INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE AND CRITICAL THINKING



Cristina Lopez-Bowlin
Oxnard College

LibreTexts™

Introduction to Literature and Critical Thinking

This text is disseminated via the Open Education Resource (OER) LibreTexts Project (https://LibreTexts.org) and like the thousands of other texts available within this powerful platform, it is freely available for reading, printing, and "consuming."

The LibreTexts mission is to bring together students, faculty, and scholars in a collaborative effort to provide and accessible, and comprehensive platform that empowers our community to develop, curate, adapt, and adopt openly licensed resources and technologies; through these efforts we can reduce the financial burden born from traditional educational resource costs, ensuring education is more accessible for students and communities worldwide.

Most, but not all, pages in the library have licenses that may allow individuals to make changes, save, and print this book. Carefully consult the applicable license(s) before pursuing such effects. Instructors can adopt existing LibreTexts texts or Remix them to quickly build course-specific resources to meet the needs of their students. Unlike traditional textbooks, LibreTexts' web based origins allow powerful integration of advanced features and new technologies to support learning.



LibreTexts is the adaptable, user-friendly non-profit open education resource platform that educators trust for creating, customizing, and sharing accessible, interactive textbooks, adaptive homework, and ancillary materials. We collaborate with individuals and organizations to champion open education initiatives, support institutional publishing programs, drive curriculum development projects, and more.

The LibreTexts libraries are Powered by NICE CXone Expert and was supported by the Department of Education Open Textbook Pilot Project, the California Education Learning Lab, the UC Davis Office of the Provost, the UC Davis Library, the California State University Affordable Learning Solutions Program, and Merlot. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1246120, 1525057, and 1413739.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation nor the US Department of Education.

Have questions or comments? For information about adoptions or adaptions contact info@LibreTexts.org or visit our main website at https://LibreTexts.org.

This text was compiled on 08/29/2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page

Info Page

Licensing

1: Introduction

- 1.1: What is Literature?
- 1.2: Why Read and Write About Literature?
- 1.3: What is Literary Analysis?
- 1.4: Reading and Annotating
- 1.5: Language, Misconceptions, and Authorial Intention in Literature
- 1.6: Inferences in Literature
- 1.7: Discussion Activity - What is Literature To You?
- 1.8: The Rough Guide to Literary Style, a Historical Overview
- 1.9: The Literary Landscape- Four Major Genres

2: About Fiction

- 2.1: What is Fiction?
- 2.2: Short Stories versus the Novel
- 2.3: How to Read Fiction
- 2.4: How to Analyze Fiction - Elements of Literature
- 2.5: Theme
- 2.6: Plot
- 2.7: Character
- 2.8: Narration, Point of View, Dialogue
- 2.9: Setting
- 2.10: Symbolism and Figurative Language
- 2.11: Tone, Voice and Style
- 2.12: A Review and Questions
- 2.13: Match and Learn Quiz

3: Fiction Readings

- 3.1: Ray Bradbury's “The Veldt” (1950)
- 3.2: Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" (1978)
- 3.3: James Joyce's "Araby" (1914)
- 3.4: Junot Diaz's "Wildwood" (2007)
- 3.5: Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (1846)
- 3.6: Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat" (1926)
- 3.7: Anton Chekhov's "The Lady with the Dog" (1899)
- 3.8: Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" (1922)
- 3.9: Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894)
- 3.10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)
- 3.11: Additional Readings
  - 3.11.1: Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820)
  - 3.11.2: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844)
  - 3.11.3: Herman Melville's "Bartleby, The Scrivener" (1853)

- 3.11.4: Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron-Mills" (1861)
- 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)
- 3.11.6: Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890)
- 3.11.7: Alice Ruth Moore's "Violets" (1895)
- 3.11.8: Willa Cather's "On the Gull's Road" (1908)
- 3.11.9: Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens" (1921)
- 3.11.10: More Recent Short Stories

4: About Poetry

- 4.1: What is Poetry?
- 4.2: Reading Poetry
- 4.3: Case Study- A Close Reading of a Poem
- 4.4: Why Analyze Poetry?
- 4.5: The Line in Poetry
- 4.6: Speaker and Voice
- 4.7: Word Choice and Word Order
- 4.8: Sound in Poetry- Rhyme
- 4.9: Sound in Poetry- Alliteration, Consonance, Assonance
- 4.10: Sound in Poetry- Meter
- 4.11: Sensory Imagery
- 4.12: Figurative Language
- 4.13: Form in Poetry
- 4.14: Music and Poetry

5: Poetry Readings

- 5.1: Aphra Behn's "On Her Loving Two Equally" (1684)
- 5.2: T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915)
- 5.3: Theodore Roethke's “My Papa’s Waltz” (1948)
- 5.4: Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" and "Fever 103°" (1962)
- 5.5: Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Pied Beauty" (1887)
- 5.6: Ben Jonson's "On My First Son" (1616)
- 5.7: Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842)
- 5.8: William Shakespeare's Sonnets 73 and 116 (1609)
- 5.9: Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" (1863)
- 5.10: Edna St. Vincent Millay's "I, being born a woman and distressed" (1923)
- 5.11: Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921) and "Let America Be America Again" (1935)
- 5.12: Judith Ortiz Cofer's "El Olvido" (1987)
- 5.13: Additional Readings
  - 5.13.1: Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599)
  - 5.13.2: Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" (1600)
  - 5.13.3: Margaret Cavendish's "The Hunting of the Hare" (1653)
  - 5.13.4: Phillis Wheatley's "An Hymn to the Morning" and "An Hymn to the Evening" (1773)
  - 5.13.5: Robert Burns' "To a Mouse" (1785)
  - 5.13.6: John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819)
  - 5.13.7: Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832-42)
  - 5.13.8: Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Song to the Men of England" (1839)
  - 5.13.9: Walt Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums!" (1861)
  - 5.13.10: Stephen Crane's "In the Desert" (1895)
  - 5.13.11: Alice Ruth Moore's "Amid the Roses" (1895)
  - 5.13.12: Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Richard Cory" (1897)
  - 5.13.13: Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (1916)

- 5.13.14: William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923)
- 5.13.15: Yoon Dong-joo's "A Poem That Came Easily" (1942)
- 5.13.16: Maya Angelou's “On the Pulse of Morning” (1993)
- 5.13.17: Sean Hill's "Distance Between Desires" (2013)
- 5.13.18: Hieu Minh Nguyen's "The Study" and "White Boy Time Machine- Override" (2018)
- 5.13.19: Athena Kashyap's "Partition Story" (2019)

6: About Drama

- 6.1: What is Drama?
- 6.2: Reading and Responding to Drama
- 6.3: Elements of Drama
- 6.4: Drama Discussion Questions, Assignments, and Supplemental Resources

7: Drama Readings

- 7.1: Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra (1914)
- 7.2: Susan Glaspell's Trifles (1916)
- 7.3: Sophocles' Antigone (441 BC)
- 7.4: Langston Hughes and Zora Hurston's The Mule-Bone (1930)
- 7.5: Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House (1879)
- 7.6: Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (1895)
  - 7.6.1: Critical Reviews of Film Version of The Importance of Being Earnest
- 7.7: Featured Playwright - William Shakespeare
  - 7.7.1: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 1 (1623)
  - 7.7.2: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 2 (1623)

8: Writing About Literature

- 8.1: The Writing Process for Literary Essays
- 8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays
- 8.3: Literary Thesis Statements
- 8.4: Essay as Argument
- 8.5: Summary vs. Analysis
- 8.6: Comparing and Contrasting Literature
- 8.7: Writing About Fiction and Creative Nonfiction
- 8.8: Writing About Poetry
- 8.9: Analyzing Poetry
  - 8.9.1: Robert Browning's Memorablia
- 8.10: Compare and Contrast Poetry Assignments
- 8.11: Writing About Drama
- 8.12: Literary Research
- 8.13: How to Perform Literary Research (Navigating Secondary Sources and Library Databases)
- 8.14: What Does My Professor Want?
- 8.15: Sample Student Literary Analysis Essays

9: Citations and Formatting Guide for Literature (MLA)

- 9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution
- 9.2: What is MLA?
- 9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA)
- 9.4: MLA Works Cited page
- 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations

- 9.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary

10: Literary Devices Glossary

Index

Glossary

Detailed Licensing

Licensing

*A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in **Back Matter/Detailed Licensing**.*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Introduction

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- identify some of the defining qualities of literature.
- begin analyzing how they would categorize works within the literary spectrum.
- challenge the historical ways in which works have or have not been classified as literature.
- discuss the benefits of reading and writing about literature.

1.1: What is Literature?

1.2: Why Read and Write About Literature?

1.3: What is Literary Analysis?

1.4: Reading and Annotating

1.5: Language, Misconceptions, and Authorial Intention in Literature

1.6: Inferences in Literature

1.7: Discussion Activity - What is Literature To You?

1.8: The Rough Guide to Literary Style, a Historical Overview

1.9: The Literary Landscape- Four Major Genres

This page titled 1: Introduction is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

1.1: What is Literature?

Defining Literature

In order for us to study literature with any kind of depth, first we must decide what constitutes literature. While works like William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* are almost universally accepted as literature, other works are hotly debated, or included or excluded based on the context. For example, some debate whether more recent publications such as David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* or Rupi Kaur's Instagram poetry constitute literature. And what about the stories told through tweets, like Jennifer Egan's "Black Box"? What about video games, like *Spiritfarer*, or memes, like Grumpy Cat?

Students often throw their hands up in the air over such distinctions, arguing literature is subjective. Isn't it up to individual opinion? Anything can be literature, such students argue. At first glance, it could seem such distinctions are, at best, arbitrary. At worst, such definitions function as a means of enforcing cultural erasure.

However, consider a story speculating about Kim Kardashian's plastic surgery in *People Magazine*. Can this be considered on the same level of literary achievement as *Hamlet*? Most would concede there is a difference in quality between these two texts. A blurb about Kim Kardashian's latest plastic surgery, most would agree, does not constitute literature. So how can we differentiate between such works?

Literature vs. literature

As illustrated in the somewhat silly example above, one way we can define what constitutes literature is by identifying what is definitely *not* literature. In terms of defining most terms in this textbook, we will use the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definitions. Some professors who teach Literature use the concept of Big L Literature vs. little l literature (Rollison).

Literature	literature
"written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit" ("Literature" - OED)	"Printed matter of any kind; esp. leaflets, brochures, etc., used to advertise products or provide information and advice" ("literature" -OED)

While the definition of little l literature is fairly easy to understand and apply, the definition of Big L Literature remains amorphous. What makes a work "artistic"? How do we classify what constitutes "superior" or "lasting"?

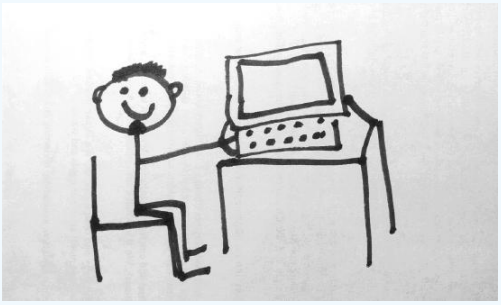
Let's break down some of the defining qualities of literature in a bit more detail, starting with the word "artistic."

Exercise 1.1.1

Consider the following works of art. Which of these images do you feel is higher quality or more "artistic"? Which is lower-quality or less artistic? Why? Justify your position by analyzing the elements of each artwork.



"Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog" by Caspar David Friedrich (1818) is in the public domain



"stick figure self portrait" by marco on flickr (2019) is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

Answer

While there may be some debate, most students usually respond that Friedrich's painting is more artistic. This is due to several composition differences between the two works:

- **Artist's skill:** it certainly appears as if the first image was produced by an artist with superior skill
- **Fame:** for anyone who knows art history, the first image is famous while the other is not
- **Lasting quality:** the first image has survived the test of time, remaining popular over two hundred years!
- **Meaning:** the first image likely conjures deeper feelings, themes, or ideas, such as isolation and the primacy of nature. This is why this image has become the face of Romanticism.

But what *about* the images demonstrate the artists' superior skills? While the second image appears to be produced with a simple doodle, and quickly composed, the first indicates more complexity, attention-to-detail, and craft. Freidrich leverages different colors, textures, shapes, and symbols to evoke a feeling in the viewer.

> Skilled artists will use different techniques, like the way they move the paintbrush, how they mix the paints, the pressure they exert or the direction of the brush. They will use textured paintbrushes for a specific effect, such as the difference between the light fluffy clouds and dark mountain rocks. They will use different color pallets to project, as accurately as possible, the feelings they are trying to evoke. In short, while anyone can paint, true artists leverage many different skills, techniques, and materials to render what is in their imagination into a real-life product.

So how does this relate to our attempts to define literature?

Literature is art, but with words.

While the artist uses different colors, paintbrushes, mediums, canvases, and techniques, the writer uses different genres and literary techniques called **literary devices**. Just like different types of paint, paintbrushes, and artistic tools, there are literally hundreds of literary devices, but some of the most common are metaphor, simile, personification, and imagery. **Genre** is the type or style of literature. Each genre has its own conventions. Literary genres include **creative nonfiction, fiction, drama,** and **poetry**. Works that are literary tend to expertly use genre conventions and literary devices to create a world in the mind of the reader. Works that are less literary tend to be for practical and/or entertainment purposes, and the writer dedicates less focused energy towards artfully employing literary devices.

However, just because a work is not as literary as another does not mean it cannot be enjoyed or analyzed. Just like a stick figure or cartoon character might be perfectly fine if intended for a particular audience or purpose, readers can still enjoy *People Magazine* even though it is not of the same literary quality as *Hamlet*.

So, to use an example from earlier:

Hamlet by William Shakespeare	*People Magazine*
• Has lasted hundreds of years • Is written by an expert of craft • Covers deep, meaningful concepts like love, loss, war & political corruption • Uses many literary devices such as metaphors	• Is often forgotten by the next issue • Is written by a pop culture writer • Covers shallow issues like what plastic surgeries a starlet has had • Usually does not use literary devices in a meaningful way, but merely to capture the attention of an audience

While some literature falls into clear designations of literature or not literature, most works are open to debate. Given the sometimes difficult task of determining whether a work falls into one camp or the other, it may be more helpful to think of Literature less as a dichotomy than a spectrum, with popular magazines on one end and works like *Beloved* on the other, and most written works falling somewhere between the two extremes.

The Literary Spectrum

This spectrum can be a helpful way to think about literature because it provides a more open-ended way to discuss writing as art than simply labeling works as literary or not. After viewing the chart, why do you think popular magazines and a Calculus textbook are considered "less literary"? In terms of popular magazines, they do not fit the definition of literature as "lasting" in the sense that they usually fade from relevancy quickly after publication. Additionally, the authors of such magazines are striving for quick entertainment rather than leaving a meaningful impression on the reader. They tend not to use literary devices, such as metaphor, in an impactful way. These works tend to fade from memory. As for textbooks, their purpose is to impart accurate information, not to necessarily shift a reader's perspective or make them feel a certain way. Textbooks are often reprinted, former editions fading into the past as more accurate current editions take their place. On the other end, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* definitely fits the definition of "lasting," in that it has survived hundreds of years. It is full of literary devices used for rhetorical effect and, one would argue, it touches upon deep themes such as death, the afterlife, murder, vengeance, and love, rather than trifling issues such as a starlet's most recent plastic surgery.



What makes certain literary works survive the test of time? What makes a story, poem, or drama "good"? While literary scholars are less interested in proving a certain work is "good" or not -- and more focused on analyzing the ways to illuminate a given work -- it can be helpful for you to consider what kinds of literature you like and why you like them. What *about the way it was written* causes you to feel the way you do about it? What makes for meaningful literature?

Who Decides What is Literature?

Now that we have at least somewhat clarified the definition of literature, who decides what works are or are not literature?

Historically speaking, kings, queens, publishers, literary critics, professors, colleges, and readers (like you!) have decided which works survive and which works do not.

Aristotle was one of the first writers to attempt to decide what works fall into the category of literature, and what works do not. While Aristotle was most famous for his contributions to science and philosophy, he is also considered one of the first literary critics. A **literary critic** is a person who studies and analyzes literature. A literary critic produces scholarship called **literary criticism**. An example of this would be Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which he identifies the defining qualities of a "good" Tragedy. Aristotle's analysis of the tragic genre was so influential that it is still used today, over two thousand years later!

When a work is officially determined to constitute literature, it enters something called **the Canon.** Not to be confused with the large metal tube that shoots explosives (cannon), the Literary Canon is a collection of works that are considered by the powers that be to constitute literature worth reading, or as representative of a given time, place, or genre. A work that falls into this designation is called **canonical.** So, to use an example from Aristotle's *Poetics*, Aristotle defined Sophocles' Oedipus Trilogy as the pinnacle of its genre. From there, in part due to Aristotle's influence, Greek society valued *Oedipus* so much that they kept discussing, reading, referencing, and teaching it. Thus, it became a kind of shining example of the Tragic Canon, one which has lasted thousands of years and continues to be read and lauded to this day. Other tragedies, fairly or not, are often judged on their quality in comparison to Sophocles' works. Interesting to think that someone who died thousands of years ago still influences what we consider literature today.

One of the most exciting aspects of reading and analyzing literature is that you can take part in canon formation. What you read, write about, and share with your friends can help propel works into the canon that would otherwise fade from history into the canon.

Memes, Social Media, and Video Games: Today's Literature?

All this talk of thousands-of-years-old texts might seem out of touch. A lot of people think "old and boring" and literature are synonymous. Students are often surprised to hear that comic books and video games can arguably be considered literature, too. There are plenty of arguments to be made that comic books, such as *Destroyer* by Victor LaValle (2017), *Maus* by Art Spiegalman (1991) or *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel (2006) are literature. Cutting edge literary scholars argue video games like *Kentucky Route Zero* by Cardboard Computer (2015) can be considered literary. There is also literature that is published in tweets, like Jennifer Egan's "Black Box" (2012). Some might even consider memes literature!

Generative question: do you think memes can be literary?



A **meme** is an image or video containing cultural values or ideas, often represented through **allusion** (implied reference to another work, without naming that work or its author). Memes can spread rapidly spreads through social media. Why? Because the best ones are #relatable; that is, they speak to a common human experience.

Usually memes take the form of text superimposed on an image. For example, the meme above conveys the dramatic reaction students sometimes give when I assign an essay. This is done primarily through a literary device called **hyperbole**, or exaggeration for rhetorical effect. It conveys its message comically through certain conventions that come along with the meme genre, such as the syntactic structure "me, a [insert noun]" and asterisks, which convey action. Just like in the Shakespearean drama, the colon indicates what each character (me and the students, in this case) is saying or doing. My chihuahua's face looks silly and very dramatic. Through this use of image, text, format, and convention, the meaning I intended to convey was that I was making fun of my students for being over-dramatic about what to me seems like a fairly simple assignment. While some might dismiss memes as shallow, when you start to unravel the layers of meaning, they can actually be very complex and even, dare I say, literary!

Think about a recent meme you have seen, or your favorite meme of all time. Imagine explaining this meme to someone who has no idea what it means. What is the message or idea behind the meme? What cultural reference points does it use to convey its message? In what ways might this meme be considered literature? How might this compare to a short poem, like a haiku?

Not Literature

Let's say you come to the conclusion that a meme, a gossip magazine, or the *Twilight* Series is not literary. Does that mean you have to feel guilty and give up reading it forever? Or that it is not "good"?

No!

Just because a work is not literary does not mean it is "bad," that it does not have value, that one cannot enjoy it, or that it is unsuitable for study as a form of literature. Indeed, there are plenty of examples of written works that are on the less literary side of the spectrum but are still fun and enriching to read, and reveal something interesting about the culture which produced them. *Joe Dirt i*s not on the same artistic level of cinema as *Schindler's List*, but my husband still quotes it regularly. Nothing JoJo Siwa has produced is as deep as Tupac Shakur's "Changes" (1992) or Mitski's "Last Words of a Shooting Star" (2014), but her work might be interesting to analyze from a literary studies angle. This is all to say that whether a text is literary or not is not as important as *the methods of analyzing texts*. In fact, texts which were excluded from literature are often argued into the literary canon through such analysis. Part of what makes analyzing literature so fun is that it means the definition of literature is always up for debate! This is especially important given the history of the canon.

The Problem with the Canon

In an ideal world, literature would be celebrated purely based on its artistic merit. Well-written works would last, poorly-written works would wither from public memory. However, that is not always the case. Works often achieve public prominence or survive based on qualities unrelated to skill or aesthetics, such as an author's fame, wealth, connections, or values of the dominant culture. William Wordsworth, for example, was named Poet Laureate of England and has been taught as one of the "Big Six" major Romantic-era authors ever since. Indeed, he is accepted as part of the Romanticism literary canon. One would be hard-pressed to find a Literature anthology that does not feature William Wordsworth. However, how many people have read Dorothy Wordsworth, William Wordsworth's sister, who arguably depicted Romantic themes with equal skill and beauty, albeit in prose form? Or James Hogg, a Scottish contemporary of Wordsworth who was a lower-class shepherd? Similarly, while most readers have encountered F. Scott Fitzgerald or Edgar Allen Poe in their high school literature classes, how many have read Frederick Douglass in these same classes? In short, all artistic skill (arguably) considered equal, why do some authors predominantly feature in the canon while others do not?

Like much of society, systemic inequities plague the publishing industry and the study of literature in English. As time progresses, it seems there is increasing but not proportionate representation on average. For example, while women make up about half of the population, over 80% of the most popular novels were written by men ("Battle"). The publishing industry is overwhelmingly white and non-disabled (Lee & Low). While there are many possible reasons for this discrepancy in representation (which could be the focus of an entire textbook), what does this mean for scholars of literature? For students? For instructors? For society?

As a cultural relic, similar to art, many scholars suggest literature is a reflection of the society which produces it. This includes positive aspects of society (championing values such as love, justice, and good triumphing over evil), but it can also reflect negative aspects of society (such as discrimination, racism, sexism, homophobia, historical lack of opportunity for marginalized authors).

For example, prior to abolition in the United States, enslavers prevented enslaved Africans from learning to read and write as a form of control. When Phillis Wheatley published *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), many doubted she wrote it, due to popularly held racist views that Black people were incapable of writing poetry. Later, abolitionist Frederick Douglass wrote about how those supporting slavery banned him from reading and writing, as they realized "education and slavery were incompatible with each other" (Douglass). He later championed literacy as the means which conveyed him to freedom. However, even when trying to publish *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (*1845), anti-abolitionists actively fought to keep Douglass' book from circulation as it threatened the institution of slavery. Indeed, to this day, Douglass' book continues to be banned in some prisons for its potential to incite revolution (Darby, Gilroy).

How could Black writers enter the canon en masse if they were not allowed to read or write? Or if they were forced to spend all of their waking hours working? And if those who had the means to read and write had to jump through absurd hoops just to have their works published? And if even those texts which were published were banned?

Similarly, throughout much of Western history, women have been discouraged from pursuing reading and writing, as it distracted from society's expectations for women to focus on motherly and household duties. Until the 1700s, women were not allowed to attend college. Even then, very few went: only the extremely wealthy. It was not until the 19th century that women attended college in representative numbers. Virginia Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own* that if there are fewer works of literature written by women, it is only because society, historically, has not given women the time, education, funding, or space to do so. In this extended essay, she describes an imaginary sister of William Shakespeare who could have been just as great of a writer had she the same opportunities as her brother.

> *I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister; but do not look for her in*

> *Sir Sidney Lee's life of the poet. She died young—alas, she never wrote a word. She lies buried where the omnibuses now stop, opposite the Elephant and Castle. Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the cross-roads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh. This opportunity, as I think, it is now coming within your power to give her.*

Woolf argues that in our time those who have been excluded from literature can now join the canon by adding their voices. The inequity of representation in literature -- which has arguably improved, but in many ways persists -- can be remedied if more people from a wide array of backgrounds and walks of life are empowered to study and create Literature. That is one reason why the current study of literature is so exciting. As a student and literary scholar in training, you have the power to influence culture through your reading and analysis of literature!

For one author's perspective on this topic, please watch this the following TED Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie about why it is important to veer away from the historically parochial canon into what Chinua Achebe calls "a balance of stories" (qtd. Bacon).



- Original video available on TED Talk website
- Transcript of video

What "single stories" do you know? What are the "single stories" people have told about you? What story would you tell if you could? What kinds of stories do you want to read? Throughout this class, you will get the opportunity to encounter many different stories. While we faced hurdles of copyright permissions, the authors of this textbook attempted to embody the values espoused in this TED Talk & Chinua Achebe's conception of the "balance of stories." As you read the textbook, consider the stories which were omitted, why they were omitted, and what literature you would include if you could.

Works Cited

Bacon, Katie. "An African Voice." *The Atlantic*, 2000.

"Battle of the Authors: Are The Most Popular Rated Fiction Books Written by Men or Women?" *Wordery*, 1 Mar. 2019.

Darby, Luke. "Illinois Prison Bans Frederick Douglass's Memoir and Other "Racial" Books." *GQ*, 20 August 2019.

Douglass, Frederick. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.* 1845.

Friedrich, Caspar David. "Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog." *Hamburger Kunsthalle Museum*, 1818.

Gilroy, Paul. "Banned Books of Guantánamo: 'An American Slave' by Frederick Douglass." *Vice*, 14 Nov. 2014.

"literature, n.; 3b & 5" *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/109080. Accessed 6 September 2019.

Rollison, David. "Big L vs Little L Literature." *Survey of World Literature I.* College of Marin, 2008. Lecture.

Lee & Low. "The 2023 Lee & Low Diversity Baseline Survey Results" Lee and Low Books, 2023.

Wheatley, Phillis. *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. 1773.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own.* 1929.

This page titled 1.1: What is Literature? is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **1.1: What is Literature?** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

1.2: Why Read and Write About Literature?

Why Read Literature?

In the age of TikTok, Twitter, Youtube, and streaming television services, literature might seem like a relic of the past. Indeed, fewer people are reading literature than ever. According to an article published in the Washington Post, "in 2015, 43 percent of adults read at least one work of literature in the previous year. That's the lowest percentage in any year since NEA surveys began tracking reading and arts participation in 1982 when the literature reading rate was 57 percent" (Ingraham). If the decline of literature-reading in adults isn't the death knoll of literature, the decline in teenagers might be. According to NPR, in a recently conducted poll, "nearly half of 17-year-olds say they read for pleasure no more than one or two times a year — if that" (Ludden). How many books have you read this year? How many poems? In this fast-paced dopamine-fueled media landscape, it's difficult for stinky old books to compete.

But this is hardly a new problem if it is even a problem at all.

Consider the words of master-of-clapbacks Sir Philip Sydney, #throwback to the late 1500s and early 1600s. After the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg, many people saw the proliferation of novels and plays as morally poisonous. Talking heads of the time argued that poetry and literature were a waste of time, or "fake news" as some might call it today. They questioned the purpose of fictional works. Poet and diplomat Sir Philip Sydney responded with a scathing literary smack-down to the haters. He argued the poet has a special talent to create new, beautiful worlds that no other professional can claim, and that those who question the purpose of poetry have "earth-creeping" minds and are "momes" (AKA fools, blockheads). He further stated that he hopes these momes never get "favor" (love) because they don't know how to write sonnets to woo their love interests and that they don't get an epitaph on their graves, because that is the poet's job. Ouch, harsh.

In today's world, it seems that Sidney would probably consider most people momes. After all, very few of us read or appreciate poetry regularly. Most of our reading and writing is done on the internet: in the forms of Facebook posts, memes, tweets, snapchats, Tik Tok videos, and viral news. In response to this trend, some claim that literature is dead (Breuklander). Indeed, if we define literature as only printed novels and poetry, perhaps it is, for all intents and purposes, dead. But... what if we were to define literature as Sidney did--a creation made from the "zodiac of [the poet's] own wit," improving upon nature itself through invention? Might some of today's internet media fall into that definition?

What if literature isn't dead after all...but thriving more than ever? What if we radically reconsider the parameters of literature? What if literature has just evolved from sonnets and novels to tweets and memes? In this textbook, we will explore how technology has blurred the lines between Literature and literature. We will question and explore the "usefulness" of literature in a world that encourages split-second attention spans. We will see how literature has solved problems in the past, and explore how it can be used to solve problems in the future. Medicine, a threat to the status quo, entertainment, activism, or boring stinky old piles of pages: what is literature to you?

No matter the reader, no matter the writer, no matter the genre, literature is a cultural relic, a manifestation of the human experience. Thus, it can teach us things about our society and about ourselves we might not be able to learn from other types of media. It enables us to experience and discuss ideas from the safety of our armchairs, to project ourselves onto characters and environments, to explore worlds and lived experiences we otherwise would never have the opportunity to experience.

Additionally, data suggests reading literature benefits us in profound ways.

Benefits of Literature

Studies show reading literature may help

- promote empathy and social skills (Castano and Kidd)
- alleviate symptoms of depression (Billington et al.)
- business leaders succeed (Coleman)
- prevent dementia by stimulating the mind (Thorpe)

These are just a few of the studied benefits of literature. As we continue to gain increasing complexity in terms of measuring brain activity and developing other tools to measure brain function, scientists may find more benefits.

Why Write About Literature?

You might be asking yourself why you should bother writing about something you've read. After all, isn't creative writing more fun, journalistic writing more interesting, and technical writing more useful? Maybe, but consider this: writing about literature will let you exercise your critical thinking skills like no other style of writing will. Even if you don't want to pursue a career involving literature, you can use critical thinking and analysis in any field from philosophy to business to physics. More than being able to think critically, you need to be able to express those thoughts in a coherent fashion. Writing about literature will allow you to practice this invaluable communication skill.

“Okay,” you say, “that's all good and well. But hasn't anything I have to say about a story already been said? So what's the point,

then?" When you write your paper, you might end up saying something that has been discussed, argued over, or proposed by literary critics and students alike. However, when you write something, you present a point of view through your unique voice. Even if something has been said about a book many times, you can add something new to that discussion. Perhaps you can state an idea in simpler terms, or you want to disagree with a popular viewpoint. Even if you're writing to an instructor's prompt, your voice will make the paper unique.

How Do I Start?

To many of us, writing a response to something we've had to read sounds more than a little daunting. There are so many things to examine and analyze in a book, play, or poem. But before you decide that writing about writing just isn't for you, think about this--you already have many of the skills you need to write a good response to literature.

How many times have you heard about someone who watched a horror movie and yelled, "Don't go into the basement!" at the potential victim. Or maybe you've listened to a song and thought about how the lyrics described your life almost perfectly. Perhaps you like to jump up and cheer for your favorite team even if you're watching the game from home. Each time you do one of these things, you are responding to something you've seen or heard. And when you read a book, you likely do the same thing. Have you ever read anything and sympathized with or hated a character? If so, you've already taken your first step in responding to literature.

However, the next steps are a little harder. You need to be able to put your response into writing so other people can understand why you believe one thing or another about a book, play, or poem. In addition, writing an essay based on how a story makes you think or feel is only one of many ways to respond to what you read. In order to write a strong paper, you will need to examine a text both **subjectively** and **objectively**. If you only write about your personal reaction to a book, there won't be much to support your argument except your word alone. Thus, you will need to use some facts from the text to support your argument. Rather than trying to evaluate every nuance of a text all at once, you should start with the basics: character and plot. From there, you can examine the theme of the work and then move on to the finer points such as the writing itself. For instance, when determining how you want to analyze a piece of literature, you might want to ask yourself the following series of questions:

- Who are the characters?
- What are they doing?
- Why and how are they doing it?
- Do their actions relate to any broader topics or issues?
- How does the author convey this through their writing?

Questions to consider when writing about literature

Of course, answering these questions will only start your analysis. However, if you can answer them, you will have a strong grasp of the basic elements of the story. From there, you can go on to more specific questions, such as, "How does symbolism help illustrate the theme?" or "What does the author say about the relationships between characters through the dialogue he gives them?" However, before you can start answering detailed questions like these, you should look at the basic elements of what you're reading. Some of the most common elements in a piece of literature include:

- Setting
- Characters
- Plot (story or play) or structure (poem)
- Tone/Mood
- Themes
- Symbolism and Figurative Language

As you work through each genre in this book, try to examine each of these elements in each piece of literature you read.

Optional, Supplemental Reading: Excerpt from Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*

"There is no art delivered unto mankind that has not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth. So doth the astronomer look upon the stars, and, by that he sees, set down what order nature has taken therein. So do the geometrician and arithmetician in their divers sorts of quantities. So doth the musician in times tell you which by nature agree, which not. The natural philosopher thereon has his name, and the moral philosopher stands upon the natural virtues, vices, and passions of man; and "follow nature," says he, "therein, and thou shalt not err." The lawyer says what men have determined, the historian what men have done. The grammarian speaks only of the rules of speech, and the rhetorician and logician, considering what in nature will soonest prove and persuade, thereon give artificial rules, which still are compassed within the circle of a question, according to the proposed matter. The physician weighs the nature of man's body, and the nature of things helpful or hurtful unto it. And the metaphysic, though it be in the second and abstract notions, and therefore be counted supernatural, yet doth he, indeed, build upon the depth of nature.

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature brings forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so as he goes hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich

tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely; her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden...

[...]

But if—fie of such a but!—you be born so near the dull-making cataract of Nilus, that you cannot hear the planet-like music of poetry; if you have so earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of poetry, or rather, by a certain rustical disdain, will become such a mome [blockhead—ed.], as to be a Momus of poetry; then, though I will not wish unto you the ass' ears of Midas, nor to be driven by a poet's verses, as Bubonax was, to hang himself; nor to be rimed to death, as is said to be done in Ireland; yet thus much curse. I must send you in the behalf of all poets:—that while you live in love, and never get favor for lacking skill of a sonnet; and when you die, your memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph." -- Sir Philip Sydney

Works Cited

Billington, Josie, Dowrick, Christopher, Hamer, Andrew, Robinson, Jude and Clare Williams. *An investigation into the therapeutic benefits of reading in relation to depression and well-being.* Liverpool Health Inequalities Research Institute. University of Liverpool, Nov. 2010. https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/iphs/web_version_therapeutic_benefits_of_reading_final_report_Mar.pdf

Breuklander, Joel. "Literature is Dead (According to Straight, White Guys at Least)." The Atlantic, 18 July 2013. Web. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/07/literature-is-dead-according-to-straight-white-guys-at-least/277906/ Accessed 12 August 2018

Castano, Emanuele and David Kidd. "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind." *Science.* 18 Oct. 2013;342(6156):377-80.

Coleman, John. "The Benefits of Poetry for Professionals." *Harvard Business Review*, 2012. https://hbr.org/2012/11/the-benefits-of-poetry-for-pro

Ingraham, Christopher. "The long, steady decline of literary reading." The Washington Post, 7 Sep 2016. Web. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/09/07/the-long-steady-decline-of-literary-reading/?utm_term=.ad2fa9146ec0 Accessed 2 August 2018.

Ludden, Jennifer. "Why Aren't Teens Reading Like They Used To?" NPR. 12 May 2014. https://www.npr.org/2014/05/12/311111701/why-arent-teens-reading-like-they-used-to Accessed 02 August 2018.

Thorpe, J.R. "Why Reading Poetry Is Good For Your Brain." *Bustle*, 20 Apr. 2017. https://www.bustle.com/p/why-reading-poetry-is-good-for-your-brain-51884

Sidney, Sir Philip. *The Defense of Poesy.* The Poetry Foundation. 13 Oct. 2009. Web. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69375/the-defence-of-poesy Accessed 2 August 2018.

Contributors and Attributions

- **Why Write About Literature** sections adapted from "Writing About Literature Basics" from *Commonsense Composition* by Crystle Bruno of San Jose State University licensed CC BY-NC 4.0

This page titled 1.2: Why Read and Write About Literature? is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **1.2: Why Read and Write About Literature?** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

1.3: What is Literary Analysis?

What is Literary Analysis?



"Magnifier 1"by Dave Edens is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

In the first section of the introduction, we defined Literature as "written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit" ("literature 3b"). As an adjective, then, literary is defined as " [o]f or relating to the writing, study, or content of literature, esp. of the kind valued for quality of form; of the nature of literature" ("literary A1"). Finally, analysis is essentially the breaking apart of anything into its composite parts for close-examination. Literary analysis, then, is the deep examination of a work of literature. When you think of literary analysis, think of holding up a magnifying glass to the details of language in a work of literature.

Literary Analysis = Close Reading

Students may have encountered previous teachers using the term "close reading." Sometimes you might hear it called **rhetorical analysis.** When teachers use any of these terms, it usually means engaging with a text on a deeper level than when reading for entertainment or information: that is, looking not just at *what* is written (the message, also known as **content**), but *how* it is written (the methods used to shape the message, also known as **form**). Literary Analysis, Close Reading, and Rhetorical Analysis are three critical thinking approaches with, for all intents and purposes, the same meaning. The major difference is that literary analysis is specific to the field of literary studies.

When performing literary analysis, some questions **literary critics**, or scholars of literature, might ask themselves include:

- What is the theme or motif of this text?
- What patterns can I detect across this text, or what patterns can I detect across this genre of literature which are also present in this text? And what might these patterns indicate about the meaning or significance of this text?
- What literary devices are featured in this text? How might an analysis of these formal features deepen understandings of the text?
- What kinds of characters are featured in this text?
- What qualities make literature "good" or of "lasting artistic merit" ("literature 3b")?
- How might the language or diction of the text reflect cultural or historical meanings most common readers miss? How might such meanings deepen or illuminate our understanding of the text?
- What have previous scholars misinterpreted or missed about this work, and how can I bring neglected aspects of this text to light?
- In what ways does this text engage with or elucidate other works of literature, philosophical theories, historical events, or social movements?
- What might this text reveal about what it means to be human? How might it deepen my understanding of my place in the world?

How to Perform Literary Analysis

The previous questions might seem amorphous or overwhelming in their implications. So how can we practice close-reading in a practical way?

1. **Read the text 3 times**: once, for enjoyment. Once, for deep understanding. And, lastly, once for deep analysis. Literary critics often read the same texts many more times! Don't be afraid to read as many times as you need.
2. **Engage with the text.** Highlight, annotate, mark pages with sticky notes or flags, and take notes as you read. Look for anything weird, surprising, confusing, or exciting that jumps out at you. Why do you think this formal feature exists in the text? Don't be afraid to write down any questions which bubble up as you read: it is likely other scholars/students have questions too, and sharing your questions with classmates or your professor might prompt a fascinating discussion! For example, an observant student once asked (his question is paraphrased here): "In *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, I noticed Hamlet and Horatio seem to think the ghost of Old Hamlet is actually a demon. But later Hamlet seems to think the ghost is an actual ghost. Gertrude does not see the ghost, making it seem like it is a figment of Hamlet's troubled mind. What are we as readers meant to believe?" This question prompted other students to share their cultural heritage's perspective on demons, the afterlife, and even to share ghost stories. Eventually, this discussion led students to research Elizabethan perspectives on ghosts and demons. This made for a lively class discussion and several strong essays all because one student dared to engage with the text by asking a question!
3. **Keep track of any patterns.** Does a certain image keep popping up, like a heart, a rose, or a color? This might be a symbol: a physical object signifying an abstract meaning. What might this repeated image mean in the context of the

rest of the story? For example, in Ambrose Bierce's short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," the color gray repeats many times. Why? What might this indicate about the importance of the color gray to the story? What might the color gray have symbolized to Bierce, or to readers alive during the Civil War?

4. **Deeply examine and question literary features** such as titles, characters, settings, figurative language, and dialogue. Constantly ask yourself: why is this here? As readers, we should usually assume authors, as masters of their craft, make choices intentionally. And even if unintentional, what might subconscious slips indicate about meaning? In short, *how does the form or structure of this writing influence my understanding of its message?*

   Other literary features you might examine include: pronouns, active vs. passive voice, verbs (what tense is being used? any tense shifts?), nouns, word order or syntax, rhyme, punctuation, paragraphing, italics, space on the page, text space (how much space or description or lines does a given character receive?), proximity (do similar words, phrases, characters, or ideas often occur in close proximity?). All of these seemingly small details can hold big implications!

Works Cited

"literature, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/109080. Accessed 28 August 2019.

"literary, adj. and n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/109067. Accessed 28 August 2019.

This page titled 1.3: What is Literary Analysis? is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **1.3: What is Literary Analysis?** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

1.4: Reading and Annotating

Reading

The first step in writing a literary analysis essay is actually completing the reading. Sometimes the professor will give you a prompt before you read. If this is the case, look for material which relates to the prompt as you read. If the professor did not give you a prompt, look for any material in the assigned reading that piques your interest or relates to class discussions. Highlight or underline any moments in the reading which stick out to you: something you don't understand, something that relates to a topic you care about, or something weird or surprising. Keeping track of patterns, themes, or literary devices is a great way to engage with a work of literature and prepare for a future discussion or essay.

Completing the Reading

One time, I was talking with my sister-in-law about her experience in nursing school. Whereas her brother had barely achieved Cs in college, she somehow maintained a 4.0, even though she was simultaneously working and caring for her two young daughters.

"What is your secret to success?" I asked.

"Actually doing the assigned readings," she laughed, "most of my peers didn't. And it showed."

As a college professor who teaches reading-heavy classes, this is not a shock to me. After all, most students taking the required writing and literature courses do not wish to become English majors. They sometimes see their literature class as a means to an end: at best, a stepping stone towards their future career; at worst, a time-suck of hoops to jump through. Also, because of today's gig economy, many students are juggling multiple jobs in addition to multiple college classes. This makes it tempting for students to want to skip the readings and just read SparkNotes or have ChatGPT summarize the literature for them. Truth be told, students who pursue this method, depending on their BSing skills, might be able to pass a literature class. But for the vast majority of students, this popular high school tactic will not work at the college level. More importantly, it means students miss out on many of the exciting benefits of diving deep into analysis, discussion, and engaging with the text. Plus, there might be consequences when SparkNotes or ChatGPT gives you incorrect answers, your instructor asks you not to use these sources, or you plagiarize by using ideas from these sources without credit.

Of course, I want my students to fall in love with the written word. I want my passion for literature to be contagious, to light students' hearts and minds on fire with a hunger for the beauty of syntax and diction and literary devices. But I also completely understand that students have limited time. Therefore, I recommend prioritizing the writing process *by reading attentively* so writers can make the most efficient use of their time. In the long run, while it might seem like skipping the readings saves time, completing the readings is actually the best way for students to optimize their time. This is because a strong essay depends on a deep understanding of the literature. If the class features examinations, these almost always test students on whether they completed and understand the readings. Finally, class will be more fun for students if they understand what their peers are talking about in class discussion, and what their professor is talking about during lectures.

Students who complete the readings and annotate as they go will find it much easier to flip back through their notes to find relevant quotations and information. Successful students often break the readings into small, manageable chunks of twenty to thirty minutes at a time. This helps their brains absorb the information better and retain information for writing and tests.

Students skipping reading often end up performing more work when it comes to writing an essay because they will spend so much time looking up text summaries on the internet (which may or may not be accurate or align with the intricacies of the assignment directions). They will also have to go back and re-read the text to find quotations that fit their prompt. Their essays may not succeed because they do not fulfill the in-depth analysis required by the assignments.

So, long story short: even the most practically-minded, time-crunched students would do well to perform the readings. And, while in pursuit of success, a previously literature-averse student might find themselves liking reading more than they thought they would. Just like watching a favorite movie or show, reading a good book can be fun and relaxing!

Active versus Passive Reading

Many students, when first reading academic material, read it like they would a timeline of Facebook or Instagram posts: not fully attentive, skimming over the material in search of something interesting or for what they think are "answers" on a test. Or they might read literature with full attention, but read without questioning or engaging with the material. The difference between a student who is successful in a literature class and a student who is not successful is often that the successful student participates in **active reading.**

Actions	Passive Reading	Active Reading

Actions	Passive Reading	Active Reading
Engagement Level	Skimming or not giving the reading undivided attention; reading for "gist" rather than substance	Reading closely, annotating, analyzing, and reflecting as you read; reading deeply for understanding
Tools	Just the book	Book, writing utensils, highlighters, sticky notes, reading journal
Number of Times Read	Once (or *gasp* not at all!)	Read three or more times: • Once without expectation • Once for comprehension • Once for closely analyzing and annotating

Annotating

In a literature class, students encounter a lot of literature, written by many different authors. Annotating, or taking notes on the assigned literature as you read, is a way to have a conversation with the reading. This helps you better absorb the material and engage with the text on a deeper level. There are several annotation methods. These are like tools in a student's learning utility belt. Try them all out to discover which tools or combinations of tools help you learn best!

Margin Notes & Highlighting

One of the best ways to interact with a text is to write notes as you read. Underlining and/or highlighting relevant passages, yes, but also responding to the text in the margins. For instance, if a character I love makes a bad choice (like Sydney Carton in Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*), I will write, "Nooooo, Sydney Carton, don't sacrifice yourself for Lucie's sake!" This helps me remember the events of the plot. Many students also find it helpful to summarize each chapter or section of the literature as they read it. For example, a student said it was helpful for them to draw a picture representing every stanza of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by William Wordsworth to help them understand what was being said. Other ideas include:

- Circling unfamiliar words
- Writing questions in the margins
- Color-coded highlighting to track various literary devices (i.e., blue for metaphors, pink for symbolism, and so forth)

Sticky Notes

For students who would like to sell their textbooks back to the bookstore, writing notes in the margins might not be a practical choice, as it may devalue the textbook or the bookstore may refuse to take it back. For these students, I recommend using sticky notes instead. If sticky notes are cost-prohibitive, most colleges have plenty of scrap paper students can use as bookmarks to stick between pages. This is also an eco-friendly way to re-use paper!

Reading Journal

Another option many students find helpful is keeping a reading journal. Students can write notes in their journals as they read. This helps students keep track of readings and materials in a chronological fashion. Just like when annotating the text directly or upon sticky notes, the most effective use of a reading journal, for learning purposes, is going to be active engagement with the text rather than passive absorption. That is, try to summarize the plot of what you read every time you read. Also, ask questions about the text. If you can record quotes and paraphrase along with in-text parenthetical citations (i.e., the page number where you found the material), this will optimize your time because you already have quotes ready to go when you write an essay!

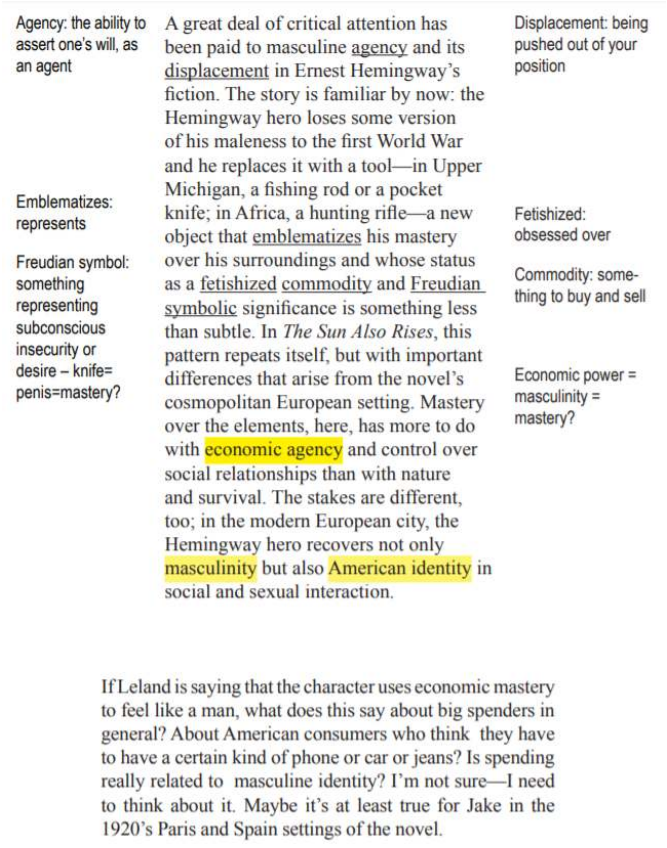
Example of an Annotated Passage

Using the guidelines above, let's consider this excerpt from a scholarly article by Jacob Michael Leland, "'Yes, That is a Roll of Bills in My Pocket': The Economy of Masculinity in The Sun Also Rises."

> *A great deal of critical attention has been paid to masculine agency and its displacement in Ernest Hemingway's fiction. The story is familiar by now: the Hemingway hero loses some version of his maleness to the first World War and he replaces it with a tool—in Upper Michigan, a fishing rod or a pocket knife; in Africa, a hunting rifle—a new object that emblematizes his mastery over his surroundings and whose status as a fetishized commodity and Freudian symbolic significance is something less than subtle. In The*

> *Sun Also Rises, this pattern repeats itself, but with important differences that arise from the novel's cosmopolitan European setting. Mastery over the elements, here, has more to do with economic agency and control over social relationships than with nature and survival. The stakes are different, too; in the modern European city, the Hemingway hero recovers not only masculinity but also American identity in social and sexual interaction. (37)*

In researching The Sun Also Rises for a project, Ling Ti found Leland's article. What follows is her annotated copy of the above excerpt:



As you can see, this writer highlighted words that seemed important to understanding the text. She included questions in the margins to help her understand the reading. She also provided definitions for terms she did not know, presumably looking them up as she read. Finally, she wrote a brief summary of her reading, also known as a reflection.

Reflecting on Assigned Literature

Studies show reflecting on reading is one of the best ways to learn. This is called metacognition, or thinking about thinking. It is a way to keep track of the knowledge you have learned as you go. Students who reflect on their reading and learning tend to, as a whole, perform better on essays and examinations. So how can you take advantage of this skill?

If you have a prompt, choose a prompt and read through the assigned literature again, noting any quotes which may relate to the assigned topic. It is recommended at this point that you keep track of your observations in a document: either on a computer (Word, Google Docs) or on a physical piece of paper. Write down any quotations along with page numbers (fiction, nonfiction), line numbers (poem), or act, scene, line numbers (drama). This way, you have all potential evidence in one place, and it makes for easy in-text citations when it comes to knitting the evidence together to form an essay. In fact, it is highly recommended that students start an informal Works Cited page to keep track of every source consulted. This makes it much easier to avoid plagiarism by practicing ethical citation habits. For more information about citations, please see the Citations and Formatting Chapter.

Start with a hypothesis or focus but be willing to refine, adjust, or completely discard it if new evidence refutes it. An essay is not a stagnant piece, but a living, breathing thought experiment. Many students feel reluctant to change their thesis or major parts of their essays because they are afraid it means the previous writing was wasted. As a professional writer, editor, and scholar, I want to clue students in on a secret:

There is no such thing as wasted writing.

Even writing that does not end up in the final draft is worthwhile because it is a chance to experiment with ideas. It helps students find a path toward stronger ideas. Just like a gardener might allow branches of a tree to grow to see which ones bear flowers and fruit and then prune the weak, unproductive branches to make the plant stronger and more beautiful, so too must a writer be willing to cut out branches of reasoning which no longer serve the essay. But before you know which ideas or thoughts are worth pursuing, you first have to give them space to grow. You never know what idea branches might prove fruitful!

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from "Reading Like a Professional" in *Writing and Literature: Composition as Inquiry, Learning, Thinking, and Communication* by Dr. Tanya Long Bennett of the University of North Georgia, CC BY-SA 4.0

This page titled 1.4: Reading and Annotating is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.3: Prewriting for Literature Essays** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

1.5: Language, Misconceptions, and Authorial Intention in Literature

The Language of Literature

One of the problems in reading literature, of course, is that language itself can be so slippery. Let me give two examples to show what I mean. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Othello is describing how Desdemona loved to hear the tales of his adventures, and he says

She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd

That heaven had made her such a man. (I.3.162-63)

Now what exactly do those lines mean? We must assume that Shakespeare knew what he was doing with language, and yet these lines contain an obvious ambiguity. Do they mean that Desdemona wished that heaven had made a man like Othello for her (reading "her" as an indirect object) or do they mean that she wished she had been made a man so that she could have such adventures (reading "her" as a direct object)? Should Shakespeare have clarified what he meant? Did poor old Shakespeare make a mistake here? As you might expect, the answers to those last two questions are both "no." The ambiguity is intentional, and both readings are "correct." On the one hand, Desdemona is revealing her love for Othello. She admires him and his deeds and wishes that a man like that existed for her. When we consider the kind of circumscribed life that a Renaissance woman of Desdemona's class was forced to live and the poor impression that most of the other men in the play make on us, her wish is even easier to understand.

On the other hand, given that circumscribed life, she also might well wish that she had been male and she reveals that she is not simply a timid, shrinking woman who exists to be used by men in any way they choose. She is someone who rebels against the limits that confront her, and her words here prepare us for her independent actions as the play progresses. So Desdemona's wish is deliberately ambiguous, and both sides of the ambiguity are significant. What we must remember, then, is that writers use words the way artists use paint. In a work of literary artistry, none of the words are accidental or arbitrary, and if they seem ambiguous or out of place, we must try to understand why the writer used them. Yes, occasionally a writer makes a mistake, as Keats did when he identified Cortez as the European discoverer of the Pacific Ocean, but generally we have to assume that writers know what they are doing; and before we attack their use of words, we must try to understand them.

This point leads to the second problem with language, which is that words change their meanings. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (affectionately known as the OED) gives examples of how every word in it has been used over the centuries, and browsing in the OED to see how words have changed can be a lot of fun. Such browsing can also be important. One simple but well-known example will illustrate my point. In the Declaration of Independence we read that "all men are created equal," but we must ask what this important phrase means. If it means that I am as good a baseball player as Stan Musial or as good a singer as Placido Domingo, then it is clearly untrue, but surely that is not what it means. It means rather that all men are equal before the law. Fine. But what about the phrase "all men"? Although Garry Wills has argued that Thomas Jefferson included African-American men in the category of "all men," we can safely assume that many in his audience, including many of the Declaration's signers, certainly did not. And no one would argue that Jefferson or any other signer of the Declaration included American Indians or women in the category of "all men." Thus while we read (or I hope we read) the phrase generically to mean that everyone, of every gender, race, or religion, is equal before the law, the earliest readers of the Declaration understood it to mean that all white males are created equal.

Whose reading is correct? The question itself is almost absurd. Apparently Jefferson may have meant one thing while his audience understood another—both eighteenth-century understandings— while we, from another perspective, understand it in yet another way. So, from an enlightened eighteenth-century point of view, Jefferson was correct. But from a common eighteenth-century point of view, deplorable though we may find it, Jefferson's audience was correct. And from an ideal twenty-first-century point of view, which has not yet become a reality, our reading is correct. While it is essential that we recognize the superiority of our reading of this phrase, we also must, in the interest of historical accuracy, acknowledge at least two eighteenth-century readings of the phrase. As we saw in the example from *Othello*, multiple meanings abound; and even if we can argue that one interpretation has some kind of primacy, we must be sensitive to other possibilities that exist not as alternatives but as complements to the readings we prefer. And to return to our earlier discussion of intention, do we want to read this passage according to what we think Jefferson's intentions might have been or according to the way the language is now understood?

Of course, this approach to reading requires a great deal of flexibility from the reader, who must be open to multiple interpretations and to taking different approaches, an openness that may contradict human nature. This view also runs counter to what we usually learn in school, where the emphasis is so often on finding the single correct answer to a question rather than on asking complex questions and then considering their complexity. Certainly the latter method cannot be tested with a multiple-choice exam and graded by a computer, but schools are responding to and reinforcing a society that rewards the single correct answer. Consequently, when people read literature, they are afraid that they are not getting what it "really" says. Even if

they enjoy the reading, they fear, often quite mistakenly, that they are missing the "message."

Messages and Misconceptions About Reading Literature

Here is another misconception about literature: that it contains messages, hidden or otherwise. Too often people approach literature as though it were all like *Aesop's Fables*. Those fables are wonderful: they tell stories, and each story is followed by a moral, such as "Necessity is the mother of invention." But very little literature works that way. Literature does have a moral dimension, of course, but great works cannot be summed up in pithy moral statements. A person who reads Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and decides that the point of the play is "don't kill your father and marry your mother" has perhaps followed the action of the play but has missed the important points that the play makes. Of course, anyone who needs to read a play to learn that important lesson probably has other, more serious problems. One basis for such misconceptions is our uncertainty about what a work may be saying, which leads us to the easiest answer we can think of, an answer which is often a cliché or a moral truism. (This tendency is obviously related to our desire to get the one "correct" answer.) Another basis is the tendency among teachers to ask what the "theme" of a work is. This question is one that has often puzzled me because any good work contains multiple themes; when we pretend that a work has a single theme, we are likely to reduce a complex work to a single, aphoristic "message." Telegrams convey messages, and if authors wanted to communicate such messages, they would send telegrams (or tweets) or write tracts or publish aphorisms. However authors want to convey some of the complexities and contradictions of human existence, and to reduce those qualities to "messages" or even to "main themes" is to do violence to what an author is trying to accomplish.

For example, the theme of most Renaissance love poetry (most of which was written by men) can be reduced to "I love her. She doesn't love me. Oh rats." We can find this "theme" in Petrarch, in Shakespeare, in Spenser, in Sidney, even in contemporary country-western music. Frankly it does not need to be said all that often, and if this is really all that those poets were saying, we would be foolish to waste our time reading them. But what they were doing was in fact quite different. They were using this stock situation to explore such aspects of the world as religion, the self, the nature of relationships, and the nature of love itself. Focusing only on their usnrequited love is like buying a bicycle because of its color: the color may be interesting, but a person who decides on the basis of the color has missed the whole point of the bicycle.

Furthermore, a good deal of the enjoyment in such poems comes from the clever ways in which poets use that stock situation for their own purposes, often to mock their own speakers, as Sir Thomas Wyatt does in "They Flee from Me," or even to be deeply critical of their speakers, as Sir Philip Sidney does in *Astrophel and Stella* (a point, incidentally, about which many Renaissance scholars might disagree).

The speaker in Wyatt's poem may lament his beloved's apparent lack of faithfulness to him, but the words he uses to describe their relationship make it clear why she has abandoned him. He compares her to birds (or perhaps to squirrels—it's hard to tell), little creatures that come to his window and eat out of his hands. This comparison reveals that he thinks of her as a little domesticated pet, another creature who eats out of his hands; and as the poem continues, he reveals further that he thinks of her only in sexual terms as an object that he can use, not as a real person. Can it be any wonder that she has abandoned him? Part of the fun of this poem comes in watching the doltish speaker reveal himself as a fool while he thinks that he is exposing his lady's unfaithfulness. At the same time, this speaker is completely mystified because he truly believes himself to be a sincere and faithful lover. Similarly, Sidney's Astrophel shows himself to be a shallow, if ardent, lover—a young man who knows the rules of the game of love but who seems incapable of realizing that his beloved Stella does not want to play. On the other hand, Edmund Spenser's lover in the sonnets of the *Amoretti* learns what it means to be a real lover and, in an extraordinary turn of events for a Renaissance sonnet sequence, actually marries the lady.

Can we take three such different poets, all of them writing in the sixteenth century, and talk about the "theme" of their poems? They are exploring human existence by examining the essential human emotion of love, but they are doing so in distinctly different ways and having fun while they do so.

Of course, there are a number of misconceptions about literature that have to be gotten out of the way before anyone can enjoy it. One misconception is that literature is full of hidden meanings. There are certainly occasional works that contain hidden meanings. The biblical book of Revelation, for example, was written in a kind of code, using images that had specific meanings for its early audience but that we can only recover with a great deal of difficulty. Most literary works, however, are not at all like that. Perhaps an analogy will illustrate this point. When I take my car to my mechanic because something is not working properly, he opens the hood and we both stand there looking at the engine. But after we have looked for a few minutes, he is likely to have seen what the problem is, while I could look for hours and never see it. We are looking at the same thing. The problem is not hidden, nor is it in some secret code. It is right there in the open, accessible to anyone who knows how to "read" it, which my mechanic does and I do not. He has been taught how to "read" automobile engines and he has practiced "reading" them. He is a good "close reader," which is why I continue to take my car to him.

The same thing is true for readers of literature. Generally authors want to communicate with their readers, so they are not likely to hide or disguise what they are saying, but reading literature also requires some training and some practice. Good writers use language very carefully, and readers must learn how to be sensitive to that language, just as the mechanic must learn to be sensitive to the appearances and sounds of the engine. Everything that the writer wants to say, and much that the writer may not be aware of, is there in the words. We simply have to learn how to read them. Another popular misconception is that a literary work has a single "meaning" (and that only English teachers know how to find that meaning). There is an easy way to dispel this misconception. Just go to a college library and find the section that holds books on Shakespeare. Choose one play, Hamlet, for example, and see how many books there are about it, all by scholars who are educated, perceptive readers. Can it be the case that one of these books is correct and all the others are mistaken? And if the correct one has already been written, why would anyone need to write another book about the play? The answer is that there is no single correct way to read a good piece of literature.

Again, let me use an analogy to illustrate this point. Suppose that everyone at a meeting were asked to describe a person who was standing in the middle of the room. Imagine how many different descriptions there would be, depending on where the viewer sat in relation to the person. Furthermore, an optometrist in the crowd might focus on the person's glasses; a hair stylist might focus on the person's haircut; someone who sells clothing might focus on the style of dress; a podiatrist might focus on the person's feet. Would any of these descriptions be incorrect? Not necessarily, but they would be determined by the viewers' perspectives. They might also be determined by such factors as the viewers' ages, genders, or ability to move around the person being viewed, or by their previous acquaintance with the subject. So whose descriptions would be correct? Conceivably all of them, and if we put all of these correct descriptions together, we would be closer to having a full description of the person.

This is most emphatically not to say, however, that all descriptions are correct simply because each person is entitled to his or her opinion. If the podiatrist is of the opinion that the person is five feet, nine inches tall, the podiatrist could be mistaken. And even if the podiatrist actually measures the person, the measurement could be mistaken. Everyone who describes this person, therefore, must offer not only an opinion but also a basis for that opinion. "My feeling is that this person is a teacher" is not enough. "My feeling is that this person is a teacher because the person's clothing is covered with chalk dust and because the person is carrying a stack of papers that look like they need grading" is far better, though even that statement might be mistaken.

So it is with literature. As we read, as we try to understand and interpret, we must deal with the text that is in front of us; but we must also recognize both that language is slippery and that each of us individually deals with it from a different set of perspectives. Not all of these perspectives are necessarily legitimate, and we are always liable to be misreading or misinterpreting what we see. Furthermore, it is possible that contradictory readings of a single work will both be legitimate, because literary works can be as complex and multifaceted as human beings. It is vital, therefore, that in reading literature we abandon both the idea that any individual's reading of a work is the "correct" one and the idea that there is one simple way to read any work. Our interpretations may, and probably should, change according to the way we approach the work. If we read War and Peace as teenagers, then in middle age, and then in old age, we might be said to have read three different books. Thus, multiple interpretations, even contradictory interpretations, can work together to give us a better understanding of a work.

Author's Intent

Intentions are a problem in studying literature. One complication is easily dispensed with. Teachers should never ask, "What was the author trying to say here?" The question, of course, implies that the author was an incompetent who was so unsuccessful in making a point that student readers have to decipher it. The real question is something like "What do these words say?" You may notice the phrasing of that question, which does not ask, "What does the author mean?" or "What does the author intend?"

The reason for that phrasing is that we cannot know (or we have to pretend that we cannot know) what the author intended. When we read literature, our focus has to be on what the words say, not on what the author intended. One reason that we have to take this stance is that an author's words, even an author who is totally in control of those words, inevitably say more than the author intended. It even happens that the words may mean something that the author did not intend. I once attended a poetry reading, at the end of which someone asked the poet, "Why do you have so many images of flayed animals and animal skins in your poems?" to which the poet replied, "Do I?" After rereading his poems, he said, "Yes, I see that I do," and he then tried to find a reason for those images, but clearly he was taken by surprise at what he himself had written.

Another reason to avoid focusing on the author's intention is that if we know (or even think we know) what the author intended, we might cease our own interpretive activities. The author's understanding of his or her work might be important, but strangely enough, it is only one understanding and might not be the best one. To use an analogy from music, Igor Stravinsky conducted many of his own compositions for recordings. Those

versions are good, and they are surely important, but they are not the best interpretations of his own music.

Furthermore, we can never really know what an author intended, even if the author tells us. For one thing, authors are cagey creatures and might lie to us. For another, the author might not always know what his or her intention was. After all, how often do we really know our full intentions when we do or say something? And authors frequently use speakers in their works who are not themselves. If one of Shakespeare's characters says something, we have to remember that we are listening to a character, not to Shakespeare. So, too, with poets and storytellers. Jonathan Swift's Lemuel Gulliver tells us many things that Swift himself would never have believed. So focus on the words, not on the author. Furthermore, even if we think we know what the author intended, we must remember that the author's reading of a work is still only one among many possibilities.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from "On the Language of Literature" from Literature, the Humanities and Humanity by Theodore L. Steinberg, licensed CC-BY-NC-SA

1.5: Language, Misconceptions, and Authorial Intention in Literature is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **1.4: Language, Misconceptions, and Authorial Intention in Literature** is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

1.6: Inferences in Literature

Inference vs. Guess

What is an inference? What's the difference between an inference and a guess? And what does any of this have to do with reading literature? Literature works largely on "showing" rather than "telling." The author shows through literary devices such as imagery, tone, figurative language and leaves it up to the reader to infer the meaning. This allows for active interpretation on the part of the reader and makes the reading dynamic rather than passive.

An **inference** is a conclusion you reach by applying logic to the evidence you are given. Making inferences while reading is a strategy that will help you learn, remember, and apply what you have read. When you make inferences you are "reading between the lines". This tactic is similar to what Sherlock Holmes does when he sees that Dr. Watson has a tan and makes a conclusion about where Watson has recently traveled. You already make inferences all of the time. For example, if you go over to a friend's house and they point at the sofa and say, "Don't sit there; Candy came over with her baby again", what could you logically conclude?

First, you know there must be a reason not to sit where your friend is pointing. Further, you know that the reason to not sit there is related to the fact that Cindy just visited with her baby. You don't know what exactly happened, but you can infer enough and don't need to ask any more questions to know that you do not want to sit there.

Other examples of inferences are when a doctor makes a diagnosis about why you are sick or when a mechanic figures out what is wrong with your car. Try some yourself. Imagine you witness each of the following – what can you infer about each situation?

1. You see a woman pushing a baby stroller down the street.
2. You are at a corner and see two cars stopped at an intersection. The rear car starts honking its horn.
3. You are walking down the street, and all of a sudden a dog comes running out of an opened door with its tail between its legs.

For the first example, you probably came up with something simple, such as that there was a baby in the stroller. For the second, you could infer that the first car should have started moving or was waiting too long at the corner and holding up the second car. For the third, you could reasonably guess that the dog had done something wrong and was afraid of being punished. You do not know for certain that these inferences are true.

Just like Sherlock Holmes, you would have to test your theories. If you checked 100 strollers, 99 times you would find a baby, but maybe one time you would find something else, like groceries.

? Exercise 1.5.1

Write a conclusion you could infer from the following:

1. You see a man running and frantically waving at a bus that is pulling away from a bus stop.
2. You are giving a speech in front of an audience and notice several people laughing and pointing at something on your pants.
3. Your sister comes home from spending the evening with her friends, slams the front door and runs to her room while crying.

Making Inferences from Reading Material

To make inferences from reading material, take two or more details from the reading and see if you can draw a conclusion. Remember, making an inference is not just making a guess, even though the answer is not stated in the reading passage. You need to make a judgment that can be supported, just as you could reasonably infer there is a baby in a stroller, because even though you do not know for certain, it is the most likely possibility. For example, at the end of the story "The Five Orange Pips", you are not told what exactly happened to the Lone Star, but you can infer that it was wrecked in a storm based on the other details provided:

- There was a storm
- The ship did not arrive at its next destination
- Wreckage with the initials L.S. were seen by other sailors

You could claim that the ship was taken by pirates, was sunk by a whale, or even that it landed on a deserted island; however, the only reasonable explanation from the facts is the same one implied by Dr. Watson: the ship was destroyed by the storm.

When you are asked to make an inference, go back over the reading and look for hints within the text, such as words that are directly related to the question. Also check for tone: are there words or phrases that indicate whether something is positive or negative? For example, if someone is referred to as being, sharp, friendly, and loyal,you would know that those are positive attributes; whereas, if they were referred to as being slovenly, dull, and selfish, those are negative attributes.

In order to make reasonable inferences that help you better comprehend what you read, remember to do the following:

Understand the stated information. You don't necessarily have to identify the main ideas to make a reasonable inference. However, you do need to understand the important vocabulary and facts in the text. So ask yourself, "What do these details

seem to show? Is there enough evidence to support my inference?" *"Are there any other possible ways to interpret this?"*

Use your prior knowledge of the situation and your common sense. However, do not ignore the facts in favor of your own personal opinions.

Consider the alternatives so you don't "jump to conclusions." Inferences tend to be "reasonable" when they are the result of "reasoned" thinking, not emotional reactions. When you go to a doctor for advice, he or she will think of different possible diagnoses before settling on the one that is most likely, given your symptoms. If the doctor jumped too quickly to one conclusion, he might give you the wrong treatment. If, as a reader, you jump too quickly to one interpretation of the text, you may not understand what the writer intended to convey.

Example: Imagine that it is a sunny day and you decide to go see a movie. After the movie is over, you step back outside and see that the sky is now cloudy and the streets and sidewalks are all wet. What can we reasonably infer happened?

If you said that it rained while you were in the theater, you're right! But what if you said that everything is wet because a water truck driving down the street was hit by a piano falling from an upper story window, causing the water truck to burst open and spill water all? This is a very unlikely scenario.

Questioning/responding (after you read): After you read a text, or part of a book, you will often be asked to respond to questions about the text. Just as you did when you annotated, you will often be asked to write down main ideas from the text as well as your own personal reactions to the text. **Hint: Read these questions BEFORE you read the text as a pre-reading exercise. This will help you build more SCHEMA (representation of a theory in the form of an outline) about the text.**

? Exercise 1.5.2

Hybrid cars are good for the environment, but they may not perform as well as cars that run only on gasoline. The Toyota Prius gets great gas mileage and has low emissions, making it a good "green" option. However, many people think that it is unattractive. The Prius also cannot accelerate as quickly as other models and cannot hold as many passengers as larger gas-fueled SUVs. Although they save money on fuel, hybrid cars cost more up front than gas-fueled cars. A new hybrid car can cost almost $3,500 more than the same car configured to run just on gasoline.

Which of the following can you infer from the passage?

1. Hybrid cars are more dangerous than other options.
2. Toyota is making a lot of money from the Prius.
3. Cars that use gasoline are going to destroy the environment.
4. Hybrid cars may not be the best choice for everyone.

Answer

All four answers are about hybrid cars in some way, but none of the answers can be found directly from the text. Read through and see what hints you can find from the text. You will notice right away that there is nothing about car safety in the passage at all, so you can eliminate choice A. Choice B could be the answer, since the passage mentions that hybrids cost more to purchase. But is it the most reasonable conclusion?

To be sure, you need to go through all of the answers – don't just stop when you find one that looks okay. You may think that choice C is true; after all, many people want hybrid cars because emissions are harmful to the environment. Although this choice seems accurate, it does not follow from anything in the passage. Choice D could be inferred from the text. If a person had a large family, was short on money or needed a car that could accelerate quickly, then a hybrid might not be the best choice for them.

Now compare choice D with the other possible answer, choice B. Choice B might not be as good an answer because you don't know how much it costs Toyota to make the cars, and you don't know how many they sell, so you can't reasonably infer that they are making a lot of money. Choice D is the correct answer.

? Exercise 1.5.3

Redwood trees are rare. They are found only on the coastal slopes of Northern California and Oregon, and in China. Redwoods were thought to be extinct in China, but they were rediscovered by a Chinese forester in 1948. These trees can grow hundreds of feet high and live to be thousands of years old. They are endangered due to logging, pollution, and global warming, which is reducing the amount of fog on the coast. Redwoods get their water from the fog.

Which of the following can you infer from the passage:

1. The Chinese logged the Redwoods almost into extinction.
2. Redwood trees will continue to grow taller throughout their whole lives.
3. Using non-recyclable products will kill Redwood trees.
4. Redwoods can only grow in places that get a lot of fog.

Paragraph 2:

Shannelle is a very good baker. Whenever there is a bake sale to raise money for a cause, Shannelle is always asked to make cupcakes or a pie. People say that they only come to the bake sales if they know that Shannelle is making something. She always agreed to bake things because she hated to say no to anyone. One week, her oven broke and she could not bake, so she decided to go for a hike instead. Shannelle enjoyed it so much that she realized she needed to learn to make time for herself, and not just donate all of her free time to charity.

Which of the following can you infer from the passage:

1. Shannelle is a generous person.
2. Shannelle's mother did a good job teaching her how to bake.
3. The people in the community were taking advantage of Shannelle.
4. Shannelle's brother broke her oven so she would get a day off.

Building on Your Knowledge of Inferences

Previously, we covered the basics of **inferences** and **reasonable conclusions**. Now we are going to look at another strategy to help you make valid inferences: the if-then statement. To use an if-then statement, look at the information presented in the reading and see if you could rephrase it into a statement using the words "if" and "then", which establish a cause-and-effect relationship.

For example:

In the 1800s in England, laws were applied differently depending on the gender of the accused. Women could not own land or vote. Women were barred from receiving a death sentence for crimes that a man could be executed for because people thought it would be too shocking to see a woman hanged publicly. In some places, men could be fined for certain behaviors done in the presence of a woman, such as swearing or spitting.

What **if-then statements** could we make based on the paragraph above? Let's go through sentence-by-sentence.

1. If we were back in England in the 1800's, then the laws would be applied differently for men and women.
2. If we were back in England in the 1800's, then women could not own land or vote.
3. If a woman committed a capital crime ("capital" meaning one that could earn a death sentence), then she would not be executed.
4. If a woman were hung, then the public would be shocked.
5. If a man swore in the presence of a woman, then he could be fined.

Broken down like this you can see how much easier it is to make logical inferences. Suppose you were asked if a woman who murdered her husband would be executed.

If-then statement #3 would tell you that the answer is "no", even though that information is not directly mentioned in the text. If you were asked if women were involved in government, you would say "no" because you know that they could not vote (#2). If you were asked if men could own real estate, you would say "yes" because #2 indicates that the fact that women could NOT own real estate was different from what men could do.

? Exercise 1.5.4

Now do the same thing with the next paragraph. Write your answers first, and then check your work below.

Many people don't realize that our sun is actually a star. Our sun seems very large because it is so close to us; however, some stars are actually much larger than our sun. Betelguese (pronounced beetle-juice), a star located in the constellation Orion, is much larger than our own sun. In fact, if it were located where our sun is located, its surface would engulf both Earth and Mars. Because other stars are so distant, they appear to be fainter, which is why we cannot see them in the daytime. Betelguese is the 8th brightest star in the night sky. To find Betelguese, first locate the constellation Orion. This star forms his left shoulder.

Answer

These are just examples, but your answers should be similar to them.

If something is far away, then it will appear smaller. If something looks smaller, then it may not be smaller if it is far away.

From here, there are dozens of conclusions you could infer. For example, if you were asked why Star A appears smaller than Star B, you would know it might be because it is actually smaller. Then again, it might also be smaller because it is farther away. The if-then statement is a useful strategy that can help you make inferences and increase your reading comprehension.

- If a star is much larger than the sun, then it could be Betelguese.
- If a star is fainter than the sun, then it cannot be seen during the day.
- If a star is the 8th brightest in the night sky, then it is Betelguese.
- If you know which constellation a star is in, then it is easier to find.

Exercise 1.5.5

Write an if-then statement for each sentence in the following paragraphs.

1. Nicaragua is the largest country in Central America. The population in Nicaragua, hovering at approximately 6 million, is multiethnic. Segments of the population include indigenous native tribes from the Mosquito Coast, Europeans, Africans, Asians, and people of Middle Eastern origin. The main language is Spanish; although, native tribes on the eastern coast speak their native languages, such as Miskito, Sumo, and Rama, as well as English Creole. The mixture of cultural traditions has generated substantial diversity in art, cuisine, literature, and music.
2. Childhood obesity is a condition where excess body fat negatively affects a child's health or well-being. Since methods to directly determine the amount of body fat are difficult, the diagnosis of obesity is often based on the Body Mass Index (BMI). Due to the rising prevalence of obesity in children and its many adverse health effects, obesity is being recognized as a serious public health concern. The term "overweight" is often used instead of "obese" for children because it is less stigmatizing.

Answer

These are just examples, but your answers should be similar to them.

Example 1:

- If a country is the largest in Central America, then it must be Nicaragua.
- If a country is in Central America and it is multiethnic, it might be Nicaragua.
- If someone is of Middle Eastern origin, they might live in Nicaragua.
- If someone lives in Nicaragua and does not speak Spanish, then they may be a member of a native tribe that speaks their native language.
- If a culture has a mixture of cultural traditions, then it is likely to have substantial diversity in art, cuisine, literature, and music.

Example 2

- If a child suffers from obesity, then she has excessive body fat that negatively affects her health or well-being.
- If someone has been diagnosed with obesity, then it is likely that their BMI was used to make this determination as determining the amount of body fat is difficult.
- If condition is rising in prevalence and has many adverse health effects, then it is likely to be recognized as a public health concern.
- If a child is described as being overweight, then it is likely that they are obese.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Making Inferences by Saylor Academy, license CC-BY
- Adapted from Adapted from Writing for Success by The Saylor Foundation, license CC-NC-SA 3.0

1.6: Inferences in Literature is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **1.5: Inferences in Literature** is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

1.7: Discussion Activity - What is Literature To You?

Learning Objectives

By the end of this assignment, students will be able to:

- critically analyze the qualities which differentiate literature from other genres of writing
- question how works of literature have been categorized as literature or not literature
- consider their relationship to literature

Part I

1. What is your favorite book or piece of writing? (If you do not like to read, what is your favorite video game, song, movie, or TV show?)
2. What qualities of this text seem literary? What qualities seem less literary?
3. Where do you think this text should be placed on the literary spectrum? Draw it on your spectrum. Why did you place it where you did?

Part II

1. Think about your past experiences with literature in school. What is a work you think your English teachers in the past would classify as literature?
2. What qualities of this text make it seem literary? What qualities might make it seem less literary?
3. Where do you think this text should be placed on the literary spectrum? Draw it on your spectrum. Why did you place it where you did?

Part III

1. Think about the spectrum you have created. Examine it closely.
2. How might these placements reflect where we come from as a student, as a class, as a campus, or as a society? To rephrase, how might our personal experiences, environment, or beliefs influence the way we approach literature?
3. If in a classroom: do you agree or disagree with your peers' placements on the spectrum? Why or why not?

This page titled 1.7: Discussion Activity - What is Literature To You? is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **1.7: Discussion Activity - What is Literature To You?** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

1.8: The Rough Guide to Literary Style, a Historical Overview

The Rough Guide to Literary Style, a Historical Overview

Literary style can be defined as how a writer decides to express whatever he wants to say; his choice of words, the sentence structure, syntax, language (figurative or metaphorical). Writing is more than telling a story or coming up with an interesting plot; for the writer it is an essential part of the writing process to select the words and language carefully and to develop his own personal style. In this article we will present some examples of different literary styles throughout history, and briefly discuss their effect on the reader, both at the time they were written and today. When you have studied the article and the examples, follow the link at the bottom for tasks and activities.

The Old Style

Reading old texts, for example from the Renaissance, can be a bit of a challenge for a modern reader. Scholars and writers at the time would often excel in rhetorical devices to show their verbal skills; sentences were long and intricate with many diversions and sub clauses. Many people were illiterate, and reading, let alone writing, was reserved for the cultural elite, and was seen as evidence of intellectual status. The following is a quote from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678):

> *Then I saw in my dream, that when they were got out of the wilderness, they presently saw a town before them, and the name of that town is Vanity; and at the town there is a fair kept, called Vanity Fair, because the town where it is kept is lighter than vanity; and also because all that is there sold, or what cometh thither, is vanity.*

What we note here is that the paragraph is one long sentence, which is made up of clauses linked by connectors (comma, semicolon, and, because). This is called a "periodic sentence" because the conclusion of the sentence is suspended until the end. The style is oratorical and formal, and the immediate effect on the modern reader is most likely impatience, because there are so many subclauses and additional information. The reader may want to find the point of the information, but in renaissance literature the ornamental language was a point on its own.

During the 16th and 17th centuries writers skillfully expressed themselves in a poetic language mainly designed for recital. The theatre was a popular cultural venue, where people came to follow the great works of William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlow, two of the great playwrights of the time. Many Shakespearian plots were often traditional or perhaps even stolen from some other source, but Shakespeare was the unchallenged master of language. The following extract is the opening lines of *Twelfth Night (1601)*:

> *If music be the food of love, play on,*
>
> *Give me excess of it; that, surfeiting*
>
> *The appetite may sicken, and so die…*
>
> *That strain again, it had a dying fall:*
>
> *O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet south*
>
> *That breathes upon a bank of violets;*
>
> *Stealing and giving odour… (-) Enough,*
>
> *No more!*

The style may seem both theatrical and pompous, but that was the literary ideal during the Renaissance, and the theatre audience loved it. Many modern readers also embrace this musical language; Shakespeare's eloquent style is still recognized as supreme literary craftsmanship.

Science and Facts

The style of the Enlightenment writers was more informative and scientifically to the point. Their choice of words and narrative style were influenced by the predominant ideals of the time – science, facts and lexical information. The following example is from *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe. Robinson has just survived the shipwreck and is on a raft approaching the island that is to become his home for the next 28 years:

> *At length I spy'd a little Cove on the right Shore of the Creek, to which with great Pain and Difficulty I guided my Raft, and at last got so near, as that, reaching Ground with my Oar, I could thrust her directly in, but here I had like to have dipt all my Cargo in the Sea again; for that Shore lying pretty steep, that is to say sloping, there was no Place to land, but where one End of my Float, if it run on Shore, it would endanger my Cargo again.*

This descriptive and rational style is typical of the era. We also see, as with John Bunyan, that the whole paragraph is one long sentence with many clauses. The informative style worked well for contemporary readers who were hungry for accounts about explorations and scientific experiments. The effect on a modern reader may of course be rather tedious as the detailed information is so meticulously laid out. An interesting detail is the capitalization of nouns, which was a common feature of enlightenment literature.

The Romantic Touch

Prose from the Romantic Era is also characterized by a somewhat elevated style, but as the two following examples will show, the style now becomes more accessible for modern readers, with shorter sentences and a more colloquial language. But the choice of words clearly reveals that this is the time of strong emotions and moral reflections. The first example is from *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë (1847):

> *I had forgotten to draw my curtain, which I usually did, and also to let down my window-blind. The consequence was, that when the moon, which was full and bright (for the night was fine), came in her course to that space in the sky opposite my casement, and looked in at me through the unveiled panes, her glorious gaze roused me. Awakening in the dead of night, I opened my eyes on her disc – silver-white and crystal clear. It was beautiful, but not too solemn: I half rose and stretched my arm to draw the curtain.*

The poetic style exemplifies the romantic ideals brilliantly; it is like a lyrical prose text with elements usually associated with poetry. The next example is from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813):

> *The discussion of Mr Collins's offer was now nearly at an end, and Elizabeth had only to suffer from uncomfortable feelings necessarily attending it, and occasionally from some peevish allusion of her mother. As for the gentleman himself, his feelings were chiefly expressed, not by embarrassment, or dejection, or by trying to avoid her, but by stiffness of manner and resentful silence.*

The style here is also purely romantic; Austen's choice of words reflects the morals and the conventions that were predominant with the upper classes at the time. To a modern reader the style may seem a bit formal, but Jane Austen portrayed her time and its virtues in an accurate manner. Austen's popularity clearly shows that her style also goes down well with modern readers.

Realism

During the Victorian Age (or Realism as the era is referred to on the continent) literary style became more diverse as writers now more than before developed their own personal style. Victorian writers wanted to display reality in all its details, for better or worse. If we look at Charles Dickens, who is recognized as the most prominent Victorian novelist, his style is quite unique with its precise and visual descriptions. People and places are painted for the reader down to the smallest details. The following example is from *Oliver Twist* (1838):

> *It was market morning. The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire; and a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog, which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above. All the pens in the centre of the large area, and as many temporary pens as could be crowded into the vacant space, were filled with sheep; tied up to post by the gutter side were long lines of beasts and oxen, three of four deep. Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade were mingled in a mass; the whistling of drovers, the barking of dogs, the bellowing and plunging of oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs…*

This is the typical Dickensian style; he paints a picture so vivid and detailed that the reader is able to see, hear and smell the scene. Here, too, the paragraph consists of three long sentences (apart from the brief introduction). Dickens' hang to meticulous descriptions is also reflected in his narrative style; the main plot is intertwined with sub-plots and more or less related side stories that seem to lead in different directions. Reading Dickens is like slow speed skating – you go left and right as you also gradually move forward. To many modern readers Dickens' style may be a bit overwhelming, there is simply too much to take in. On the other hand, few other writers – if any – have been able to paint such an accurate picture of their contemporary society.

The next example of literary style from the mid-19th century is taken from Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* (1874), where Twain writes about his training to become a pilot on the river:

> *Now the engines were stopped altogether, and we drifted with the current. Not that I could see the boat drift, for I could not, the stars being all gone by this time. This drifting was the dismalest work; it held one's heart still. Presently I discovered a blacker gloom than that which surrounded us. It was the head of the island. We were closing right down upon it. We entered it deeper shadow, ad so imminent seemed the peril that I was likely to suffocate; and I had the strongest impulse to do something, anything, to save the vessel. But still Mr Bixby stood by his wheel, silent, intent as a cat, and all the pilots stood shoulder to shoulder at his back. "She'll not make it! Somebody whispered.*

Note how the style here is totally different from Dickens' picturesque description of the market scene. Mark Twain's style is subtler and more subdued, nevertheless he communicates the scene brilliantly; we feel the intensity of the moments before the steamer hits land. This may also be a consequence of Mark Twain's narrative angle, as he relates this in an autobiographical way, from a 1st person angle.

Less is More

During the first half of the 20th century literary style became even more diverse. Many writers now wanted to experiment with their art, and literature became complex and abstract. Some writers took it to the limit and their texts were close to unintelligible for the ordinary reader. Here we will present two examples of a more moderate modernist literary style. James Joyce is probably the prime exponent of the experimental modernist style, but the following example from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), his debut, is quite straightforward – though it carries elements of the style he would develop in his later works:

> *She had passed through the dusk. And therefore the air was silent save for one soft hiss that fell. And therefore the tongues about him had ceased their babble. Darkness was falling.*

The style of these silent and poetic lines has an intriguing effect on the reader. Joyce's choice of words makes the reader reflect: Why was the air silent because "she had passed through the dusk"? Note also: "passed through the dusk" instead of "walked through the evening". And at the end is a sentence of just three words; it is a brilliant example of minimalist, poetic prose.

Another modernist writer who became famous for his minimalist style was Ernest Hemingway. His literary style was to economize information to the point that what is left unsaid is more important than what is said. A famous example is when Hemingway

accepted the challenge of writing a novel in six words, and came up with: “For Sale. Baby Shoes. Never Worn.” This example of Hemingway’s short-cut style is from the novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926):

> *It was dim and dark and the pillars went high up, and there were people praying, and it smelt of incense, and there were some wonderful big buildings.*

In this very brief and to-the-point description, Hemingway gives the reader as little information as possible, but enough to set the mood or atmosphere of the scene. The sentence consists of five independent clauses connected with “and.” In his short story *Indian Camp* (1924) Hemingway takes his minimalist style even further by omitting the connecting “ands”:

> *The sun was coming over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning.*

If we compare this with, for example, Charles Dickens’ market scene we see a totally different narrative style that demands more from the reader. We are not given all the details; the full effect of the text depends on what the reader is able to add to it. The Norwegian author Tarjei Vesaas is another prime example of this poetic minimalism; he would often omit all unnecessary connectors (“and,” ”or,” ”because”…), and present his narrative like a naked skeleton for the reader to dress up.

The Style is the Trial

Writers at all times have worked with words to develop their own personal style, influenced by their cultural and social environment, and driven by an unstoppable urge to express themselves. They struggle with words and literary devices to get their message across exactly the way they want it. Writing is a remarkable profession; it takes some talent and creativity, certainly some commitment – and a lot of work. The German writer Thomas Mann put it like this: “It is a struggle – spending hour after hour, even days fighting with just one sentence; a good day is when I have completed some lines.” Most writers are perfectionists; the bulk of what they write is simply tossed in the bin. American contemporary novelist Paul Auster even said: “Don’t do it if you don’t have to. It’s a curse!” Discouraging advice for aspiring writers!

Contributors and Attributions

- "The Rough Guide to Literary Style, a Historical Overview." **Authored by**: Jan-Louis Nagel. **Provided by**: NDLA. **Located at**: **ndla.no/en/node/110262?fag=71085**. **License**: ***CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike***

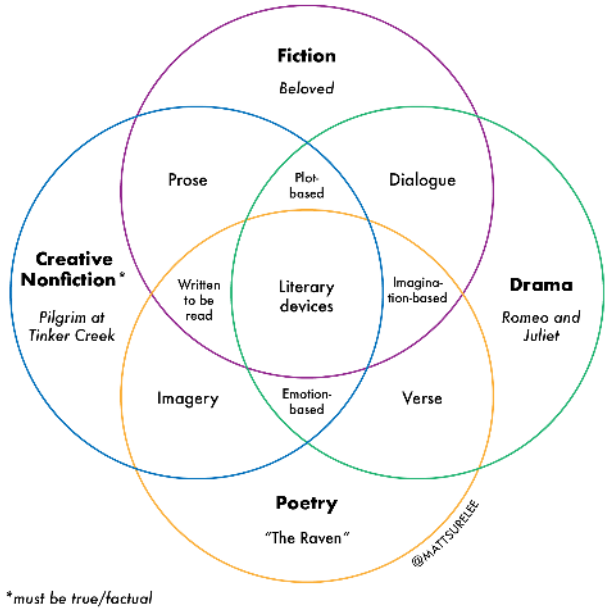
This page titled 1.8: The Rough Guide to Literary Style, a Historical Overview is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **1.6: The Rough Guide to Literary Style, a Historical Overview** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap has no license indicated.

1.9: The Literary Landscape- Four Major Genres

The Literary Landscape: Four Major Genres

In the landscape of literature, there are four major genres: poetry, drama, fiction, and creative nonfiction. While there are certain key recognizable features of each genre, these are not so much rules as they are tools, or conventions, the author uses. If we think of literature as its own world, it may help to think of genres more as regions with open borders, where there are no walls and that authors can freely move through if they desire. But, like any traveler, it helps you understand your place in the world if you know where you are located (or at least the "lay of the land"). It can also be interesting to analyze how certain texts break genre conventions. These major genres are briefly outlined below.



"Literary Genres Venn Diagram" by Matt Shirley (2021) licensed CC-BY-SA. This image shows some of the differences and overlap between different genres.

Poetry

- Emphasis on image or feeling
- More emphasis on rhythm and meter than other genres (older drama, like Shakespeare, often uses rhythm and meter)
- Sometimes rhymes, but not always
- Organized through stanzas and lines
- Does not require a plot or characters, although it may include them (such as in narrative poetry). Often focuses on single moment or feeling or image
- Meant to be heard as well as read, so there is an emphasis on sound

Example

"I wandered lonely as a cloud" by William Wordsworth (1807)

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees, 5
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,

They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay: 10
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company: 15
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude; 20
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

In-Text Citation: Wordsworth personified the daffodils as "dancing" (line 6). The 6 corresponds to the line number.

Works Cited Entry: Wordsworth, William. "I wandered lonely as a cloud." *Poems in Two Volumes.* London: Longman, 1807.

Drama

- Meant to be performed to an audience
- Character List (often); Character names indicate who is speaking (almost always)
- Heavy inclusion of dialogue. Usually not much scene description (compared to other genres)
- Organized by Acts, Scenes, and Line Numbers
- May include stage directions, but may not
- Plot based (it tells a story, usually involving a conflict of some kind)
- May be written in verse
- Types: Comedy, Tragedy, History, and Romance, among others

Example

The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde (excerpt)

THE PERSONS IN THE PLAY

John Worthing, J.P.
Algernon Moncrieff
Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.
Merriman, Butler
Lane, Manservant
Lady Bracknell
Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax
Cecily Cardew
Miss Prism, Governess

ACT 1 SCENE 1

1 Morning-room in **Algernon's** flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.

2 [**Lane** is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, **Algernon** enters.]

3 **Algernon.** Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

4 **Lane.** I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

5 **Algernon.** I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—any one can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life.

6 **Lane.** Yes, sir.

7 **Algernon.** And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

8 **Lane.** Yes, sir. [Hands them on a salver.]

9 **Algernon.** [Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.] Oh! . . . by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord 10 Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

In-Text Citation: The dynamics of power are indicated by Lane's repeated use of "sir" (Wilde 1.1.4, 6, 8). Here the numbers represent the Act (1), the Scene (1), and the line numbers (4, 6, 8).

Works Cited Entry: Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest.* London: St. James' Theatre, 1895.

Fiction

- Prose
- Created from the imagination. May be inspired by real events or people, but not chained by the constraints of reality.
- Plot-based
- Character-based
- Usually includes dialogue and scene descriptions
- Organized through paragraphs and sentences
- Types: Short Story, Novella, Novel

Example

From the oval-shaped flower-bed there rose perhaps a hundred stalks spreading into heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves half way up and unfurling at the tip red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour raised upon the surface; and from the red, blue or yellow gloom of the throat emerged a straight bar, rough with gold dust and slightly clubbed at the end. The petals were voluminous enough to be stirred by the summer breeze, and when they moved, the red, blue and yellow lights passed one over the other, staining an inch of the brown earth beneath with a spot of the most intricate colour. The light fell either upon the smooth, grey back of a pebble, or, the shell of a snail with its brown, circular veins, or falling into a raindrop, it expanded with such intensity of red, blue and yellow the thin walls of water that one expected them to burst and disappear. Instead, the drop was left in a second silver grey once more, and the light now settled upon the flesh of a leaf, revealing the branching thread of fibre beneath the surface, and again it moved on and spread its illumination in the vast green spaces beneath the dome of the heart-shaped and tongue-shaped leaves. Then the breeze stirred rather more briskly overhead and the colour was flashed into the air above, into the eyes of the men and women who walk in Kew Gardens in July.

In-Text Citation: The natural world is described in anatomical language, like dismembered body parts, such as the "heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves," the "throat" of the flowers, and the "veins" of the snail shells (Woolf 1). If there are page numbers, the number that goes in the parenthesis is the page number. If there are no page numbers, you can use the paragraph number (Woolf par. 1). If there are not page numbers, and there are too many paragraphs to count, you can just put the author last name (Woolf).

Works Cited Entry: Woolf, Virginia. "Kew Gardens." *Monday or Tuesday.* New York: Harcourt, 1921.

Creative Nonfiction

- Prose
- **True** (not fabricated, not from the imagination). This is a *very important* distinction from the other genres.
- Plot-based
- Character-based
- Usually includes dialogue and scene descriptions
- Organized through paragraphs and sentences
- Types: Narrative, Memoir, and Literary Journalism, among others

Example

I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot county, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. I was not allowed to make any inquiries of my master concerning it. He deemed all such inquiries on the part of a slave improper and impertinent, and evidence of a restless spirit. The nearest estimate I can give makes me now between twenty-seven and twenty-eight years of age. I come to this, from hearing my master say, some time during 1835, I was about seventeen years old.

In-Text Citation: Even from the first paragraph of his narrative, Douglass repeatedly notes the power of "knowledge" and "information", and of enslavers' dehumanizing cruelty in withholding knowledge and information, such as birthdays (1). The number here represents the page. Just like in Fiction, if there is no page available, cite the paragraph number (Douglass par. 1). If there no page number, and there are too many paragraphs to count, just cite the last name (Douglass).

Works Cited Entry: Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Boston Anti-Slavery Office, Boston, 1845.

Copyright

All literary works cited on this page are in the public domain.

This page titled 1.9: The Literary Landscape- Four Major Genres is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **1.8: The Literary Landscape- Four Major Genres** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: About Fiction

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- explain the difference between fiction and non-fiction, short stories and novels.
- describe the key elements of fiction.
- discuss the meanings of “tone,” “diction,” and “syntax."
- identify the major elements of a plot.
- identify character, setting, and theme.
- differentiate between internal and external conflict.

2.1: What is Fiction?
2.2: Short Stories versus the Novel
2.3: How to Read Fiction
2.4: How to Analyze Fiction - Elements of Literature
2.5: Theme
2.6: Plot
2.7: Character
2.8: Narration, Point of View, Dialogue
2.9: Setting
2.10: Symbolism and Figurative Language
2.11: Tone, Voice and Style
2.12: A Review and Questions
2.13: Match and Learn Quiz

This page titled 2: About Fiction is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

2.1: What is Fiction?

Overview



Image from Pixabay

Fiction refers to literature created from the imagination. Mysteries, science fiction, romance, fantasy, chick lit, and crime thrillers are all fiction genres. Whether or not all of these genres should be considered “literature” is a matter of opinion. Some of these fiction genres are taught in literature classrooms and some are not usually taught, considered more to be reading for entertainment. Works often taught in literature classrooms are referred to as “literary fiction” including classics by Dickens, Austen, Twain, and Poe, for example. We will be studying primarily literary fiction in our readings, unless your instructor decides otherwise.

Difference Between Fiction and Nonfiction

While nonfiction and creative nonfiction are true, fiction is **not true**. Fiction may chronicle real events that happened in a convincing way using **verisimilitude**, but for categorization purposes the literature is still fiction. For example, historical fiction adapts real events and historical figures into a compelling narrative. But even if 95% of the story is true, the 5% of imagination renders the narrative into fiction. Meanwhile, nonfiction and creative nonfiction must tell the truth. The flexibility in creative nonfiction comes in how the story is told. Fiction writers are not constrained by the truth in this way.

If an author presents untrue events as nonfiction, they are at risk of losing their reputation as writers or falling prey to lawsuits. For example, James Frey's "memoir" *A Million Little Pieces* is an example of what can happen when an author presents fictional events as nonfiction. His career was tanked. He was even kicked out of Oprah Winfrey's book club (Wyatt)! As creative nonfiction expert Lee Gutkind writes, "by virtue of the fact that some of the stuff in Frey’s book never happened, it should be catalogued as fiction—not creative nonfiction" (Gutkind).

Fiction writers are not constrained by reality in the same way that creative nonfiction authors might be. They are only bound by the limits of their imaginations.

Why Should We Read Fiction?

Prose fiction, whether in the form of the novel or the short story, is one of the most popular and widely consumed literary **genres**. One only has to see the proliferation of bookstalls at railway stations and airports, for example, and the predominance of novels over other forms of writing made available in such locations, to realize the appeal of fiction.

Take a few moments to think about *Why* we read fiction. *What* do we hope to gain from reading stories about imagined events that happen to imaginary people?

Robert DiYanni begins his impressively wide-ranging study *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and the Essay* (1997) with the following assertion about why we read:

> *We read stories for pleasure; they entertain us. And we read them for profit; they enlighten us. Stories draw us into their imaginative worlds and engage us with the power of their invention. They provide us with more than the immediate interest of narrative – of something happening – and more than the pleasures of imagination: they enlarge our understanding of ourselves and deepen our appreciation of life. (p. 27)*

Did your own answers to the question of why we read touch on any of the reasons DiYanni gives? I wouldn't be at all surprised if they did. It is, I think, true for all of us that there is an element of sheer escapism in our desire to read stories, to imaginatively engage with the incidents and events that befall the characters we read about. We often come to identify with these fictional characters, and think perhaps about how we would react and respond to the situations they find themselves in.

We can immerse ourselves in a fictional world in this way without necessarily applying a great deal of critical or intellectual effort, of course. But if fictional narratives are, as DiYanni puts it, to "enlarge our understanding of ourselves and deepen our appreciation of life," we need, perhaps, to read them in a more objective way, to subject them to a more critical scrutiny to see if they reinforce or challenge our existing ideas about the world around us. Close attention to the texts we read can only enhance our understanding, and this in turn can increase our pleasure in reading. In this section we will

concentrate largely on the various elements that make up a fictional **narrative**; the events that make up a **story** and how they are arranged (the **plot**); the perspectives from which stories can be narrated; the act of **characterisation**; the importance of **setting**, both in terms of time and place; and the actual language and style which writers adopt to tell their narratives. Above all, in what follows, and in your own readings of fictional narratives, you need to always keep in mind the question of *why* you think writers use particular narrative strategies. There are an infinite number of ways in which stories can be told; the choices made by individual writers of individual texts are not randomly made. We need to think about why those choices might have been made. There is no single authoritative answer to such questions. How we read is dictated largely by the experiences and contexts we each of us bring to a particular text, and for that reason no two readings are likely to be the same, even though we may be applying the same critical processes to our reading.



Video 4.1.1 : Introduction to Fiction

Works Cited

Gutkind, Lee. "A Million Little Choices: The ABCs of CNF." *Creative Nonfiction* Issue 29, 2006.

Wyatt, Edward. "Author Is Kicked Out of Oprah Winfrey's Book Club." *The New York Times*, 27 January 2006.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from the course Approaching Prose Fiction by Dr. Steve Padley, provided on the OpenLearn Website, licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA

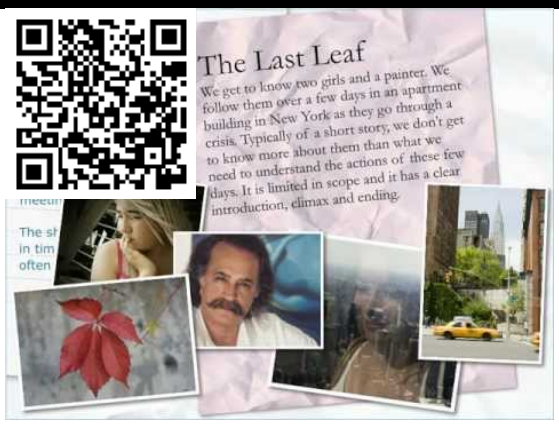
This page titled 2.1: What is Fiction? is shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **4.1: What is Fiction?** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY 4.0.

2.2: Short Stories versus the Novel

Short Story

Short stories are works of fiction that usually fall between 1,000 to 10,000 words. On the shorter end of the short story classification we have flash fiction (500-1,000 words). On the longer end, we might approach a novella (17,500-40,000 words). Aside from length, there are some other characteristics which qualify a work of fiction as a short story. It is written in prose, meaning sentences and paragraphs rather than the lines and stanzas of poetry. There is usually a clear storyline, or plot, that unfolds over time. In short stories, the plot usually stretches over a relatively short time span, and will involve fewer characters than a novel. Like in drama and novels, a short story will have a certain structure with a turning point or climax which brings the plot in an unexpected direction.

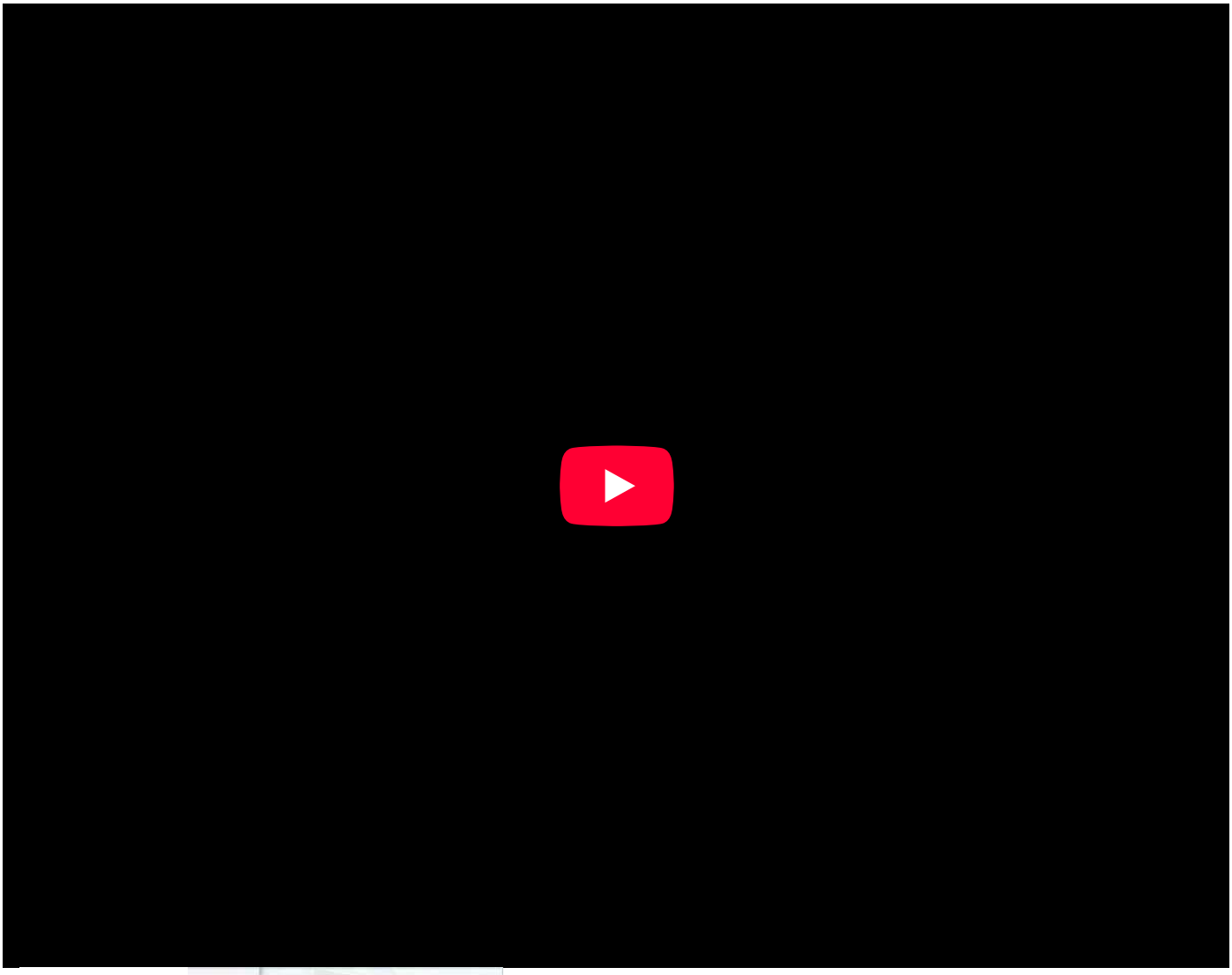


Video 4.2.1 : Short Story

The Novel

A novel is a work of fiction. This means that it is made up and not factual. Unlike the short story, it is NOT short: it usually focuses on many events and places as well as more characters than the short story. Also, the time span depicted in a novel is often longer than that of a short story.

In literary history, the novel is a fairly new form. Scholars count *Don Quixote* by Miguel Cervantes (1605) as the first narrative that fits modern criteria of a novel. Usually a novel is defined by its length, or, more precisely, the extension of its plot, which can span over longer time than, for example, a short story. But that is not always the case; there are many famous (and long) novels where the narrative evolves over a very short span of time, for example a couple of hours or a day. In addition, a novel often has an extensive cast of characters, and the plot may take place in many different settings. There are a number of subgenres that will identify a novel more specifically, such as fantasy, romance, historical, or bildungsroman.





Video 4.2.2 : Introduction to the Novel

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Literary Genres, **Authored by**: Jan-Louis Nagel **Provided by**: NDLA. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA*
- Adapted from What is a Novel, **Authored by**: Eli M. Huseby **Provided by**: NDLA. **License**: *CC BY-NC-SA*

2.2: Short Stories versus the Novel is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **4.2: Short Stories versus the Novel** has no license indicated.

2.3: How to Read Fiction

How to Read and Analyze Fiction



CC-BY-NC-SA-4.0 Supplier: Corbis NTB scanpix

> *Novels are exciting machines (verbal machines) which transport their readers in space and time. They challenge us to meet the unfamiliar. They offer us a share in the pleasure*

The above quote by Dr. Milligan shows us the pleasure a reader can get not only by reading a novel, but also analyzing it. The ultimate reading experience comes as a result of the collaboration between the writer and the reader; they both will have to contribute for the reading experience to be a success. So, once the writer has completed his task, the reader must do his bit for the literary universe to unfold. What happens in this process has occupied writers and scholars over the years. Many authors, including Virginia Woolf, have written extensive essays on the nature of literature, and how a literary text should be read. It is of course hard to define which basic elements are essential for the "correct" perception of a text, firstly because reading is a very private and individual experience. Secondly, writers are different and have their individual literary approach and style. But here lies the essence of a complete understanding of a literary text – the symbiotic unity of writing and reading.

The Act of Reading

The act of reading has been characterized by Robert DiYanni as involving three interrelated processes: experience, interpretation, and evaluation. The first thing we do when we read a novel is to experience it, that is to say, we respond to the development of the narrative and the characters presented to us. The story we read if it does its job effectively affects us on certain levels. We become involved in the events and incidents that befall the characters. The language of the narrative forces us to respond to it, maybe with pleasure or admiration, or sometimes with confusion. If we are engaged by the story on any level we will have feelings one way or the other about the outcome; we will all respond in different ways. That response is shaped by our reaction to the interplay of various narrative elements, which will be outlined now and discussed in detail later.

To read and appreciate a short story fully, you need to read it at least twice, especially if you are going to analyze it. You can follow the steps below:

1. Read the story in its entirety for enjoyment.
2. Read the story again, pausing often to reflect on what the description/events/language is trying to tell you.
3. Once you reach the end on the second read, you can reflect on the story as a whole based on your interpretations.

How to Read a Novel: Advice from Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf's essay, "How Should One Read a Book?" is still useful today to understand one reads a novel.



CC-BY-NC-SA-4.0 Photographer: George Charles Beresford

About the Author: Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

Until she was 13, Adeline Virginia Stephen led a happy and carefree life in a harmonious Victorian family. Then a series of events threw her life into an accelerating downward spiral. Her mother died, which for her was “the greatest tragedy that could ever happen”. But there was more to come. After this her father despaired and was unable to take care of his three children, so Virginia and her sister had to be looked after by their half-sister Stella. In this new family setting the Stephen sisters were exposed to sexual advances by both Stella’s husband and their half-brother, George Duckworth. Virginia withdrew into a state of “frozen and defensive panic” and became a shy individual, feeling that the next shock would drive her mad. This came when her father soon after died of cancer, and Virginia had her first of a series of nervous breakdowns. She was on the brink of madness, wandering in and out of hallucinations and fighting with self-destructive thoughts.

Literature became her refuge. She and her sister Vanessa became the leading figures of the so-called Bloomsbury Group, an avant-garde circle based at their home in Bloomsbury, London. It was a group of intellectuals discussing social, cultural and political issues of the time – anti-imperialism, modernist literature and art, and feminism. She later married another member of the group, Leonard Woolf.

Her first writing was fairly conventional and straightforward, but gradually she developed a more experimental style influenced by modernist writers, such as James Joyce. She wanted to challenge the conventional concept of a novel and traditional narrative style. Some of her most famous works include *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), and *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

Virginia Woolf published two volumes of literary essays, *The Common Reader* (1925) and *The Second Common Reader* (1932), which are, as the titles indicate, written to encourage reading among common people as opposed to critics and literary scholars. She reflects on the style and approach of different writers, the criteria of literary quality, and most importantly, as in this excerpt from *The Second Common Reader* – the role of the reader.

How Should One Read a Book?: *An Essay by Virginia Woolf*

In the first place, I want to emphasize the note of interrogation at the end of my title. Even if I could answer the question for myself, the answer would apply only to me and not to you. The only advice, indeed, that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions. If this is agreed between us, then I feel at liberty to put forward a few ideas and suggestions because you will not allow them to fetter that independence which is the most important quality that a reader can possess. After all, what laws can be laid down about books? The battle of Waterloo was certainly fought on a certain day; but is Hamlet a better play than Lear? Nobody can say. To admit authorities, however heavily furred and gowned, into our libraries and let them tell us how to read, what value to place upon what we read, is to destroy the spirit of freedom which is the breath of these sanctuaries. Everywhere else we may be bound by laws and conventions, there we have none.

(…)

Yet few people ask from books what books can give us. Most commonly we come to books with blurred and divided minds, asking of fiction that it shall be true, of poetry that it shall be false, of biography that it shall be flattering, of history that it shall enforce our own prejudices. If we could banish all such preconceptions when we read, that would be an admirable beginning. Do not dictate to your author; try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice. If you hang back, and reserve and criticize at first, you are preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what you read. But if you open your mind as widely as possible, then signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turn of sentences, will bring you into the presence of a human being unlike any other. Steep yourself in this, acquaint yourself with this, and soon you will find that your author is giving you, attempting to give you something far more definite. The thirty-two chapters of a novel – if we consider how to read a novel first – are an attempt to make something as formed and controlled as a building: But words are more impalpable than bricks; reading is a longer and more complicated process than seeing. Perhaps the quickest way to understand the elements of what a novelist is doing is not to read, but to write; to make your own experiment with the dangers and difficulties of words. Recall, then, some event that has left a distinct impression on you – how at the corner of a street, you passed two people talking. A tree shook; an electric light danced; the tone of the talk was comic, but also tragic; a whole vision, an entire conception contained in that moment.

But when you attempt to reconstruct it in words, you will find that it breaks into a thousand conflicting impressions. Some must be subdued; others emphasized; in the process you will lose, probably, all grasp upon the emotion itself. Then turn from your blurred and littered pages to the opening pages of some great novelist – Defoe, Jane Austen, Hardy. Now you will be better able to appreciate their mastery. It is not merely that we are in the presence of a different person – Defoe, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy – but we are living a different world. Here in Robinson Crusoe, we are trudging a plain highroad; one thing happens after another; the fact and the order of the fact is enough. But if the open air and adventure mean everything to Defoe they mean nothing to Jane Austen. Here is the drawing-room, and people talking, and by the many mirrors of their talk revealing their characters. And if, when we have accustomed ourselves to the drawing-room and its reflections, we turn to Hardy, we are once more spun round. The moors are round us and the stars are above out heads. The other side of the mind is now exposed – the dark side that comes uppermost in solitude, not the light side that shows in company. Our relations are not towards people, but towards Nature and Destiny. Yet different as these worlds are, each is consistent with itself. The maker of each is careful to observe the laws of his own perspective, and however great a strain they may put upon you they will never confuse us, as lesser writers so frequently do, by introducing two different kinds of reality into the same book.

Exercise 4.4.1

- What does Virginia Woolf say about the relation between reader and writer?
- What is her advice about what to read?
- What does she say about defining "good" literature?
- What does she mean by saying that “few people ask from books what books can give us”?
- How is “reading a more complicated process than seeing”?
- In addition to an open mind, what does she suggest as a good starting point if we want to appreciate good literature?
- She mentions three famous English novelists; how does she describe their different styles?
- Explain the last sentence of the essay.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from the course Approaching Prose Fiction by Dr. Steve Padley, provided on the OpenLearn Website, licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA
- Adapted from Writing About Literature: The Basics by CK-12, license CC-BY-NC

This page titled 2.3: How to Read Fiction is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **4.4: How to Read Fiction** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

2.4: How to Analyze Fiction - Elements of Literature

Elements of Literature

Before you dive straight into your analysis of symbolism, diction, imagery, or any other rhetorical device, you need to have a grasp of the basic elements of what you're reading. When we read critically or analytically, we might disregard character, plot, setting, and theme as surface elements of a text. Aside from noting what they are and how they drive a story, we sometimes don't pay much attention to these elements. However, characters and their interactions can reveal a great deal about the story's themes. Plot can act as a stand-in for real-world events just as setting can represent our world or an allegorical one. Theme is the heart of literature, exploring everything from love and war to childhood and aging.

With this in mind, you can begin your examination of literature with a “who, what, when, where, how?” approach. Ask yourself “Who are the characters?” “What is happening?” “When and where is it happening?” and “How does it happen?” The answers will give you character (who), plot (what and how), and setting (when and where). When you put these answers together, you can begin to figure out theme, and you will have a solid foundation on which to base your analysis.

We will be exploring several of the following literary elements in the following pages so that we can have a common vocabulary to talk about fiction:

- Tone
- Character
- Plot
- Setting
- Narration
- Rhetorical Devices
- Theme
- Imagery
- Symbolism

Here are a few questions to ask when looking at some of the main elements of fiction. We will be looking at each of these in more detail in the following pages.

Setting

Setting is a description of where and when the story takes place.

- What aspects make up the setting?
  - Geography, weather, time of day, social conditions?
- What role does setting play in the story? Is it an important part of the plot or theme? Or is it just a backdrop against which the action takes place?
- Study the time period which is also part of the setting
- When was the story written?
  - Does it take place in the present, the past, or the future?
  - How does the time period affect the language, atmosphere, or social circumstances of the novel?

Characterization

Characterization deals with how the characters are described.

- through dialogue?
- by the way they speak?
- physical appearance? thoughts and feelings?
- interaction – the way they act towards other characters?
- Are they static characters who do not change?
- Do they develop by the end of the story?
- What type of characters are they?
- What qualities stand out?
- Are they stereotypes?

- Are the characters believable?

Plot and structure

The *plot* is the main sequence of events that make up the story.

- What are the most important events?
- How is the plot structured? Is it linear and chronological or does it move back and forth?
- Are there turning points, a climax, and/or an anticlimax?
- Is the plot believable?

Narrator and Point of View

The *narrator* is the person telling the story.
Point of view: whose eyes the story is being told through.

- Who is the narrator or speaker in the story?
- Is the narrator the main character?
- Does the author speak through one of the characters?
- Is the story written in the first person “I” point of view?
- Is the story written in a detached third person “he/she/they” point of view?
- Is the story written in an “all-knowing” third person who can reveal what all the characters are thinking and doing at all times and in all places?

Conflict

Conflict or tension is usually the heart of the novel and is related to the main character.

- How would you describe the main conflict?
  - Is it internal where the character suffers inwardly?
  - Is it external, caused by the surroundings or environment the main character finds themself in?

Theme

The *theme* is the main idea, lesson, or message in the novel. It is usually an abstract, universal idea about the human condition, society or life, to name a few.

- How does the theme shine through in the story?
- Are any elements repeated that may suggest a theme?
- What other themes are there?

Style

The author’s style has to do with the author’s vocabulary, use of imagery, tone, or feeling of the story. It has to do with his attitude towards the subject. In some novels the tone can be ironic, humorous, cold, or dramatic.

- Is the text full of figurative language?
- Does the author use a lot of symbolism? Metaphors, similes?
  An example of a metaphor is when someone says, "My love, you *are* a rose." An example of a simile is "My darling, you are *like* a rose."
- What images are used?

Your literary analysis of a novel will often be in the form of an essay or book report where you will be asked to give your opinions of the novel at the end. To conclude, choose the elements that made the greatest impression on you. Point out which characters you liked best or least and always support your arguments. Try to view the novel as a whole and try to give a balanced analysis.

These are the Elements of Literature, the things that make up every story. This is the first of two videos.



Video 4.5.1 : Elements of literature with Mr. Taylor: Part I



Video 4.5.2 Elements of literature with Mr. Taylor: Part II

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing About Literature: The Basics by CK-12, license CC-BY-NC
- Adapted from How to Analyze a Novel by Carol Dwankowski, provided by NDLA, license CC-BY-SA

This page titled 2.4: How to Analyze Fiction - Elements of Literature is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **4.5: Elements of Fiction** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

2.5: Theme



Image from Pixabay

Theme

Theme is the unifying idea behind a story. It connects the plot points, conflicts, and characters to a major idea. It usually provides a broad statement about humanity, life, or our universe. We can think of theme, in its most basic definition, as the message the author tries to send his or her readers.

One thing you should remember about theme is that it must be expressed in a complete sentence. For instance, “discrimination” is not a theme; however, “genetic modification in humans is dangerous because it can result in discrimination” is a complete theme.

A story can have more than one theme, and it is often useful to question and analyze how the themes interact. For instance, does the story have conflicting themes? Or do a number of slightly different themes point the reader toward one conclusion? Sometimes the themes don't have to connect-- many stories use multiple themes in order to bring multiple ideas to the readers' attention.

So how do we find theme in a work? One way is to examine **motifs,** or recurring elements in a story. If something appears a number of times within a story, it is likely of significance. A motif can be a statement, a place, an object, or even a sound. Motifs often lead us to discern a theme by drawing attention to it through repetition. In addition, motifs are often symbolic. They can represent any number of things, from a character's childhood to the loss of a loved one. By examining what a motif symbolizes, you can extrapolate a story's possible themes. For instance, a story might use a park to represent a character's childhood. If the author makes constant references to the park, but we later see it replaced by a housing complex, we might draw conclusions about what the story is saying about childhood and the transition to adulthood.



Video 2.5.1: Introduction to theme in fiction

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from Writing About Literature: The Basics by CK-12, license CC-BY-NC

This page titled 2.5: Theme is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

2.6: Plot

Plot



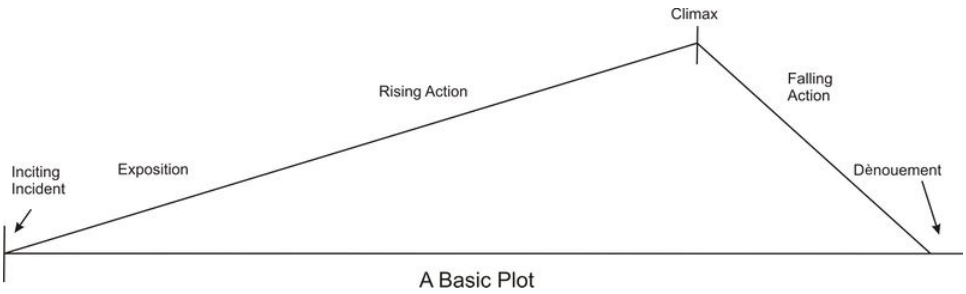
Image from Pixabay

Before you can write an in-depth explanation of the themes, motives, or diction of a book, you need to be able to discuss one of its most basic elements: the story. If you can't identify what has happened in a story, your writing will lack context. Writing your paper will be like trying to put together a complex puzzle without looking at the picture you're supposed to create. Each piece is important, but without the bigger picture for reference, you and anyone watching will have a hard time understanding what is being assembled. Thus, you should look for “the bigger picture” in a book, poem, or play by reading for plot.

A plot is a storyline. We can define plot as the main events of a book, short story, play, poem, etc. and the way those events connect to one another. Conflicts act as the driving forces behind a plot.

A plot has several main elements: **inciting incident, exposition, rising action, climax, falling action,** and **dénouement.** These elements often appear in the order listed here, but you should be aware that some works deviate from this form.

A Diagram of the Components of a Basic Plot



Inciting Incident: This is the event that sets the main conflict into motion. Without it, we could have no plot, as all the characters would already be living “happily ever after,” so to speak. Most stories contain many conflicts, so you will have to identify the main conflict before you can identify the inciting incident. Remember, the inciting incident and conflict are two separate things – the inciting incident is a moment in a story that starts the main conflict. For instance, a person throwing the first punch can be considered the inciting incident to the conflict of a long fistfight. In addition, the inciting incident can happen before a story takes place, in which case it is related to the reader as a past event.

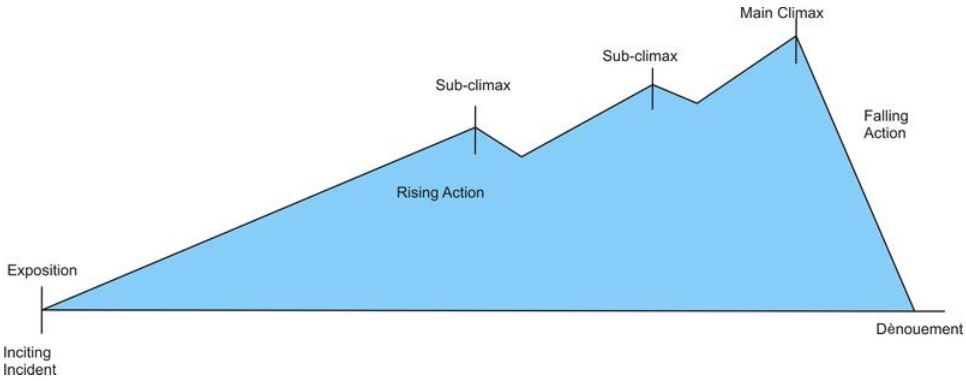
Exposition: This is the part of the story that tells us the setting. We find out who the main characters are and where the story takes place. The exposition also hints at the themes and conflicts that will develop later in the story. Exposition can take place throughout a story as characters reveal more about themselves.

Rising Action: The rising action is comprised of a series of events that build up to the climax of the story. It introduces us to secondary conflicts and creates tension in the story. You can think of the rising action as the series of events that make the climax of the story possible.

Climax: The climax has often been described as the “turning point” of a story. A good way to think of it is the incident that allows the main conflict of a story to resolve. The climax allows characters to solve a problem. It take many forms, such as an epiphany the protagonist has about himself, a battle between the protagonist and antagonist, or the culmination of an internal struggle.

Many stories actually have smaller climaxes before the main one. Like the main climax, these are turning points in the story. These sub-climaxes can be minor turning points in the main conflict that help build and release suspense during the rising action. They can also be the main turning points for secondary conflicts within a story. You might diagram a plot containing sub-climaxes and a main climax like this:

A Diagram of a Complex Plot, or a Plot that Contains Sub-climaxes



Falling Action: The events that take place after the climax are called the falling action. These events show the results of the climax, and they act as a bridge between the climax and the dénouement.

Dénouement: The word dénouement comes from the French “to untie” and the Latin “knot,” which gives us an indication of its purpose. It serves as the unraveling of a plot – a resolution to a story. In the dénouement, the central conflict is resolved. However, conflicts aren't always resolved. Some stories leave secondary conflicts unsettled, and a rare few even leave doubt about the resolution of the main conflict. The dénouement can also leave the story and characters in the same state they were in before the story began. This often occurs when an epilogue tells the reader that all the conflicts in the story have been resolved. Thus, we can see the dénouement as a kind of mirror to the exposition, showing us the same situation at both the beginning and end of a story.

A **flashback** (not shown in the diagram) is a device used to give the reader background information that happened in the past.

The first video below gives an overview about plot:

Video 4.7.1 : Plot



The second video talks about climax and turning point:



Video 4.7.2 : Climax and Turning Point

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from Writing About Literature: The Basics by CK-12, license CC-BY-NC

This page titled 2.6: Plot is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **4.7: Plot** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

2.7: Character

Characters and Characterization

How do writers of prose fiction make us respond to the imaginary people they create? In order to encourage us to continue reading, writers must force us to react in some way to their characters, whether it is to identify, empathise, or sympathise with them; to dislike or disapprove of them; or to pass judgement on their actions, behaviour and values. As we have already seen, the fundamental question we repeatedly ask when we read a story is what happened next. Equally importantly we want to know to whom it happened, and we will only want to know this if we feel strongly one way or another about the characters in the story. In this respect the author's skill at characterisation is crucial.

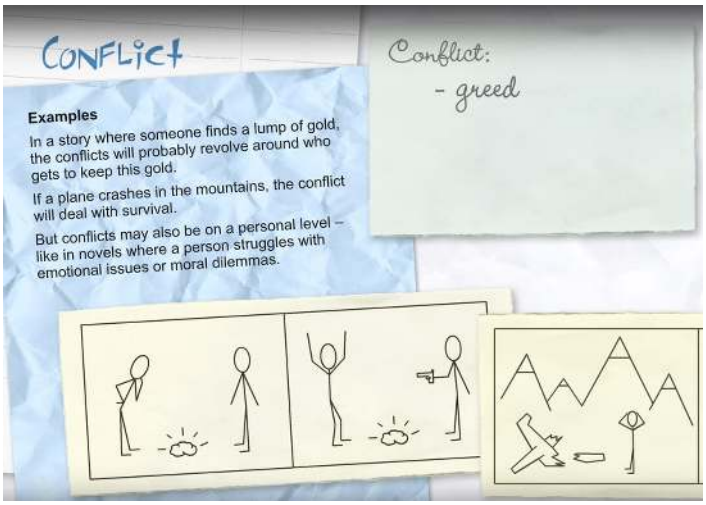
We use the term characterisation to describe the strategies that an author uses to present and develop the characters in a narrative. This use of descriptive techniques will vary from character to character. Some characters are central to a story; often there will be one main character around whom the narrative revolves: Pip in *Great Expectations*, for example, or, we may reasonably surmise from the opening paragraph we looked at earlier, Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. We expect that such characters, and others close to the heart of narrative events, will be presented to us in great detail; we may be allowed access to their consciousness, either by the use of first-person narration or third-person **focalisation**, and it is extremely likely that they will undergo some sort of significant personal change (for better or worse) as a result of their experiences. These kinds of characters are sometimes known as *dynamic*. Other characters, often described as *static*, may be much less thoroughly-drawn; they may be introduced to the narrative primarily to perform a particular narrative or thematic function, and will probably undergo little or no change in the course of the story.

Terms Related to Characterization

You are probably already adept at identifying the characters of a story, but there are some terms that will be helpful in your literary analysis. Keep in mind that characters aren't necessarily people. They can be animals, divine beings, personifications, etc.

One of the most important terms you will use is **conflict.** Conflict occurs between two opposing sides in a story, usually centering on characters' values, needs, or interests. A conflict can be internal or external. **Internal conflict** takes place within an individual, such as when a character is torn between duty to his family and duty to the state. **External conflict** occurs when two individuals or groups of individuals clash. A struggle between a character and his best friend is an example of an external conflict.

Video



Click for video to discuss that conflict is a struggle between opposing forces.

By examining the conflict, we can determine the **protagonist** and **antagonist.** The protagonist is the focal point of the conflict, meaning that he or she is the main character of the story. All the action in a story will revolve around its protagonist. In addition, a story that contains a series of conflicts can contain several protagonists – no story is limited to just one. The antagonist is the character who stands in opposition of the protagonist. The antagonist is the other half of the conflict. Remember that an antagonist doesn't have to be a person – it can be a nation, a group, or even a set of ideas.

Sometimes, the protagonist can take the form of the **antihero.** The antihero is a protagonist who does not embody traditional "heroic" values. However, the reader will still sympathize with an antihero. For instance, a protagonist who is a scoundrel is an antihero, as a traditional hero would embody virtue.

In addition to the protagonist and antagonist, most stories have **secondary** or **minor characters.** These are the other characters in the story. They sometimes support the protagonist or antagonist in their struggles, and they sometimes never come into contact with the main characters.

Authors use minor characters for a variety of reasons. For instance, they can illustrate a different side of the main conflict, or they can highlight the traits of the main characters. One important type of minor character is called a **foil.** This character emphasizes the traits of a main character (usually the protagonist) through contrast. Thus, a foil will often be the polar opposite of the main character he or she highlights. Sometimes, the foil can take the form of a sidekick or friend. Other times, he or she might be someone who contends against the protagonist. For example, an author might use a decisive and determined foil to draw attention to a protagonist's lack of resolve and motivation.

Finally, any character in a story can be an **archetype.** We can define archetype as an original model for a type of character, but that doesn't fully explain the term. One way to think of an archetype is to think of how a bronze statue is made. First, the sculptor creates his design out of wax or clay. Next, he creates a fireproof mold around the original. After this is done, the sculptor can make as many of the same sculpture as he pleases. The original model is the equivalent to the archetype. Some popular archetypes are the trickster figure, such as Coyote in Native American myth or Brer Rabbit in African American folklore, and the femme fatale, like Pandora in Greek myth. Keep in mind that archetype simply means original pattern and does not always apply to characters. It can come in the form of an object, a narrative, etc. For instance, the apple in the Garden of Eden provides the object-based forbidden fruit archetype, and Odysseus's voyage gives us the narrative-based journey home archetype.

Flat and Round Characters

Another useful distinction between types of characters was proposed by E.M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*. "We may divide characters into flat and round," Forster suggested (1927, p. 65). What do you think he meant by these terms?

I expect you found this rather straightforward. The word "flat" suggests a one-dimensional figure, and what Forster meant by "flat" characters were those who are largely taken to represent a particular idea, human trait, or set of values, much like the static characters described above. They are caricatures who can be easily and quickly summarised; Forster gives an example:

> *The really flat character can be expressed in one sentence such as "I will never desert Mr Micawber." There is Mrs Micawber – she says she won't desert Mr Micawber; she doesn't, and there she is.*
>
> *(ibid.)*

The reference is to a character in Dickens' *David Copperfield* who does not change in any significant way in spite of the varied experiences she and her family encounter. "Round" characters, by contrast, are described and developed in such a way as to achieve three-dimensionality, a physical and psychological complexity that mimics that of the real people we come to know in our everyday lives.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* provides some interesting examples of "flat" and "round" characters. Note, however, that identifying those examples will largely depend on the reader's response to Austen's characters, but we might well place figures such as Mrs. Bennett in the former category, and the central character, her daughter Elizabeth, in the latter. As you may know, Austen sums up Mrs. Bennet in three short, direct sentences at the end of the opening chapter of the novel:

> *She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.*
>
> *(Austen, 1813, p. 3)*

Compare this with the opening of the final chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*:

> *Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters. With what delighted pride she afterwards visited Mrs. Bingley and talked of Mrs. Darcy may be guessed. I wish I could say, for the sake of her family, that the accomplishment of her earnest desire in the establishment of so many of her children, produced so happy an effect as to make her a sensible, amiable woman for the rest of her life; though perhaps it was lucky for her husband, who might not have relished domestic felicity in so unusual a form, that she still was occasionally nervous and invariably silly.*
>
> *(ibid., p. 295)*

These two descriptions of Mrs. Bennet, at the beginning and end of the novel are rare examples of Austen "telling" us about this particular character. More often, she "shows" us Mrs. Bennett by reporting her speech directly and allowing us to draw our own conclusions about Mrs. Bennet's attitudes and values. We are never given access to Mrs. Bennett's consciousness; events are never "focalised" through her. Why do you think this is?

It is probably because Mrs. Bennet's main function in the story is to represent a particular attitude of the period in which the novel is set, that the best, or only chance for women's social advancement and financial security was through marriage. By representing this view from the outside, as it were, Austen leads us to scrutinise it in a more rigorous way. To describe Mrs. Bennet as "flat" or "static" is not to imply that she is necessarily a negligible character. She may perform only one function in the novel, but it is a function that draws attention to the constrained position of women in the society Austen depicts.

That Elizabeth is a "round," or "dynamic," character is surely not in doubt. The entire novel revolves around her and we perceive much of the action through her eyes. The changes she experiences conform to Forster's template of "roundness," and the contrast with Mrs. Bennet demonstrates the necessity for combinations of "flat" and "round" that Forster sees as necessary for the successful creation of fictional narrative:

> *The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round. It has the incalculability of life about it – life within the pages of a book. And by using it sometimes alone, more often in combination with the other kind, the novelist achieves his task of acclimatization, and harmonizes the human race with the other aspects of his work.*
>
> *(Forster, 1927, p. 75)*

Activity: Character Analysis

Most novels will have a hero, a good guy. There is no doubt that Harry Potter is the hero and protagonist, and he has a lot of good friends. How do we know that they are good? We have to depend on information about looks, behavior, and speech.

Study the extracts and then answer the questions which follow.

Extracts from the first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* used in the analysis.

EXTRACT 1

If the motorcycle was huge, it was nothing to the man sitting astride it. He was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide. He looked simply too big to be allowed, and so wild – long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands the size of trash can lids, and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was holding a bundle of blankets. (Description of Hagrid)

EXTRACT 2

"S-s-sorry," sobbed Hagrid, taking out a large, spotted handkerchief and burying his face in it. "But I c-c-can't stand it – Lily and James dead – an' poor little Harry off ter live with Muggles–" (Hagrid talks about Harry's dead parents and how he has to

stay with the humans, the Muggles)

EXTRACT 3

“Yes, yes, it’s all very sad, but get a grip on yourself, Hagrid, or we’ll be found,” Professor McGonagall whispered, patting Hagrid gingerly on the arm as Dumbledore stepped over the low garden wall and walked to the front door. He laid Harry gently on the doorstep, took a letter out of his cloak, tucked it inside Harry’s blankets, and then came back to the other two. For a full minute the three of them stood and looked at the little bundle; Hagrid’s shoulders shook, Professor McGonagall blinked furiously, and the twinkling light that usually shone from Dumbledore’s eyes seemed to have gone out. (From the delivery of the orphan Harry at the Dursleys’ doorstep)

EXTRACT 4

“Look”– he murmured, holding out his arm to stop Malfoy. Something bright white was gleaming on the ground. They inched closer. It was the unicorn, all right, and it was dead. Harry had never seen anything so beautiful and sad. Its long, slender legs were stuck out at odd angles where it had fallen and its mane was spread pearly white on the dark leaves. Harry had taken one step toward it when a slithering sound made him freeze where he stood. A bush on the edge of the clearing quivered… Then, out of the shadows, a hooded figure came crawling across the ground like some stalking beast. Harry, Malfoy, and Fang stood transfixed. The cloaked figure reached the unicorn, lowered its head over the wound in the animal’s side, and began to drink its blood. (From the first time Harry meets Voldemort)

EXERCISES

Study Extracts 1, 2, and 3

1. How does the author introduce us to Hagrid and Professor Dumbledore? What kind of impression do you get? Do you like them? Why?
2. Describe in your own words Hagrid’s looks.
3. How is speech used to describe the characters?

Villains/Antagonists

In most novels we will also meet some “bad guys.” They are often called villains or antagonists. How do we know that they are evil? Study **Extract 4** above.

1. Describe in your own words Voldemort’s looks and behavior.
2. How does the author tell us that Voldemort is an evil character (an antagonist)?

Character Development

Throughout the story Harry changes a lot. He develops from a loner into a sociable, more mature guy, and he also has to admit that he is mistaken. One of the characters that he thinks is “a bad guy” is actually “a good guy”! In most reports you will be asked to write a characterization of one of the main characters and to comment if they have changed or not.



Video 4.6.1 : Character

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing About Literature: The Basics by CK-12, license CC-BY-NC
- Characters and Characterization by Ely M. Huseby, provided by NDLA., license: *CC BY-NC-SA*
- Adapted from the course, Approaching Prose Fiction from OpenLearn licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA

This page titled 2.7: Character is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **4.6: Character** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

2.8: Narration, Point of View, Dialogue

Narration



Image from Pixabay

When doing a close reading, you also need to keep the big picture in mind. You already know how to look for major plot points, identify the setting, and list possible themes, but you should also keep in mind who is telling you the story. The **narrator**, or the person telling the story, is one of the most important aspects of a text. A narrator can be a character in the story, or he or she might not appear in the story at all. In addition, a text can have multiple narrators, providing the reader with a variety of viewpoints on the text. And finally, a story can be related by an **unreliable narrator** – a narrator the reader cannot trust to tell the facts of a story correctly or in an unbiased manner.

Note: One thing you should always keep in mind is that the narrator and author are different. The narrator exists within the context of the text and only exists in the story. However, in most non-fiction and some fiction, the author can model the narrator after him or her self; in this case, the author and narrator are different people sharing the same viewpoint.



Image from Pixabay

Unreliable Narrators

In reading a first-person narration we encounter a potential problem that we do not have when we encounter an omniscient third-person narrative such as Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Can you think what that might be?

The factor I was hoping you would identify is that of the degree of reliability we can attach to a first-person narrative. As we read and discover more about a narrator we receive more and more indications that determine the extent to which we can trust the voice telling us the story. Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) is narrated by its central character, an English butler called Stevens, who recalls various events and incidents from the past in such a way as to constantly cast doubt on the dependability of his narration. At one point we are presented with a prolonged and heated argument between Stevens and the housekeeper Miss Kenton about the butler's ailing father, also a member of the staff of the same country house. The argument is

narrated in direct speech, suggesting an authentic recreation of the actual incident, but is followed by a piece of narration by Stevens that immediately undermines our trust in his version of events:

> *But now that I think further about it, I am not sure Miss Kenton spoke quite so boldly that day. We did, of course, over the years of working closely together come to have some very frank exchanges, but the afternoon I am recalling was still early in our relationship and I cannot see even Miss Kenton having been so forward. I am not sure she could actually have gone so far as to say things like: 'these errors may be trivial in themselves, but you must yourself realise their larger significance'. In fact, now that I come to think of it, I have a feeling it may have been Lord Darlington himself who made that particular remark to me that time he called me into his study some two months after that exchange with Miss Kenton outside the billiard room. By that time, the situation as regards my father had changed significantly following his fall. (p. 60)*

There are numerous such examples of Stevens' "unreliability" throughout the novel. These become more significant when placed against the wider historical and political backdrop of the story. Stevens had been butler to Lord Darlington, devoting his life to the service of someone he saw as a "great man." However, as the narrative unfolds, and in spite of Stevens' selective and constantly revised memory, Darlington is revealed as an unwitting pawn of Nazism. The unreliability of Stevens' narration draws an implicit parallel between memory and history and shows both to be liable to distortion and manipulation, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Fragmented Narration

We can see, then, that even when the identity of the narrator of a prose fiction is made clear to us, there are possibilities for uncertainty and ambiguity. So what are we to make of the next extract?

Exercise 4.9.1

Please read the extract from **A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man** by James Joyce now and consider what the narrative is describing, and try to characterize the narrative voice and perspective.

Answer

This is not at all an easy narrative voice to characterise. Indeed, it is difficult to define who is narrating at various points in the opening section of this novel. However, I hope you realised at least that, as with the other two extracts, this is an account of childhood experience. It even begins with the time-honoured phrase used for telling stories to children – "Once upon a time." The diction of the remainder of the opening sentence seems very childlike, an excited-sounding unpunctuated flow with repetitions of childish terms such as "moocow" and nonsense words like "nicens." We are a long way from narrative "**realism**" here. As the novelist Anthony Burgess has implied, a more conventional representation of the child's impressions–"My first memories are of my father, a monocled hirsute man who told me stories"–would have a very different effect on us as readers. Burgess described the beginning of *Portrait* as "the first big technical breakthrough of twentieth-century prose-writing" (1965, p. 50) and I hope you were able to identify aspects of the extract that might warrant such a description.

The narrative seems to be made up of fragmented, unrelated associations; the father's "hairy face"; the mysterious Betty Byrne and her even more mysterious "lemon platt"; the random and sometimes distorted snatches of song and the sinister nursery-rhyme-like refrain "Pull out his eyes /Apologise"; and the unexpected reference to Michael Davitt and Parnell, which we need some knowledge of Irish politics to understand fully.

But can we detect some sort of order or pattern here? I think we can, though it is by no means obvious. The passage gives me the impression of an attempt to replicate a child's growing awareness of his world, the relationships between those who populate it, and the development of his facility for language. The novel begins with an episode of storytelling as we have seen, though we can't be sure whether the child or the father is the actual speaker at that point. The child's stumbling attempts at language are suggested by the nonsensical line of song–"O, the green wothe botheth"–which seems to be a corruption of the two lines quoted prior to that. A world of sensations, sight, sound, touch, smell, and movement is invoked

and gradually the wider world begins to impinge and we can see the child beginning to categorise and impose order on his growing knowledge, recognising different smells and the ages of the adults around him. The family unit is then transcended as mention is made of the Vances and the "different father and mother," again implying a developing awareness on the part of the child-narrator. The sense of fragmentation remains strong, however, with the unexplained incident of the child hiding under the table (we are not told why he is there or why he must apologise). The critic Hugh Kenner has described the opening of *Portrait* as "contrapuntal," and there are certainly at least two contrasting perspectives revealed in this extract: what Kenner calls "an Aristotelian catalogue of senses, faculties, and mental activities" combined with "the unfolding of the infant conscience" (quoted in Beja, 1973, p. 126).

Narrative Organization

The way a story unfolds is as important as who tells it. Even though prose is just “regular writing,” there are many different kinds of prose. Some prose is written as short stories, while other prose is written as novels and novellas. Each type of prose has its own organizational scheme as well. For instance, some stories are organized into large sections, while others are organized into chapters. Some prose is even organized into sections of journal entries or letters between characters.

It is important to note how an author divides a story. Ask yourself why a chapter ends where it does. Does the chapter ending add suspense to the story, or does it just provide a place to transition to another character's point of view? Does each section of a story have its own theme, or is there only one overarching theme? If you are reading an epistolary novel, why do you think one character chose to reveal certain information to another? Paying attention to how a text is organized, divided, and sub-divided will provide you insight into the plot and theme.

Points of View

All prose is written in one of three points of view: first-person narration, third-person limited narration, and third-person omniscient narration.

First Person

First-person narration is written in the first person mode, meaning that that story is told from the viewpoint of one person who often uses language like “I,” “you,” or “we.” A first-person narrator can even be a character in the story she is narrating. Furthermore, the narrator will have a limited perspective; he cannot tell what the other characters are thinking or doing, and his telling of the story is influenced by his feelings about the other characters, the setting of the story, and the plot. When you read prose related by a first-person narrator, pay attention to the narrator's biases – they can tell you a great deal about the other elements of the story. For instance, here's an example of first-person narration:

As I walked home from the store, I could feel the cool spring breeze stir my hair. It was getting warm, and I had been looking forward to the end of snow, sleet, and rain for the past few months. I saw Charley coming down the sidewalk towards me. He was a nice guy, that Charley, but I always thought he was a few bulbs short of a chandelier. He waved at me, and I nodded in return.

As you can see, in the first-person mode, the narrator tells the story directly from his point-of-view. He has the ability to influence the reader's opinions of characters through his narration – here the narrator explains Charley is not a very intelligent person. However, for all the reader knows, this could just be the narrator's bias, not fact. Thus, when you read a story written in the first-person mode, look for evidence to support the narrator's claims.

Exercise 4.9.1

How would you describe the narrative voice and perspective of this extract?

Click to read the opening of **Great Expectations by Charles Dickens**.

Answer

This is an example of first-person narration. The story is told by a character who is also a protagonist in the narrative. In *Great Expectations*, as in most **first person** narratives, the narrator is also the central character. The opening paragraph, with its emphasis on the narrator's family background, and the repetitions of his name – "So I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip" – are an immediate suggestion that the character telling us the story is likely to be at the heart of it. This is further reinforced as we are then given more information about his family and his circumstances.

The story begins, then, with the narrator giving us an introduction to his own childhood, moving rapidly from the general to the particular and his meeting with the "fearful man" he met in the churchyard. Again, the relation of this incident at the start of the novel leads us to attach some significance to the episode and its participants, raising expectations that are not fulfilled until much later in the narrative.

Here, and throughout *Great Expectations*, there is in a sense a dual narrative perspective, presenting events narrated by the adult Pip which are at times mediated through the perceptions of the child Pip. The opening encounter in the churchyard, for instance, is enacted with a vivid immediacy. Look again at the point at which the narrative shifts from description to direct speech. The rapidity of the exchanges, with further repetitions of the main character's name and the allusion to his feelings of terror, engage us much more directly with the boy's feelings of horror and dismay.

Third-Person Limited and Omniscient

Third-person narration is related by someone who does not refer to him or her self and does not use “I,” “you,” or “we” when addressing the reader. Here's the same story as above, told in third-person narration:

As Bill walked home from the store, he could feel the cool spring breeze stir his hair. It was getting warm, and he had been looking forward to the end of snow, sleet, and rain for the past few months. He saw Charley coming down the sidewalk towards him. Charley was a nice guy, but he was a few bulbs short of a chandelier. Charley waved at Bill, and he nodded in return.

In this example, the story is told by someone looking at the characters from an outside perspective. A third-person narrator will not be a character in a story, but an outside entity relating the story's events. Third-person narrators rarely give biased accounts of events, but sometimes you will encounter an unreliable third-person narrator.

Some third-person narrators tell from a limited perspective. These narrators relate a story from one point of view, which is often the main character's point of view. Because readers can only tell what that character is thinking and feeling, they have a limited perspective of what other characters are thinking and feeling. In addition, since only one character's perspective is narrated, the audience gets to see the world through that character's eyes; this can be good for revealing certain facts about setting and character, but it can also present a slightly biased story.

The other type of third-person narration is told from an omniscient perspective. This means that the narrator relates the story in third person but has access to all information in the story. The third-person omniscient mode is often used when an author wants to relate a text through the viewpoints of several characters. Third-person omniscient narrators tend to be the most reliable narrators, as they can present all the facts of a story.

Finally, you will sometimes encounter a story that is told in first-person narration by multiple narrators. When reading a multi-narrator text, you must always be aware of who is speaking. Multi-narrator prose provides the reader with as much insight about the characters as third-person omniscient narration does. However, because the reader only receives first-person accounts from each character, this kind of narration tends to be very biased. Thus, it is up to the reader to analyze the information provided by the narrators to reach conclusions about the story.

Omniscient Narrators

This would perhaps be a good point at which to say a little more about third-person narrators. These are often known as an "**omniscient**" narrators. An omniscient narrator is one that exhibits full knowledge of the actions, thoughts and feelings of each of the characters in the story. Austen invariably used this omniscient perspective, and it remains a popular means of narration amongst contemporary writers. Indeed, more recent authors have made great play of drawing attention to the narrator's role as an all-powerful figure, an embodiment of the author who has full control of the characters at his or her mercy. The beginning of Martin Amis' novel *London Fields* demonstrates this well:

> *This is a true story but I can't believe it's really happening.*
>
> *It's a murder story, too. I can't believe my luck.*
>
> *And a love story (I think), of all strange things, so late in the century, so late in the goddamned day.*

> *This is the story of a murder. It hasn't happened yet. But it will. (It had better.) I know the murderer, I know the murderee. I know the time, I know the place. I know the motive (her motive) and I know the means. I know who will be the foil, the fool, the poor foal, also utterly destroyed. And I couldn't stop them, I don't think, even if I wanted to. The girl will die. It's what she always wanted. You can't stop people, once they start creating.*
>
> *What a gift. This page is briefly stained by my tears of gratitude. Novelists don't usually have it so good, do they, when something real happens (something unified, dramatic and pretty saleable), and they just write it down? (1989, p. 1)*

We might be forgiven for thinking that this is the direct voice of Martin Amis himself. After all, he is the author of the novel, the manipulator of events and characters. But as we read on we realise that this narrator is another character, an American writer called Samson Young, who is living in London in the flat of yet another fictional writer, Mark Asprey (note the initials). To further confuse matters a writer called Martin Amis also makes a cameo appearance in the novel! *London Fields* uses a variety of narrative perspectives. When Samson Young is actually present at the events described first-person narration is used; when he is not we have something akin to the omniscient narrator of the Austen extract in Activity 2, but we also have the sense that that narrator has a name and a role in the novel.



Video 4.9.1 : Point of view/narrator

Dialogue/Dialog

Dialogue is defined as a conversation between two or more people in a movie. In addition, a fictional piece could have a monologue where a character is speaking out loud when he or she is alone. A character, for example, may contemplate the pros and cons of taking some form of action in a monologue. Dialogue, monologue, and narration progresses the story in literature.

When analyzing **character** , the terms **dialogue**, **monologue**, and **soliloquy** take on increased importance. Conversation between two or more characters is referred to as **dialogue** (usually the majority of speech in plays consists of dialogue). A **monologue** is when one character delivers a speech to convey his or her thoughts, although other characters may remain on stage in scene. Similar to a monologue, a **soliloquy** is a speech made by one character but delivered when he or she is alone on stage. Knowing the root words of each term can help clarify the distinction. Monologue comes from the Greek words *monos* (single) and *legein* (to speak); soliloquy comes from the Latin words *solus* (alone) and *Ioqui* (to speak).

What would fiction be without dialogue? Take a look at the following example of a scene with and without dialogue.

Jack, Suzie and Alec are walking home after work. Jack begins the conversation, as he always does. Suzie speaks, as she is always the first one to respond. Alec is silent for a moment and the other two stop walking. Alec notices that they stopped so he stops walking too. Bewildered, Alec mumbles. Jack retorts. Alec looks at them both. Suzie interjects. Alec returns a comment. After a brief moment of silence where all three look at one another, they shrug their shoulders and begin to walk again.

Suzie questions. Alec comments again. There is silence again and Suzie stops the other two. Suzie speaks. Jack interjects again. Alec calmly states. Jack and Suzie look at each other stunned.

The above scene, with no dialogue but just a description, is only a group of actions with no meaning. They could refer to almost any type of situation. As a viewer, after watching the above scene, would you be interested enough in watching the rest of the movie with no dialogue?

Now read the scene with dialogue.

Jack, Suzie and Alec are walking home after work.

Jack begins a conversation as he always does, “How was the work day?”

“All right,” Suzie says as she is always the first one to respond.

Looking at Alec, Jack asks, “How was your day, Alec?”

Alec is silent for a moment as the other two stop walking. Alec notices that they stopped walking so he stops. Bewildered, Alec mumbles, “What?”

“How was your day?” Jack retorts.

“Fine, fine.” Alec looks at them both. “How do you think it was?”

“I don’t know. That’s why I asked.”

Suzie interjects, “That’s why we asked. We like to know how your day was.”

“Oh,” Alec returns.

After a brief moment of silence, where all three look at one another, they shrug their shoulders and begin to walk again.

“Wait a minute! You never did tell us how your day was,” Suzie questions. “Yeah!” agrees Jack.

“Oh,” Alec comments again. There is silence again and Suzie stops the other two.

“Well…” Suzie says. “Yeah,” interjects Jack again.

“I quit my job,” Alec calmly states. Jack and Suzie look at each other stunned.

The dialogue gives the viewer an understanding of what is going on. If the above scene was at a beginning of the fiction piece, the viewer would have an idea what the conflict in the story was going to be.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing About Literature: The Basics by CK-12, license CC-BY-NC
- Adapted from the course Approaching Prose Fiction from OpenLearn licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA
- Adapted from What is Sound? in Exploring Movie Construction and Production, license CC-NC-SA 4.0
- Adapted from Elements of Drama in Literature for the Humanities, source Florida State College at Jacksonville, license CC-BY: Attribution

---

This page titled 2.8: Narration, Point of View, Dialogue is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **4.9: Narration, Point of View, Dialogue** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

2.9: Setting

Setting in Fiction



Image from Pixabay

If a story has characters and a plot, these elements must exist within some context. The frame of reference in which the story occurs is known as **setting**. The most basic definition of setting is one of place and time. You want to ask yourself, “Where and when does the story take place?” *Gone With the Wind*, for example, takes place in Georgia during the American Civil War. Setting can be very important in discovering and highlighting the **mood**, or the general feeling we get from a story. (Note: Be careful not to mix up mood and tone, as they are not the same thing. Mood is the feeling we get from a story; tone is a way of getting that feeling across.) For instance, Edgar Allan Poe portrays a very dark, oppressive setting in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” which makes the reader share the narrator's feelings of confinement and depression. In addition, the house in Poe's story can be seen as a kind of **internalized setting.** In this kind of setting, an aspect of the story external to a character represents the character's internal development. For instance, the cracked face of the house can be said to represent the cracked minds of the Usher siblings.

Setting as Geographical Entity

We can define the "setting" of a story as the geographical location or locations in which the events of the narrative takes place, as well as the time in which those events are set. Location can refer to wider geographical entities such as countries or cities as well as to smaller entities such as households or domestic interiors. Time can refer to a general historical period or to the chronological boundaries of the story's events.

Let's look again at the beginning of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. How important is setting in this case? How does Rushdie's narrative style help us to evaluate the significance of the setting?

> *I was born in the city of Bombay … once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more … On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps. And, outside the window, fireworks and crowds. A few seconds later, my father broke his big toe; but his accident was a mere trifle when set beside what had befallen me in that benighted moment, because thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was to be no escape. Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicos ratified my authenticity.*
>
> *(1981, p. 9)*

Did you feel that setting was clearly very important here? We may not know exactly *why* at this stage, but the implication is that the time and place at which the narrator's story begins is of great significance. He describes himself as "handcuffed to history" by the circumstances of his birth, and, as I suggested earlier, we are alerted to the possibility of a story to come which will have historical and political associations, reinforced by the assertion that the narrator's "destinies" were "indissolubly chained" to the future of his country. Location is surely important here; the place of the narrator's birth is the first thing we are told. You might further have noticed that the specific cultural environment is suggested by the image of "Clock-hands join(ing) palms in respectful greeting," mimicking the Indian gesture of *namaste*. The references to "soothsayers," "newspapers," and "politicos" further enhances our sense of a culturally significant environment, where traditional and modern values interact. The American writer Eudora Welty has claimed that "every story would be another story, and unrecognizable as art, if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else" (quoted in DiYanni, 1997, p. 67). Rushdie's use of place and time in this extract from *Midnight's Children* seems to bear this out; the narrative's entire meaning and significance rests on its setting, I hope you'll agree.

Setting as Time and Place

The surroundings in which characters are placed and in which narrative events take place can have other, more subtle effects on how we read and interpret stories. Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862) is another novel rooted very specifically in time and place. Much of the action takes place in various country house settings, which represent different aspects of Russian society at the time. Into that environment comes the anarchist Bazarov, influenced by the ideas he has absorbed in the very different settings of the city and the university. As you will see from your study of the novel, the various settings come to represent different values, ideas and attitudes. This is equally true of smaller scale settings. We associate particular characters with the environments in which we encounter them, and the values associated with those places; characters often seem "at home" in specific places, but not elsewhere. In *Great Expectations*, Joe Gargery is uncomfortable when visiting Miss Havisham at Statis House, and awkward in Pip's London dwelling. Other characters, like Turgenev's Bazarov, are **characterized** by their failure to "belong" in any of the locations they inhabit in the course of the story. Pavel Petrovich, seemingly the antithesis of Bazarov, also often seems ill-at-ease in his surroundings. He lives on the estate of his brother Nikolai, but is not originally from this sort of rural background.

Exercise 4.8.1

Read the following description of Pavel's room and try to decide what the setting tells us about him.

> *But Pavel Petrovich returned to his elegant room, hung with fine dark-grey wallpaper and decorated with guns fixed on a colourful Persian rug, with walnut furniture upholstered in dark-green velveteen, a Renaissance-style bookcase in old dark oak, bronze statuettes on a magnificent desk and a fireplace. He flung himself on his sofa, folded his hands behind his head and remained there motionless, gazing almost with despair at the ceiling. Whether it was that he wanted to hide from the very walls themselves what was happening to his face, or for some other reason, he stood up, undid the loops holding the heavy window curtains and once again flung himself down on the sofa.*
>
> *(1862, pp. 40-1)*

Answer

The overall impression given by the very detailed inventory of Pavel's room is one of a bewildering array of cultural styles and influences, from different times and places. It is undoubtedly the room of someone with a well-developed aesthetic sense, but does it appear at all comfortable or inviting? The very diversity of the décor seems to suggest a sense of rootlessness, reinforced by Pavel's behaviour here; the possibility that he is trying to "hide from the very walls themselves what was happening to his face." Even in the sanctuary of his own rooms on his brother's estate he seems to find himself alienated amongst the no doubt impressive, yet strangely soulless artefacts he has gathered around him.

The significance of setting will vary from novel to novel, or from story to story, of course, and one of the questions you should continually ask yourself as you read is *how* important to the narrative events and characterisation are the dual factors of time and place.



Video 4.8.1 : Setting in fiction

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing About Literature: The Basics by CK-12, license CC-BY-NC
- Adapted from the course Approaching Prose Fiction from OpenLearn licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA

This page titled 2.9: Setting is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **4.8: Setting** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

2.10: Symbolism and Figurative Language

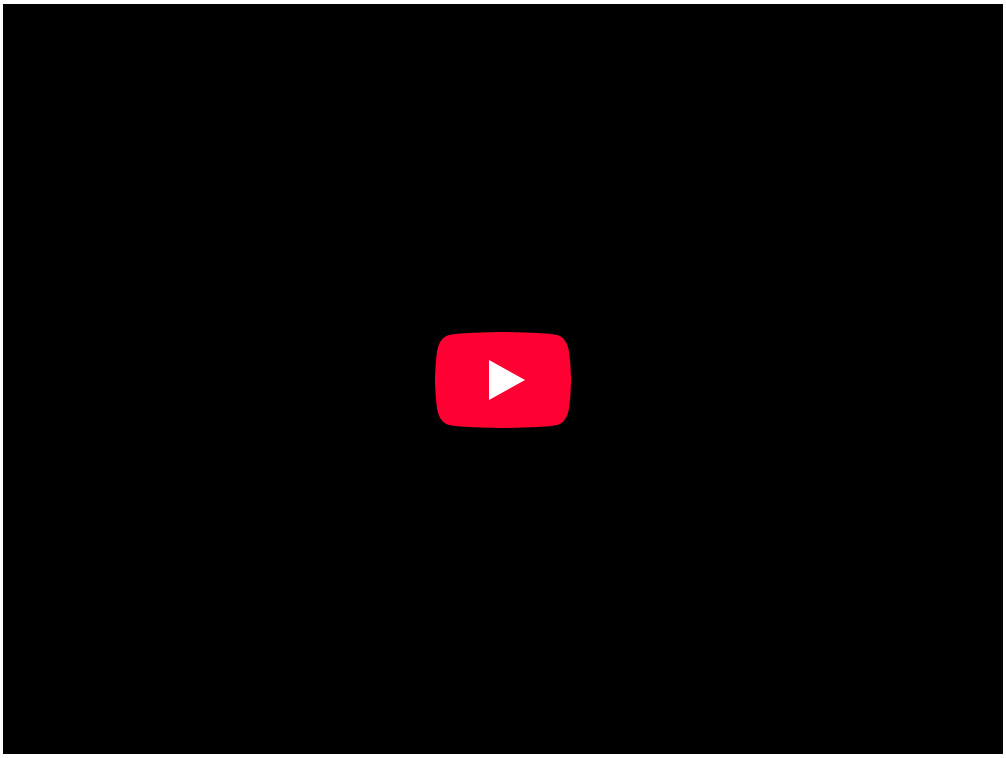


Image from Pixabay

Symbolism

Symbolism is a practice of using symbols, or anything that represents something larger than itself. Common examples of symbols are a country's flag and a heart symbol, which represent the country, and love. Each has suggestive meanings--for example, the flag brings up thoughts of patriotism, a unified country.

What is the value of using symbols in a literary text? Symbols in literature allow a writer to express a lot in a condensed manner. The meaning of a symbol is connotative or suggestive rather than definitive which allows for multiple interpretations.





Video 2.10.1: Symbols in Literature

Other Common Rhetorical and Literary Devices

How do you tell which words you should examine closely? If you were to spend time doing a close reading of every word in a story, you would never finish. Thus, you want to look for **rhetorical devices** when you read. Rhetorical devices are words that serve a special function in the text. Authors include them in order to convey a meaning to the reader. Listed below are some of the most common rhetorical devices.

Allegory

An **allegory** has a fixed meaning. According to Dictionary.com, an allegory is "a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms; figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another." Usually didactic (meant to impart a lesson), an allegory is a kind of story in which abstract concepts (such as love, war, or death) became objects, characters, or places in the story. For example, consider Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," where light symbolizes knowledge and darkness symbolizes ignorance.

Allusion

An **allusion** is an indirect reference, usually to another work, outside of the text, without explicitly naming the reference point. For example, in *Hamlet*, the scene of Old Hamlet being poisoned in the castle garden by his brother -- who is referred to as a "serpent" -- would likely be a familiar allusion to the Biblical Garden of Eden for highly religious Elizabethan readers (1.5.36).

Imagery

Imagery is language that makes an appeal to the senses. It can apply to any of the five senses or a combination of multiple senses. Although imagery often comes in phrases or complete sentences, a word can evoke the senses.

Here are some examples.

Touch	The dog's fur was smooth and silky, as though it had just been brushed.
Smell	The delicious scent of freshly-baked cookies wafted out of the window.
Taste	Dinner was mouthwatering! We ate buttery rolls, and a savory chicken dish with a side of rich gravy.
Sound	1st Street was a cacophony of car horns, people on cell phones, and police sirens.
Sight	The apple was a deep red, like the sky moments before the sun comes up.

Every time you find imagery in a text, it brings up a set of connotations. For instance, the scent of freshly-baked cookies might bring up connotations of childhood, comfort, or home. When you see a particularly striking image in a text, think of what it denotes

to you. Ask yourself, “Why describe *this* thing in detail instead of describing something else?” An author often uses imagery to call attention to a particular idea, character, setting, or plot point. Imagery can also be used to create the mood of a text. For instance, a story that includes a great deal of rain imagery might have a very dark, dreary mood.

Irony

Irony is a meaning or outcome contrary to what is expected. A fire station burning down would be considered ironic. In Raymond Carver's short story "Cathedral," one of the characters is a blind man. The blind man demonstrates irony when he says, "My dear, I have two TVs. I have a color set and a black-and-white thing, an old relic. It's funny, but if I turn the TV on, and I'm always turning it on, I turn on the color set. It's funny, don't you think?"

There are three different types of irony that can be included in a literary work.

- Verbal irony: when a speaker or narrator says one thing and means the reverse (e.g., sarcasm)
- Dramatic irony: when the reader or audience knows something characters don’t
- Situational irony: when a character holds a position or has an expectation that is reversed or fulfilled in an unexpected way

Metaphor and Simile

Two of the most common rhetorical devices are **metaphors** and **similes.** These are both means of comparison. A metaphor compares two things by saying they are the same, while a simile uses the words “like” or “as.”

Table

The following table contains a list of examples.

Metaphor	Simile
My Great Dane is a vacuum.	My Great Dane is like a vacuum.
That linebacker is a wall.	That linebacker is like a wall.
She is a cheetah.	She runs as fast as a cheetah.

In the first example, we know that the Great Dane isn't really a vacuum. Both the metaphor and simile, however, imply that the dog consumes a large amount. The main difference is that the metaphor creates a stronger comparison. However, in the last example, only the context will tell you that the metaphor is not talking about a real cheetah. If we were talking about a runner, saying “she is a cheetah” would carry the denotations of speed, grace, agility, litheness, etc. But if we are looking at the simile, we only see that the runner is fast.

Personification and Anthropomorphism

Personification is giving human qualities to animals or objects for the sake of imagery. For example, “the trees’ branches reached towards the sun like arms.” This is similar to **anthropomorphism:** imbuing a nonhuman entity with human behaviors or attributes. For example, the daffodils in Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud” are described as “dancing,” which is a distinctly human behavior (6).

Repetition

Repetition is another powerful rhetorical device. When you read, you should always keep your eyes open for repeated words and phrases. This can be tricky, as sometimes the repeated words appear close together and other times they are spread out in a text as a motif. For instance, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, a green light is mentioned repeatedly; however, these references are spread throughout the text, never appearing more than once or twice per chapter. Therefore, you will need to keep your eyes open for repetition while reading a story. If you see a word or phrase appear more than once, make a note of it--it is likely that the author included the repetition intentionally.

Exercise **2.10.1**

Ralph Waldo Ellison was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Ellison’s father, Lewis, a manual laborer who delivered ice and coal, was an avid reader who named his son after Ralph Waldo Emerson and who hoped that his son would grow up to be a poet. Unfortunately he died of a work-related accident when Ellison was three, which left the two brothers, Robert and Herbert, to be raised by their single mother, Ida. The absence of his father would remain a recurring theme in Ellison's owrk.

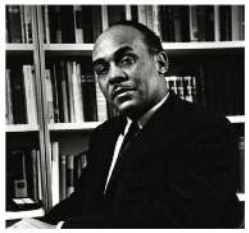


Image 6.5 | Ralph Ellison, 1961
Photographer | Houghton Mifflin
Source | Wikimedia Commons
License | Public Domain

Read the first chapter of Invisible Man, Battle Royal by Ralph Ellison.

Questions

1.What is the significance of the protagonist's dream? What does his grandfather's appearance symbolize?

2. Why do you think the protagonist still gives his speech even after he's been humiliated?

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing About Literature: The Basics by CK-12, license CC-BY-NC
- Adapted from Ralph Ellison, authored by Berke, Bleil, & Cofer, originally sourced from the University of North Georgia Press.

This page titled 2.10: Symbolism and Figurative Language is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

2.11: Tone, Voice and Style

Tone

You will also want to keep an author's **tone** in mind as you read. Tone is the attitude writing can take towards its subject or audience. For instance, writing can be informal, formal, sarcastic, or playful. These are just a few examples of tone. When trying to figure out a story's tone, ask yourself how the writing is actually put together. Does the author use **diction**, or the overall word choice, to convey a specific tone? For instance, is there any reason to say “joyful” instead of “happy” or “seething” instead of “angry”?

Table

The following table provides examples of the same scene written in different tones. Pay special attention to the italicized words.

Joyful	Unhappy
The sound of their *revelry rang* throughout the town. The sun *gleamed brightly* on the parade, and colorful streamers *floated* through the air like *dazzling rainbows*.	The noise of the *cacophony shrilled* throughout the town. The sun *glared harshly* on the parade, and colorful streamers *rained* through the air like *falling debris*.

As another example, read through the following excerpt from Edgar Allan Poe's “The Fall of the House of Usher.” Some words that stand out have been italicized.

I looked upon the scene before me--upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain--upon the bleak walls--upon the *vacant eye-like* windows--upon a few *rank* sedges--and upon a few *white trunks of decayed trees*--with an *utter depression* of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the *reveller upon opium*--the *bitter lapse* into everyday life--the *hideous dropping off* of the veil.

When reading a passage like this, you might get a general impression that its mood is gloomy and depressing. Certain key words in the passage are what create that impression, and if we look at the italicized text, we can see a pattern. The narrator is describing a house, but “vacant eye-like windows” has a denotation of dark or empty windows, but it also brings up the connotation of corpses. “Rank” means overgrown, but it brings up connotations of abandonment and possible decay. Continue looking at the connotations behind each word, and see if you can detect any patterns. For instance, do the italicized words in this passage make you think of death, decline, and decay? Does the comparison to “the after-dream of the reveller upon opium” make you question the narrator's state of mind? By asking these kinds of questions, you're on your way to doing a close reading.

In addition, ask yourself if the author uses unusual **syntax**-- the order in which the sentence is put together grammatically? (Look at “money is the root of all evil” versus “the root of all evil is money.” Does each sentence imply something different to you?) Keeping tone, diction, and syntax in mind will help in your analysis of literature.

With that said, we should always look at every aspect of these elements, from the most basic to the most complex when we read. Thus, this chapter will begin by giving you a broad overview of character, plot, setting, and theme then provide some examples of how you can use these elements to illustrate some of the more complex ideas in a story.

Narrative Voice

Two of the most fundamental choices that face the author of a fictional narrative is to decide *who* is to be the narrator and *how* the story is to be narrated. Along with tone, the authorial "voice" is one of the key distinguishing factors of a piece of writing and can range from aloof and distant to warm and personable.

Exercise **2.11.1**

Click to read the attached extract from the opening of **Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey** (1818). Who is the narrator? How would you characterize the narrative ‘voice’?

Answer

This is what is known as third-person narration. The voice does not belong to a particular character in the novel, and in the extract it does not assume the perspective of any of the characters, merely describing their physical appearance, social status and relationships, and, in Catherine's case, her likes and dislikes, her accomplishments and pastimes. You will

probably have noticed that this extract comprises a single, extremely long paragraph and is mostly concerned with describing the young Catherine Morland. This amount of detail at the start of the novel suggests to us that Catherine is likely to be the central character, and so it proves.

At first sight the narrative voice seems to be fairly neutral and undemonstrative, like that at the beginning of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* above. But a closer inspection reveals greater subtleties. Indeed, it appears that the narrative voice is doing everything in its power to undermine our possible interest, while also drawing our attention to the kinds of expectations and conventions that often attend the process of reading particular kinds of fiction. Everything about Catherine seems to militate against the possibility of her being an interesting central character. According to the narrator, she was no-one's idea of a heroine, and her social and family connections are of little assistance in this respect too. Austen is poking fun here at the idea of the tragic heroine. The narrator sounds almost disappointed at the fact that Catherine is not a motherless waif whose plight can tug at our heartstrings:

> *Her mother was a woman of useful plain sense, with a good temper, and, what is more remarkable, with a good constitution. She had three sons before Catherine was born; and instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as anybody might expect, she still lived on – lived to have six children more – to see them growing up around her, and to enjoy excellent health herself.*

Neither does Catherine have the classical beauty of the novelistic heroine, her unprepossessing looks in themselves rendering her 'unpropitious' for such a role. Furthermore, she clearly lacks aptitude and enthusiasm for the kind of accomplishments which young girls of this time were expected to acquire.

The overriding tone of this extract could perhaps be best described as coolly detached and above all ironic. As you will discover from reading further in Austen, irony was invariably the main feature of her narrative voices. In the case of the opening to *Northanger Abbey*, would you agree that this ironic strategy of seeming to deflate our enthusiasm is in fact a subtle device to heighten the reader's interest? If Catherine is such unlikely heroine material, what kind of narrative will it be that can feature her as its central character?

Style and language

What do we mean when we talk of a particular writer's style? It might help us to think of style as a way of organising and expressing narrative unique to the writer, as distinctive and personal a characteristic as the writer's handwriting or the prints on the fingers holding the pen. Just as no two sets of fingerprints are alike, so no two writers are alike. Writers write in a style that reflects their individual view of the world.

The word 'style' can generally be used to encompass the various literary devices that authors combine to convey their themes and the content of their narratives. Some of those devices, such as narrative perspectives and the representation of character have already been discussed, so I want to focus here on the language writers use and the effects of that language.

Exercise **2.11.1**

Please read the attached extract from a short story, '**Kew Gardens**' (1919), by Virginia Woolf. How would you characterise the descriptive language Woolf uses here and the way in which she presents the thoughts and speech of her characters?

Answer

The descriptive language of the first and final paragraphs is intensely detailed. Various human figures pass by and butterflies flit from flower-bed to flower-bed – a scene we can easily visualize. But Woolf s use of terms such as 'curiously irregular' to describe the movement of the humans and 'zig-zag' to depict the flight of the butterflies suggests a sense of vagueness and randomness. The change of focus, from the general scene to the positioning and attitudes of a man, a woman – he 'strolling carelessly', she moving 'with greater purpose' alerts us to anticipate that they will be the subject of what is to follow. Would you agree that there is almost a filmic quality to this narrative description. When I read this I imagine a camera panning across a wide screen before closing in on the two characters. The final paragraph of the extract, which describes how the husband and wife and their children 'diminished in size […] as the sunlight and shade swam over their backs in large trembling irregular patches' seems to me to suggest a gradually dissolving image, such as we might see when

a film deliberately loses focus. In spite of the plethora of detail and description, then, I feel there is nevertheless a somewhat impressionistic feel to Woolf's scene-setting.

Did you notice how a similar 'blurring' effect seems to result from the second paragraph's shifts, first to the man's internal consciousness, as we are given access to his thoughts, and then to direct speech right at the end of the paragraph: 'Tell me, Eleanor, d'you ever think of the past?' There is only a dash to denote this second shift; on a first reading we may not even notice that Woolf has moved from a depiction of thoughts to the representation of speech.

And what of the conversation between the man and woman? Does this strike you as a naturalistic representation of dialogue? Probably not, I would suggest. There is something artificial and heightened about the woman's speech in particular:

> *'Doesn't one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees? Aren't they one's past, all that remains of it, those men and women, those ghosts lying under the trees … one's happiness, one's reality?'*

We might think that no-one would really speak like this, or relate a memory of 'the mother of all my kisses all my life' in quite such a mannered fashion. Only with the brisk command to her children – 'Come Caroline, come Hubert' – does the woman's speech appear naturalistic. I think it's safe to assume that this is not merely bad writing on Woolf's part; she has chosen her language and her means of representing it for a reason. Indeed, it may seem as though the language itself, rather than the actual narrative, is the main focus of this piece of writing. Woolf was one of a number of authors in the early twentieth-century who sought new ways of writing, challenging the conventions of previous generations that gave a primacy to realistic and naturalistic representation and foregrounded narrative events; stories that had a beginning, middle and end, a strong sense of closure, and a fixed authorial point of view. The narrative, such as it is, of Woolf's story 'Kew Gardens' is episodic rather than linear, and is a good early example of a style of writing that later came to be labeled 'Modernist' (James Joyce, whose opening to *Portrait of the Artist* we looked at earlier was another dominant figure in this movement). We could say, then, that 'style' seems to take precedence over subject-matter in writing such as this, and I hope you can see how Woolf's particular use of language contributes to this.

Exercise **2.11.1**

Now look at another extract; the closing section of a much more recent work, a short story, '**Gazebo**', by the American writer Raymond Carver. Think again about the questions I asked you to consider in Activity 7 before reading the Woolf extract. How does Carver's style differ from that of Woolf?

Answer

The language is minimalist, pared down to the absolute basics, and heavily dialogue-led. We are given no indication of speech intonation; the only verb used to describe the dialogue is the verb 'to go', which gives us no clue as to how the words are spoken. This breeds a sense of uncertainty in the reader, I think, and as with Woolf's elevated tone and language this strategy is deliberate, I would suggest. Although the story is narrated in the first-person I get a strong impression that the narrator, Duane, does not fully understand the situation he is describing: 'I pray for a sign from Holly. I pray for Holly to show me.' Similarly, the sparseness of Carver's writing leaves the reader in a state of uncertainty. Although the dialogue is, I think you'll agree, much more colloquial and naturalistic than that of Woolf's characters, there seems to me to be a great deal left unsaid, and a sense that the two characters, while conversing, are not communicating. This is, I would argue, a direct consequence of Carver's choice of style and language.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Writing About Literature: The Basics by CK-12, license CC-BY-NC
- Adapted from the course, Approaching Prose Fiction from OpenLearn licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA

This page titled 2.11: Tone, Voice and Style is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

2.12: A Review and Questions

How to Analyze a Short Story



CC-BY-SA-4.0 Writer: lu2shoot

Old Fence. A short story has a structure and a message. Can you analyze this picture in much the same way as a short story?

What Is a Short Story (a review)?

A short story is a work of short, narrative prose that is usually centered around one single event. It is limited in scope and has an introduction, body, and conclusion. Although a short story has much in common with a novel (see How to Analyze a Novel), it is written with much greater precision. You will often be asked to write a literary analysis. An analysis of a short story requires basic knowledge of literary elements. The following guide and questions may help you:

Setting

Setting is a description of where and when the story takes place. In a short story there are fewer settings compared to a novel. The time is more limited. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How is the setting created? Consider geography, weather, time of day, social conditions, et cetera.
- What role does setting play in the story? Is it an important part of the plot or theme? Or is it just a backdrop against which the action takes place?

Study the time period, which is also part of the setting, and ask yourself the following:

- When was the story written?
- Does it take place in the present, the past, or the future?
- How does the time period affect the language, atmosphere, or social circumstances of the short story?

Characterization

Characterization deals with how the characters in the story are described. In short stories there are usually fewer characters compared to a novel. They usually focus on one central character or protagonist. Ask yourself the following:

- Who is the main character?
- Are the main character and other characters described through dialogue – by the way they speak (dialect or slang for instance)?
- Has the author described the characters by physical appearance, thoughts and feelings, and interaction (the way they act towards others)?
- Are they static/flat characters who do not change?
- Are they dynamic/round characters who DO change?
- What type of characters are they? What qualities stand out? Are they stereotypes?
- Are the characters believable?

Plot and structure

The plot is the main sequence of events that make up the story. In short stories the plot is usually centered around one experience or significant moment. Consider the following questions:

- What is the most important event?
- How is the plot structured? Is it linear and chronological or does it move around?
- Is the plot believable?

Narrator and Point of View

The narrator is the person telling the story. Consider this question: Are the narrator and the main character the same?

By point of view we mean from whose eyes the story is being told. Short stories tend to be told through one character's point of view. The following are important questions to consider:

- Who is the narrator or speaker in the story?
- Does the author speak through the main character?
- Is the story written in the first person "I" point of view?
- Is the story written in a detached third person "he/she/they" point of view?
- Is there an "all-knowing" third person who can reveal what all the characters are thinking and doing at all times and in all places?

Conflict

Conflict or tension is usually the heart of the short story and is related to the main character. In a short story there is usually one main struggle.

- How would you describe the main conflict?
- Is it an internal conflict within the character?
- Is it an external conflict caused by the surroundings or environment the main character finds themself in?

Climax

The climax is the point of greatest tension or intensity in the short story. It can also be the point where events take a major turn as the story races towards its conclusion. Ask yourself:

- Is there a turning point in the story?
- When does the climax take place?

Theme

The theme is the main idea, lesson, or message in the short story. It may be an abstract idea about the human condition, society, or life. Ask yourself:

- How is the theme expressed?
- Are any elements repeated and therefore suggest a theme?
- Is there more than one theme?

Style

The author's style has to do with their vocabulary, use of imagery, tone, or the feeling of the story. It has to do with the author's attitude toward the subject. In some short stories the tone can be ironic, humorous, cold, or dramatic.

- Is the author's language full of figurative language?
- What images are used?
- Does the author use a lot of symbolism? Metaphors (comparisons that do not use "as" or "like") or similes (comparisons that use "as" or "like")?

Your literary analysis of a short story will often be in the form of an essay where you may be asked to give your opinions of the short story at the end. Choose the elements that made the greatest impression on you. Point out which character/characters you liked best or least and always support your arguments.

Contributors and Attributions

How to Analyze a Short Story by Carol Dwankowski, provided by ndla.no. License: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

2.12: A Review and Questions is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **4.13: A Review and Questions** has no license indicated.

2.13: Match and Learn Quiz

Literary Terms - Task

Drag the words into the correct boxes

1. _____ = the author's vocabulary, use of imagery, tone or feeling in the story.
2. _____ = the main idea, lesson or message in the short story.
3. _____ = through whose eyes the story is being told.
4. _____ = the point of greatest tension or intensity in the short story, also called the turning point.
5. _____ = a description of where and when the story takes place.
6. _____ = a work of short, narrative prose centered around one single event.
7. _____ = the main sequence of events that make up the story.
8. _____ = the tension at the heart of the short story usually related to the main character.
9. _____ = the person telling the story.
10. _____ = how the characters are described through dialogue, physical appearance, thoughts, feelings and interaction.

Plot
Short Story
Narrator
Characterization
Conflict
Point of view
Setting
Climax
Style
Theme

Check

Contributors and Attributions

Carol Dwankowski (CC BY-SA) provided by NDLA

This page titled 2.13: Match and Learn Quiz is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **4.14: Match and Learn Quiz** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Fiction Readings

Assigned Readings

3.1: Ray Bradbury's “The Veldt” (1950)
3.2: Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" (1978)
3.3: James Joyce's "Araby" (1914)
3.4: Junot Diaz's "Wildwood" (2007)
3.5: Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (1846)
3.6: Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat" (1926)
3.7: Anton Chekhov's "The Lady with the Dog" (1899)
3.8: Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" (1922)
3.9: Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894)
3.10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)
3.11: Additional Readings
3.11.1: Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820)
3.11.2: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844)
3.11.3: Herman Melville's "Bartleby, The Scrivener" (1853)
3.11.4: Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron-Mills" (1861)
3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)
3.11.6: Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890)
3.11.7: Alice Ruth Moore's "Violets" (1895)
3.11.8: Willa Cather's "On the Gull's Road" (1908)
3.11.9: Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens" (1921)
3.11.10: More Recent Short Stories

Supplemental Readings

(links to external websites)

Novels

To conserve space in this textbook and keep it printable, there are not any novels included in the textbook. Students are recommended to use online resources or their library to find novels to read. Below are a few recommendations.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1831)

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851)

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899)

Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923)

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970)

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989)

For an extensive list of American fiction, ordered chronologically, please refer to Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865- present by Berke, Bleil, & Cofer, sourced from University of North Georgia Press, CC-BY-SA.

This page titled 3: Fiction Readings is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

3.1: Ray Bradbury's “The Veldt” (1950)

Ray Bradbury’s “The Veldt”

“George, I wish you’d look at the nursery.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, then.”

“I just want you to look at it, is all, or call a psychologist in to look at it.”

“What would a psychologist want with a nursery?”

“You know very well what he’d want.” His wife was standing in the middle of the kitchen watching the stove busy humming to itself, making supper for four.

“It’s just that it is different now than it was.”

“All right, let’s have a look.”

They walked down the hall of their HappyLife Home, which had cost them thirty thousand dollars with everything included. This house which clothed and fed and rocked them to sleep and played and sang and was good to them. Their approach was sensed by a hidden switch and the nursery light turned on when they came within ten feet of it. Similarly, behind them, in the halls, lights went on and off automatically as they left them behind.

“Well,” said George Hadley. They stood on the grass-like floor of the nursery. It was forty feet across by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house.

“But nothing’s too good for our children,” George had said.

The room was silent and empty. The walls were white and two dimensional. Now, as George and Lydia Hadley stood in the center of the room, the walls made a quiet noise and seemed to fall away into the distance. Soon an African veldt appeared, in three dimensions, on all sides, in color. It looked real to the smallest stone and bit of yellow summer grass. The ceiling above them became a deep sky with a hot yellow sun.

George Hadley started to sweat from the heat. “Let’s get out of this sun,” he said. “This is a little too real. But I don’t see anything wrong.”

“Wait a moment, you’ll see,” said his wife.

Now hidden machines were beginning to blow a wind containing prepared smells toward the two people in the middle of the baked veldt. The hot straw smell of lion grass, the cool green smell of the hidden water hole, the strong dried blood smell of the animals, the smell of dust like red pepper in the hot air. And now the sounds: the thump of distant antelope feet on soft grassy ground, the papery rustle of vultures. A shadow passed through the sky. George Hadley looked up, and as he watched the shadow moved across his sweating face. “Horrible creatures,” he heard his wife say.

“The vultures.”

“You see, there are the lions, far over, that way. Now they’re on their way to the water hole.

They’ve just been eating,” said Lydia. “I don’t know what.”

“Some animal.” George Hadley put his hand above his eyes to block off the burning light and looked carefully. “A zebra or a baby giraffe, maybe.”

“Are you sure?” His wife sounded strangely nervous.

“No, it’s a little late to be sure,” he said, with a laugh. “Nothing over there I can see but cleaned bone, and the vultures dropping for what’s left.”

“Did you hear that scream?” she asked.

“No.”

“About a minute ago?”

“Sorry, no.”

The lions were coming. And again George Hadley was filled with respect for the brilliant mind that had come up with the idea for this room. A wonder of efficiency selling for an unbelievably low price. Every home should have one. Oh, occasionally they frightened you with their realism, they made you jump, gave you a scare. But most of the time they were fun for everyone. Not only your own son and daughter, but for yourself when you felt like a quick trip to a foreign land, a quick change of scenery. Well, here it was!

And here were the lions now, fifteen feet away. They looked so real, so powerful and shockingly real, that you could feel the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. Your mouth was filled with the dusty smell of their heated fur. The yellow of the lions and the summer grass was in your eyes like a picture in an expensive French wall hanging. And there was the sound of the lions quick, heavy breaths in the silent mid-day sun, and the smell of meat from their dripping mouths.

The lions stood looking at George and Lydia Hadley with terrible green-yellow eyes. “Watch out!” screamed Lydia.

The lions came running at them. Lydia turned suddenly and ran. Without thinking, George ran after her. Outside in the hall, after they had closed the door quickly and noisily behind them, he was laughing and she was crying. And they both stood shocked at the other’s reaction.

“George!”

“Lydia! Oh, my dear poor sweet Lydia!”

“They almost got us!”

“Walls, Lydia, remember; glass walls, that’s all they are. Oh, they look real, I must admit – Africa in your living room. But it’s all created from three dimensional color film behind glass screens. And the machines that deliver the smells and sounds to go with the scenery. Here’s my handkerchief.”

“I’m afraid.” She came to him and put her body against him and cried as he held her. “Did you see? Did you feel? It’s too real.”

“Now, Lydia…”

“You’ve got to tell Wendy and Peter not to read any more on Africa.”

“Of course – of course.” He patted her.

“Promise?”

“Sure.”

“And lock the nursery for a few days until I can get over this.”

“You know how difficult Peter is about that. When I punished him a month ago by locking it for even a few hours – the way he lost his temper! And Wendy too. They live for the nursery.”

“It’s got to be locked, that’s all there is to it.”

“All right.” Although he wasn’t happy about it, he locked the huge door. “You’ve been working too hard. You need a rest.”

“I don’t know – I don’t know,” she said, blowing her nose, sitting down in a chair that immediately began to rock and comfort her. “Maybe I don’t have enough to do. Maybe I have time to think too much. Why don’t we shut the whole house off for a few days and take a vacation?”

“You mean you want to fry my eggs for me?”

“Yes.” She nodded.

“And mend my socks?”

“Yes.” She nodded again excitedly, with tears in her eyes.

“And clean the house?”

“Yes, yes – oh, yes!”

“But I thought that’s why we bought this house, so we wouldn’t have to do anything?”

“That’s just it. I feel like I don’t belong here. The house is wife and mother now, and nurse for the children. Can I compete with an African veldt? Can I give a bath and clean the children as efficiently or quickly as the automatic body wash can? I cannot. And it isn’t just me. It’s you. You’ve been awfully nervous lately.”

“I suppose I have been smoking too much.”

“You look as if you didn’t know what to do with yourself in this house, either. You smoke a little more every morning and drink a little more every afternoon, and you are taking more pills to help you sleep at night. You’re beginning to feel unnecessary too.”

“Am I?” He thought for a moment as he and tried to feel into himself to see what was really there.

“Oh, George!” She looked past him, at the nursery door. “Those lions can’t get out of there, can they?”

He looked at the door and saw it shake as if something had jumped against it from the other side.

“Of course not,” he said.

At dinner they ate alone, for Wendy and Peter were at a special plastic fair across town. They had called home earlier to say they’d be late. So George Hadley, deep in thought, sat watching the dining-room table produce warm dishes of food from the machines inside.

“We forgot the tomato sauce,” he said.

“Sorry,” said a small voice within the table, and tomato sauce appeared.

As for the nursery, thought George Hadley, it won’t hurt for the children to be locked out of it a while. Too much of anything isn’t good for anyone. And it was clearly indicated that the children had been spending a little too much time on Africa. That sun. He could still feel it on his neck, like a hot paw. And the lions. And the smell of blood. Remarkable how the nursery read the thoughts in

the children's minds and created life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there were lions. The children thought zebras, and there were zebras. Sun – sun. Giraffes – giraffes. Death and death.

That last. He ate the meat that the table had cut for him without tasting it. Death thoughts. They were awfully young, Wendy and Peter, for death thoughts. Or, no, you were never too young, really. Long before you knew what death was you were wishing it on someone else. When you were two years old you were shooting people with toy guns.

But this – the long, hot African veldt. The awful death in the jaws of a lion. And repeated again and again.

"Where are you going?"

George didn't answer Lydia… he was too busy thinking of something else. He let the lights shine softly on ahead of him, turn off behind him as he walked quietly to the nursery door. He listened against it. Far away, a lion roared. He unlocked the door and opened it. Just before he stepped inside, he heard a faraway scream. And then another roar from the lions, which died down quickly. He stepped into Africa.

How many times in the last year had he opened this door and found Wonderland with Alice and the Mock Turtle, or Aladdin and his Magical Lamp, or Jack Pumpkinhead of Oz, or Dr. Doolittle, or the cow jumping over a very real-looking moon. All the most enjoyable creations of an imaginary world. How often had he seen Pegasus the winged horse flying in the sky ceiling, or seen explosions of red fireworks, or heard beautiful singing.

But now, is yellow hot Africa, this bake oven with murder in the heat. Perhaps Lydia was right. Perhaps they needed a little vacation from the fantasy which was growing a bit too real for ten-yearold children. It was all right to exercise one's mind with unusual fantasies, but when the lively child mind settled on one pattern..?

It seemed that, at a distance, for the past month, he had heard lions roaring, and noticed their strong smell which carried as far away as his study door. But, being busy, he had paid it no attention.

George Hadley stood on the African veldt alone. The lions looked up from their feeding, watching him. The only thing wrong with the image was the open door. Through it he could see his wife, far down the dark hall, like a framed picture. She was still eating her dinner, but her mind was clearly on other things.

"Go away," he said to the lions.

They did not go. He knew exactly how the room should work. You sent out your thoughts. Whatever you thought would appear. "Let's have Aladdin and his lamp," he said angrily. The veldt remained; the lions remained.

"Come on, room! I demand Aladdin!" he said.

Nothing happened. The lions made soft low noises in the hot sun.

"Aladdin!"

He went back to dinner. "The fool room's out of order," he said. "It won't change."

“Or…”

“Or what?”

“Or it can’t change,” said Lydia, “because the children have thought about Africa and lions and killing so many days that the room’s stuck in a pattern it can’t get out of.”

“Could be.”

“Or Peter’s set it to remain that way.”

“Set it?”

“He may have got into the machinery and fixed something.”

“Peter doesn’t know machinery.”

“He’s a wise one for ten. That I.Q. of his…”

“But…”

“Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad.”

The Hadleys turned. Wendy and Peter were coming happily in the front door, with bright blue eyes and a smell of fresh air on their clothes from their trip in the helicopter.

“You’re just in time for supper,” said both parents.

“We’re full of strawberry ice-cream and hot dogs,” said the children, holding hands. “But we’ll sit and watch.”

“Yes, come tell us about the nursery,” said George Hadley.

The brother and sister looked at him and then at each other. “Nursery?”

“All about Africa and everything,” said the father with a false smile.

“I don’t understand,” said Peter.

“Your mother and I were just traveling through Africa.

“There’s no Africa in the nursery,” said Peter simply.

“Oh, come now, Peter. We know better.”

“I don’t remember any Africa,” said Peter to Wendy. “Do you?”

“No.”

“Run see and come tell.”

She did as he told her.

“Wendy, come back here!” said George Hadley, but she was gone. The house lights followed her like fireflies. Too late, he realized he had forgotten to lock the nursery door after his last visit.

“Wendy’ll look and come tell us,” said Peter.

“She doesn’t have to tell me. I’ve seen it.”

“I’m sure you’re mistaken, Father.”

“I’m not, Peter. Come along now.”

But Wendy was back. “It’s not Africa,” she said breathlessly.

“We’ll see about this,” said George Hadley, and they all walked down the hall together and opened the door.

There was a green, lovely forest, a lovely river, a purple mountain, high voices singing. And there

was Rima the bird girl, lovely and mysterious. She was hiding in the trees with colorful butterflies, like flowers coming to life, flying about her long hair. The African veldt was gone. The lions were gone. Only Rima was here now, singing a song so beautiful that it brought tears to your eyes.

George Hadley looked in at the changed scene. “Go to bed,” he said to the children.

They opened their mouths.

“You heard me,” he said.

They went off to the air tube, where a wind blew them like brown leaves up to their sleeping rooms.

George Hadley walked through the forest scene and picked up something that lay in the corner near where the lions had been. He walked slowly back to his wife.

“What is that?” she asked.

“An old wallet of mine,” he said. He showed it to her. The smell of hot grass was on it… and the smell of a lion. It was wet from being in the lion’s mouth, there were tooth marks on it, and there was dried blood on both sides. He closed the door and locked it, tight.

They went to up to bed but couldn’t sleep. “Do you think Wendy changed it?” she said at last, in the dark room.

“Of course.”

“Made it from a veldt into a forest and put Rima there instead of lions?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. But it’s staying locked until I find out.”

“How did your wallet get there?”

“I don’t know anything,” he said, “except that I’m beginning to be sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are suffering from any kind of emotional problem, a room like that…”

“It’s supposed to help them work off their emotional problems in a healthy way.”

“I’m starting to wonder.” His eyes were wide open, looking up at the ceiling.

“We’ve given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our reward – secrecy, not doing what we tell them?”

“Who was it said, ‘Children are carpets, they should be stepped on occasionally’? We’ve never lifted a hand. They’re unbearable – let’s admit it. They come and go when they like; they treat us as if we were the children in the family. They’re spoiled and we’re spoiled.”

“They’ve been acting funny ever since you wouldn’t let them go to New York a few months ago.”

“They’re not old enough to do that alone, I explained.”

“I know, but I’ve noticed they’ve been decidedly cool toward us since.”

“I think I’ll have David McClean come tomorrow morning to have a look at Africa.”

“But it’s not Africa now, it’s South America and Rima.”

“I have a feeling it’ll be Africa again before then.”

A moment later they heard the screams. Two screams. Two people screaming from downstairs. And then a roar of lions.

“Wendy and Peter aren’t in their rooms,” said his wife.

He lay in his bed with his beating heart. “No,” he said. “They’ve broken into the nursery.”

“Those screams – they sound familiar.”

“Do they?”

“Yes, awfully.”

And although their beds tried very hard, the two adults couldn’t be rocked to sleep for another hour.

A smell of cats was in the night air.

* * *

“Father?” asked Peter the next morning.

“Yes.”

Peter looked at his shoes. He never looked at his father any more, nor at his mother. “You aren’t going to lock up the nursery for good, are you?”

“That all depends.”

“On what?” said Peter sharply.

“On you and your sister. If you break up this Africa with a little variety – oh, Sweden perhaps, or Denmark or China…”

“I thought we were free to play as we wished.”

“You are, within reasonable limits.”

“What’s wrong with Africa, Father?”

“Oh, so now you admit you have been thinking up Africa, do you?”

“I wouldn’t want the nursery locked up,” said Peter coldly. “Ever.”

“Matter of fact, we’re thinking of turning the whole house off for about a month. Live sort of a happy family existence.”

“That sounds terrible! Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of letting the machine do it? And brush my own teeth and comb my hair and give myself a bath?”

“It would be fun for a change, don’t you think?”

No, it would be horrible. I didn’t like it when you took out the picture painter last month.”

“That’s because I wanted you to learn to paint all by yourself, son.”

“I don’t want to do anything but look and listen and smell; what else is there to do?”

“All right, go play in Africa.”

“Will you shut off the house sometime soon?”

“We’re considering it.”

“I don’t think you’d better consider it any more, Father.”

“I won’t have any threats from my son!”

“Very well.” And Peter walked off to the nursery.

* * *

“Am I on time?” said David McClean.

“Breakfast?” asked George Hadley.

“Thanks, had some. What’s the trouble?”

“David, you’re a psychologist.”

“I should hope so.”

“Well, then, have a look at our nursery. You saw it a year ago when you dropped by; did you notice anything unusual about it then?”

“Can’t say I did; the usual violences, a tendency toward a slight paranoia here or there. But this is usual in children because they feel their parents are always doing things to make them suffer in one way or another. But, oh, really nothing.”

They walked down the hall. “I locked it up,” explained the father, “and the children broke back into it during the night. I let them stay so they could form the patterns for you to see.”

There was a terrible screaming from the nursery.

“There it is,” said George Hadley. “See what you make of it.”

They walked in on the children without knocking. The screams had stopped. The lions were feeding.

“Run outside a moment, children,” said George Hadley. “No, don’t change the mental picture. Leave the walls as they are. Get!”

With the children gone, the two men stood studying the lions sitting together in the distance, eating with great enjoyment whatever it was they had caught.

“I wish I knew what it was,” said George Hadley. “Sometimes I can almost see. Do you think if I brought high-powered binoculars here and…”

David McClean laughed dryly. “Hardly.” He turned to study all four walls. “How long has this been going on?”

“A little over a month.”

“It certainly doesn’t feel good.”

“I want facts, not feelings.”

“My dear George, a psychologist never saw a fact in his life. He only hears about feelings; things that aren’t always clearly expressed. This doesn’t feel good, I tell you. Trust me. I have a nose for something bad. This is very bad. My advice to you is to have the whole damn room torn down and your children brought to me every day during the next year for treatment.”

“Is it that bad?”

“I’m afraid so. One of the original uses of these rooms was so that we could study the patterns left on the walls by the child’s mind. We could study them whenever we wanted to, and help the child. In this case, however, the room has become a means of creating destructive thoughts, instead of helping to make them go away.”

“Didn’t you sense this before?”

“I sensed only that you had spoiled your children more than most. And now you’re letting them down in some way. What way?”

“I wouldn’t let them go to New York.”

“What else?”

“I’ve taken a few machines from the house and threatened them, a month ago, with closing up the nursery unless they did their homework. I did close it for a few days to show I meant business.”

“Ah, ha!”

“Does that mean anything?”

“Everything. Where before they had a Santa Claus now they have a Scrooge. Children prefer Santa. You’ve let this room and this house replace you and your wife in your children’s feelings. This room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents. And now you come along and want to shut it off. No wonder there’s hatred here. You can feel it coming out of the sky. Feel that sun. George, you’ll have to change your life. Like too many others, you’ve built it around creature comforts. Why, you’d go hungry tomorrow if something went wrong in your kitchen. You wouldn’t know how to cook an egg. All the same, turn everything off. Start new. It’ll take time. But we’ll make good children out of bad in a year, wait and see.”

“But won’t the shock be too much for the children, shutting the room up without notice, for good?”

“I don’t want them going any deeper into this, that’s all.”

The lions were finished with their bloody meat. They were standing on the edge of the clearing watching the two men.

“Now I’m feeling worried,” said McClean. “Let’s get out of here. I never have cared for these damned rooms. Make me nervous.”

“The lions look real, don’t they?” said George Hadley. I don’t suppose there’s any way…”

“What?”

“…that they could become real?”

“Not that I know.”

“Some problem with the machinery, someone changing something inside?”

“No.”

They went to the door.

“I don’t imagine the room will like being turned off,” said the father.

“Nothing ever likes to die – even a room.”

“I wonder if it hates me for wanting to switch it off?”

“Paranoia is thick around here today,” said David McClean. “You can see it everywhere. Hello.” He bent and picked up a bloody scarf. “This yours?”

“No.” George Hadley’s face set like stone. “It belongs to Lydia.”

They went to the control box together and threw the switch that killed the nursery.

The two children were so upset that they couldn’t control themselves. They screamed and danced around and threw things. They shouted and cried and called them rude names and jumped on the furniture.

“You can’t do that to the nursery, you can’t!”

“Now, children.”

The children threw themselves onto a sofa, crying.

“George,” said Lydia Hadley, “turn it on again, just for a few moments. You need to give them some more time.”

“No.”

“You can’t be so cruel…”

“Lydia, it’s off, and it stays off. And the whole damn house dies as of here and now. The more I see of the mess we’ve put ourselves in, the more it sickens me. We’ve been thinking of our machine assisted selves for too long. My God, how we need a breath of honest air!”

And he marched about the house turning off the voice clocks, the stoves, the heaters, the shoe cleaners, the body washer, the massager, and every other machine he could put his hand to.

The house was full of dead bodies, it seemed. It felt like a mechanical cemetery. So silent. None of the humming hidden energy of machines waiting to function at the tap of a button.

“Don’t let them do it!” cried Peter to the ceiling, as if he was talking to the house, the nursery.

“Don’t let Father kill everything.” He turned to his father. “Oh, I hate you!”

“Saying things like that won’t get you anywhere.”

“I wish you were dead!”

“We were, for a long while. Now we’re going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we’re going to live.”

Wendy was still crying and Peter joined her again. “Just a moment, just one moment, just another moment of nursery,” they cried.

“Oh, George,” said the wife, “it can’t hurt.”

“All right – all right, if they’ll just shut up. One minute, mind you, and then off forever.”

“Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!” sang the children, smiling with wet faces.

“And then we’re going on a vacation. David McClean is coming back in half an hour to help us move out and get to the airport. I’m going to dress. You turn the nursery on for a minute, Lydia, just a minute, mind you.”

And the three of them went off talking excitedly while he let himself be transported upstairs through the air tube and set about dressing himself. A minute later Lydia appeared.

“I’ll be glad when we get away,” she said thankfully.

“Did you leave them in the nursery?”

“I wanted to dress too. Oh, that horrible Africa. What can they see in it?”

“Well, in five minutes we’ll be on our way to Iowa. Lord, how did we ever get in this house? What made us buy a nightmare?”

“Pride, money, foolishness.”

“I think we’d better get downstairs before those kids spend too much time with those damned beasts again.”

Just then they heard the children calling, “Daddy, Mommy, come quick – quick!”

They went downstairs in the air tube and ran down the hall. The

children were nowhere in sight. “Wendy? Peter!”

They ran into the nursery. The veldt was empty save for the lions waiting, looking at them. “Peter, Wendy?”

The door closed loudly.

“Wendy, Peter!”

George Hadley and his wife turned quickly and ran back to the door.

“Open the door!” cried George Hadley, trying the handle. “Why, they’ve locked it from the outside! Peter!” He beat at the door. “Open up!”

He heard Peter’s voice outside, against the door.

“Don’t let them switch off the nursery and the house,” he was saying.

Mr. and Mrs. George Hadley beat at the door. “Now, don’t be silly, children. It’s time to go. Mr. McClean’ll be here in a minute and…”

And then they heard the sounds.

The lions were on three sides of them in the yellow veldt grass. They walked quietly through the dry grass, making long, deep rolling sounds in their throats. The lions!

Mr. Hadley looked at his wife and they turned and looked back at the beasts edging slowly forward, knees bent, tails in the air.

Mr. and Mrs. Hadley screamed.

And suddenly they realized why those other screams had sounded familiar.

* * *

“Well, here I am,” said David McClean from the nursery door. “Oh, hello.” He looked carefully at the two children seated in the center of the room eating a little picnic lunch. On the far them he could see the water hole and the yellow veldt. Above was the hot sun. He began to sweat. “Where are your father and mother?”

The children looked up and smiled. “Oh, they’ll be here directly.”

“Good, we must get going.”

At a distance Mr. McClean saw the lions fighting over something and then quietening down to feed in silence under the shady trees. He put his hand to his eyes to block out the sun and looked at them. Now the lions were done feeding. They moved to the water hole to drink. A shadow moved over Mr. McClean’s hot face. Many shadows moved. The vultures were dropping down from the burning sky.

“A cup of tea?” asked Wendy in the silence.

3.1: Ray Bradbury's “The Veldt” (1950) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **5.13: Ray Bradbury’s “The Veldt”** has no license indicated.

3.2: Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" (1978)

Jamaica Kincaid, whose original name is Elaine Potter Richardson, was born in Antigua in 1949. She is currently Professor of African and African-American Studies at Harvard University. She grew up in Antigua in poverty, and she had a troubled relationship with her mother, whom she believed neglected her in favor of her brothers. She has said that this relationship shaped her as a writer. As a teenager, she moved to New York city, where she began her career as a writer in her twenties publishing short stories in teen magazines but eventually publishing short fiction in *The Village Voice*, *The Paris Review*, and *The New Yorker*. While she has no college degree, Kincaid wrote for *The New Yorker* for nearly 20 years. Kincaid's work is often semi-autobiographical; she explores themes of race and gender, particularly in a neo-colonial setting. "Girl" was originally published in the *New Yorker* magazine in 1978. Written as a dispute between a mother and a daughter, it is a powerful illustration of the limits of a young woman's life in the Caribbean culture of the time.

"Girl"

Please click the link to read the short story "Girl." You may also watch a video of the author reading "Girl" below.



Exercise 3.2.1

Reading and Review Questions

1. Why is the story written in second person?
2. What does the mother tell the young girl about her role as a woman?
3. How does the tone change as the conversation progresses?
4. How does this very short story reflect the author's experiences?

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from Compact Anthology of World Literature by Turlington et al. Sourced from LibreTexts , license: CC BY-SA

This page titled 3.2: Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" (1978) is shared under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anita Turlington, Matthew Horton, Karen Dodson, Laura Getty, Kyounghye Kwon, Georgia, & Laura Ng (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.3: James Joyce's "Araby" (1914)

NORTH RICHMOND STREET being blind[1], was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp: *The Abbot*,[2] by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant* [3]and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*.[4] I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle-pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

When the short days of winter came dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners. When we met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses where we ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages[5], to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness. When we returned to the street light from the kitchen windows had filled the areas. If my uncle was seen turning the corner we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed. Or if Mangan's sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea we watched her from our shadow peer up and down the street. We waited to see whether she would remain or go in and, if she remained, we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan's steps resignedly. She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door. Her brother always teased her before he obeyed and I stood by the railings looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.

Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye and, when we came near the point at which our ways diverged, I quickened my pace and passed her. This happened morning after morning. I had never spoken to her, except for a few casual words, and yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood.

Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to go to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a *come-all-you*[6] about O'Donovan Rossa, or a ballad about the troubles in our native land. These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.

One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken panes I heard the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: "*O love! O love!*" many times.

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*.[7] I forgot whether I answered yes or no. It would be a splendid bazaar, she said she would love to go.

"And why can't you?" I asked.

While she spoke she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent. Her brother and two other boys were fighting for their caps and I was alone at the railings. She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her

hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

“It’s well for you,” she said.

“If I go,” I said, “I will bring you something.”

What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening! I wished to annihilate the tedious intervening days. I chafed against the work of school. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me. I asked for leave to go to the bazaar on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised and hoped it was not some Freemason[8] affair. I answered few questions in class. I watched my master’s face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle. I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child’s play, ugly monotonous child’s play.

On Saturday morning I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazaar in the evening. He was fussing at the hallstand, looking for the hat-brush, and answered me curtly:

“Yes, boy, I know.”

As he was in the hall I could not go into the front parlour and lie at the window. I left the house in bad humour and walked slowly towards the school. The air was pitilessly raw and already my heart misgave me.

When I came home to dinner my uncle had not yet been home. Still it was early. I sat staring at the clock for some time and. when its ticking began to irritate me, I left the room. I mounted the staircase and gained the upper part of the house. The high cold empty gloomy rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.

When I came downstairs again I found Mrs. Mercer sitting at the fire. She was an old garrulous woman, a pawnbroker’s widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose. I had to endure the gossip of the tea-table. The meal was prolonged beyond an hour and still my uncle did not come. Mrs. Mercer stood up to go: she was sorry she couldn’t wait any longer, but it was after eight o’clock and she did not like to be out late as the night air was bad for her. When she had gone I began to walk up and down the room, clenching my fists. My aunt said:

“I’m afraid you may put off your bazaar for this night of Our Lord.”

At nine o’clock I heard my uncle’s latchkey in the halldoor. I heard him talking to himself and heard the hallstand rocking when it had received the weight of his overcoat. I could interpret these signs. When he was midway through his dinner I asked him to give me the money to go to the bazaar. He had forgotten.

“The people are in bed and after their first sleep now,” he said.

I did not smile. My aunt said to him energetically:

“Can’t you give him the money and let him go? You’ve kept him late enough as it is.”

My uncle said he was very sorry he had forgotten. He said he believed in the old saying: “*All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.*” He asked me where I was going and, when I had told him a second time he asked me did I know *The Arab’s Farewell to his Steed*.[9] When I left the kitchen he was about to recite the opening lines of the piece to my aunt.

I held a florin[10] tightly in my hand as I strode down Buckingham Street towards the station. The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey. I took my seat in a third-class carriage of a deserted train. After an intolerable delay the train moved out of the station slowly. It crept onward among ruinous house and over the twinkling river. At Westland Row Station a crowd of people pressed to the carriage doors; but the porters moved them back, saying that it was a special train for the bazaar. I remained alone in the bare carriage. In a few minutes the train drew up beside an improvised wooden platform. I passed out on to the road and saw by the lighted dial of a clock that it was ten minutes to ten. In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name.

I could not find any sixpenny entrance and, fearing that the bazaar would be closed, I passed in quickly through a turnstile, handing a shilling to a weary-looking man. I found myself in a big hall girdled at half its height by a gallery. Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognised a silence like that which pervades a church after a service. I walked into the centre of the bazaar timidly. A few people were gathered about the stalls which were still open. Before a curtain, over which the words Cafe Chantant[11] were written in coloured lamps, two men were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.[12]

Remembering with difficulty why I had come I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets. At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen. I remarked their English accents and listened vaguely to their conversation.

“O, I never said such a thing!”

“O, but you did!”

“O, but I didn’t!”

“Didn’t she say that?”

“Yes. I heard her.”

“0, there’s a . . . fib!”

Observing me the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured:

“No, thank you.”

The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They began to talk of the same subject. Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder.

I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real. Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

Contributors and Attributions

- Template:ContribSexton

---

1. A dead-end street. ↵
2. A historical romance (1820). In this novel, the young hero becomes the guardian of Mary, Queen of Scots’ state secrets. ↵
3. Subtitled “Pious Meditations and Aspirations for the Three Days Before and the Three Days After Receiving the Holy Eucharist,” by English Franciscan friar Pacificus Baker (1775-1857). ↵
4. Memoirs of François-Eugène Vidocq, originally a criminal, turned French police detective. The Memoirs were first published in 1828. ↵
5. Small dwellings for the poor. ↵
6. A topical ballad, in this case, one about the exploits of Fenian leader Jeremiah O’Donovan Rossa (1851-1915). ↵
7. The young Joyce attended the Araby Bazaar in 1894. The term "Araby" held exotic, romantic connotations in 19th-century British Empire, particularly after the reception of such works as Fitzgerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859) and Sir Richard Burton’s version of the Arabian Nights (1885-88). ↵
8. A fraternal organization to which the Roman Catholic Church objected. ↵
9. A popular romantic poem by Caroline Norton (1808-1877). ↵
10. A two-shilling coin. ↵
11. In France, a coffeehouse with entertainment. ↵
12. cf. Matthew 21: 12-13, Jesus confronts the moneylenders at the temple. A salver was derived from "saviour" and was originally used to catch drops of wine from the chalice placed upon it. ↵

3.3: James Joyce's "Araby" (1914) is shared under a CC BY license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

3.4: Junot Diaz's "Wildwood" (2007)

Junot Diaz was born in the Dominican Republic in 1968. He then immigrated with his family to New Jersey at the age of 6 in order to join his father, who had already been working in the United States. After struggling with the English language growing up, Diaz eventually majored in English at Rutgers University, receiving his BA in 1992. Three years later, he went on to receive his MFA from Cornell University, where he wrote many short stories that would later appear in his first collection *Drown* (1996). His critically acclaimed novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) won a Pulitzer Prize and was followed up by another collection of short stories *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012). Diaz currently teaches at MIT and is the fiction editor for the *Boston Review* magazine. "Wildwood" was originally published in the *New Yorker* magazine in 2007 before being included as a chapter in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. This coming-of-age story focuses on a Dominican-American teenager named Lola as she grapples with puberty, first love, family struggles, and her heritage.

“Wildwood”

Please click the link to read the short story "Wildwood."

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Biography of Junot Diaz. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Junot_D%C3%ADaz. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

3.4: Junot Diaz's "Wildwood" (2007) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

3.5: Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (1846)

The Birthmark

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

In the latter part of the last century there lived a man of science, an eminent proficient in every branch of natural philosophy, who not long before our story opens had made experience of a spiritual affinity more attractive than any chemical one. He had left his laboratory to the care of an assistant, cleared his fine countenance from the furnace smoke, washed the stain of acids from his fingers, and persuaded a beautiful woman to become his wife. In those days when the comparatively recent discovery of electricity and other kindred mysteries of Nature seemed to open paths into the region of miracle, it was not unusual for the love of science to rival the love of woman in its depth and absorbing energy. The higher intellect, the imagination, the spirit, and even the heart might all find their congenial aliment in pursuits which, as some of their ardent votaries believed, would ascend from one step of powerful intelligence to another, until the philosopher should lay his hand on the secret of creative force and perhaps make new worlds for himself. We know not whether Aylmer possessed this degree of faith in man's ultimate control over Nature. He had devoted himself, however, too unreservedly to scientific studies ever to be weaned from them by any second passion. His love for his young wife might prove the stronger of the two; but it could only be by intertwining itself with his love of science, and uniting the strength of the latter to his own.

Such a union accordingly took place, and was attended with truly remarkable consequences and a deeply impressive moral. One day, very soon after their marriage, Aylmer sat gazing at his wife with a trouble in his countenance that grew stronger until he spoke.

"Georgiana," said he, "has it never occurred to you that the mark upon your cheek might be removed?"

"No, indeed," said she, smiling; but perceiving the seriousness of his manner, she blushed deeply. "To tell you the truth it has been so often called a charm that I was simple enough to imagine it might be so."

"Ah, upon another face perhaps it might," replied her husband; "but never on yours. No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect, which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty, shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection."

"Shocks you, my husband!" cried Georgiana, deeply hurt; at first reddening with momentary anger, but then bursting into tears. "Then why did you take me from my mother's side? You cannot love what shocks you!"

To explain this conversation it must be mentioned that in the centre of Georgiana's left cheek there was a singular mark, deeply interwoven, as it were, with the texture and substance of her face. In the usual state of her complexion—a healthy though delicate bloom—the mark wore a tint of deeper crimson, which imperfectly defined its shape amid the surrounding rosiness. When she blushed it gradually became more indistinct, and finally vanished amid the triumphant rush of blood that bathed the whole cheek with its brilliant glow. But if any shifting motion caused her to turn pale there was the mark again, a crimson stain upon the snow, in what Aylmer sometimes deemed an almost fearful distinctness. Its shape bore not a little similarity to the human hand, though of the smallest pygmy size. Georgiana's lovers were wont to say that some fairy at her birth hour had laid her tiny hand upon the infant's cheek, and left this impress there in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts. Many a desperate swain would have risked life for the privilege of pressing his lips to the mysterious hand. It must not be concealed, however, that the impression wrought by this fairy sign manual varied exceedingly, according to the difference of temperament in the beholders. Some fastidious persons—but they were exclusively of her own sex—affirmed that the bloody hand, as they chose to call it, quite destroyed the effect of Georgiana's beauty, and rendered her countenance even hideous. But it would be as reasonable to say that one of those small blue stains which sometimes occur in the purest statuary marble would convert the Eve of Powers to a monster. Masculine observers, if the birthmark did not heighten their admiration, contented themselves with wishing it away, that the world might possess one living specimen of ideal loveliness without the semblance of a flaw. After his marriage,—for he thought little or nothing of the matter before,—Aylmer discovered that this was the case with himself.

Had she been less beautiful,—if Envy's self could have found aught else to sneer at,—he might have felt his affection heightened by the prettiness of this mimic hand, now vaguely portrayed, now lost, now stealing forth again and glimmering to and fro with every pulse of emotion that throbbed within her heart; but seeing her otherwise so perfect, he found this one defect grow more and more intolerable with every moment of their united lives. It was the fatal flaw of humanity which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps ineffaceably on all her productions, either to imply that they are temporary and finite, or that their perfection must be wrought by toil and pain. The crimson hand expressed the ineludible gripe in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mould, degrading them into kindred with the lowest, and even with the very brutes, like whom their visible frames return to dust. In this manner, selecting it as the symbol of his wife's liability to sin,

sorrow, decay, and death, Aylmer's sombre imagination was not long in rendering the birthmark a frightful object, causing him more trouble and horror than ever Georgiana's beauty, whether of soul or sense, had given him delight.

At all the seasons which should have been their happiest, he invariably and without intending it, nay, in spite of a purpose to the contrary, reverted to this one disastrous topic. Trifling as it at first appeared, it so connected itself with innumerable trains of thought and modes of feeling that it became the central point of all. With the morning twilight Aylmer opened his eyes upon his wife's face and recognized the symbol of imperfection; and when they sat together at the evening hearth his eyes wandered stealthily to her cheek, and beheld, flickering with the blaze of the wood fire, the spectral hand that wrote mortality where he would fain have worshipped. Georgiana soon learned to shudder at his gaze. It needed but a glance with the peculiar expression that his face often wore to change the roses of her cheek into a deathlike paleness, amid which the crimson hand was brought strongly out, like a bass-relief of ruby on the whitest marble.

Late one night when the lights were growing dim, so as hardly to betray the stain on the poor wife's cheek, she herself, for the first time, voluntarily took up the subject.

"Do you remember, my dear Aylmer," said she, with a feeble attempt at a smile, "have you any recollection of a dream last night about this odious hand?"

"None! none whatever!" replied Aylmer, starting; but then he added, in a dry, cold tone, affected for the sake of concealing the real depth of his emotion, "I might well dream of it; for before I fell asleep it had taken a pretty firm hold of my fancy."

"And you did dream of it?" continued Georgiana, hastily; for she dreaded lest a gush of tears should interrupt what she had to say. "A terrible dream! I wonder that you can forget it. Is it possible to forget this one expression?—'It is in her heart now; we must have it out!' Reflect, my husband; for by all means I would have you recall that dream."

The mind is in a sad state when Sleep, the all-involving, cannot confine her spectres within the dim region of her sway, but suffers them to break forth, affrighting this actual life with secrets that perchance belong to a deeper one. Aylmer now remembered his dream. He had fancied himself with his servant Aminadab, attempting an operation for the removal of the birthmark; but the deeper went the knife, the deeper sank the hand, until at length its tiny grasp appeared to have caught hold of Georgiana's heart; whence, however, her husband was inexorably resolved to cut or wrench it away.

When the dream had shaped itself perfectly in his memory, Aylmer sat in his wife's presence with a guilty feeling. Truth often finds its way to the mind close muffled in robes of sleep, and then speaks with uncompromising directness of matters in regard to which we practise an unconscious self-deception during our waking moments. Until now he had not been aware of the tyrannizing influence acquired by one idea over his mind, and of the lengths which he might find in his heart to go for the sake of giving himself peace.

"Aylmer," resumed Georgiana, solemnly, "I know not what may be the cost to both of us to rid me of this fatal birthmark. Perhaps its removal may cause cureless deformity; or it may be the stain goes as deep as life itself. Again: do we know that there is a possibility, on any terms, of unclasping the firm gripe of this little hand which was laid upon me before I came into the world?"

"Dearest Georgiana, I have spent much thought upon the subject," hastily interrupted Aylmer. "I am convinced of the perfect practicability of its removal."

"If there be the remotest possibility of it," continued Georgiana, "let the attempt be made at whatever risk. Danger is nothing to me; for life, while this hateful mark makes me the object of your horror and disgust,—life is a burden which I would fling down with joy. Either remove this dreadful hand, or take my wretched life! You have deep science. All the world bears witness of it. You have achieved great wonders. Cannot you remove this little, little mark, which I cover with the tips of two small fingers? Is this beyond your power, for the sake of your own peace, and to save your poor wife from madness?"

"Noblest, dearest, tenderest wife," cried Aylmer, rapturously, "doubt not my power. I have already given this matter the deepest thought—thought which might almost have enlightened me to create a being less perfect than yourself. Georgiana, you have led me deeper than ever into the heart of science. I feel myself fully competent to render this dear cheek as faultless as its fellow; and then, most beloved, what will be my triumph when I shall have corrected what Nature left imperfect in her fairest work! Even Pygmalion, when his sculptured woman assumed life, felt not greater ecstasy than mine will be."

"It is resolved, then," said Georgiana, faintly smiling. "And, Aylmer, spare me not, though you should find the birthmark take refuge in my heart at last."

Her husband tenderly kissed her cheek—her right cheek—not that which bore the impress of the crimson hand.

The next day Aylmer apprised his wife of a plan that he had formed whereby he might have opportunity for the intense thought and constant watchfulness which the proposed operation would require; while Georgiana, likewise, would enjoy the perfect repose essential to its success. They were to seclude themselves in the extensive apartments occupied by Aylmer as a laboratory, and where, during his toilsome youth, he had made discoveries in the elemental powers of Nature that had roused the admiration of all the learned societies in Europe. Seated calmly in this laboratory, the pale philosopher had investigated the secrets of the highest cloud region and of the

profoundest mines; he had satisfied himself of the causes that kindled and kept alive the fires of the volcano; and had explained the mystery of fountains, and how it is that they gush forth, some so bright and pure, and others with such rich medicinal virtues, from the dark bosom of the earth. Here, too, at an earlier period, he had studied the wonders of the human frame, and attempted to fathom the very process by which Nature assimilates all her precious influences from earth and air, and from the spiritual world, to create and foster man, her masterpiece. The latter pursuit, however, Aylmer had long laid aside in unwilling recognition of the truth—against which all seekers sooner or later stumble—that our great creative Mother, while she amuses us with apparently working in the broadest sunshine, is yet severely careful to keep her own secrets, and, in spite of her pretended openness, shows us nothing but results. She permits us, indeed, to mar, but seldom to mend, and, like a jealous patentee, on no account to make. Now, however, Aylmer resumed these half-forgotten investigations; not, of course, with such hopes or wishes as first suggested them; but because they involved much physiological truth and lay in the path of his proposed scheme for the treatment of Georgiana.

As he led her over the threshold of the laboratory, Georgiana was cold and tremulous. Aylmer looked cheerfully into her face, with intent to reassure her, but was so startled with the intense glow of the birthmark upon the whiteness of her cheek that he could not restrain a strong convulsive shudder. His wife fainted.

"Aminadab! Aminadab!" shouted Aylmer, stamping violently on the floor.

Forthwith there issued from an inner apartment a man of low stature, but bulky frame, with shaggy hair hanging about his visage, which was grimed with the vapors of the furnace. This personage had been Aylmer's underworker during his whole scientific career, and was admirably fitted for that office by his great mechanical readiness, and the skill with which, while incapable of comprehending a single principle, he executed all the details of his master's experiments. With his vast strength, his shaggy hair, his smoky aspect, and the indescribable earthiness that incrusted him, he seemed to represent man's physical nature; while Aylmer's slender figure, and pale, intellectual face, were no less apt a type of the spiritual element.

"Throw open the door of the boudoir, Aminadab," said Aylmer, "and burn a pastil."

"Yes, master," answered Aminadab, looking intently at the lifeless form of Georgiana; and then he muttered to himself, "If she were my wife, I'd never part with that birthmark."

When Georgiana recovered consciousness she found herself breathing an atmosphere of penetrating fragrance, the gentle potency of which had recalled her from her deathlike faintness. The scene around her looked like enchantment. Aylmer had converted those smoky, dingy, sombre rooms, where he had spent his brightest years in recondite pursuits, into a series of beautiful apartments not unfit to be the secluded abode of a lovely woman. The walls were hung with gorgeous curtains, which imparted the combination of grandeur and grace that no other species of adornment can achieve; and as they fell from the ceiling to the floor, their rich and ponderous folds, concealing all angles and straight lines, appeared to shut in the scene from infinite space. For aught Georgiana knew, it might be a pavilion among the clouds. And Aylmer, excluding the sunshine, which would have interfered with his chemical processes, had supplied its place with perfumed lamps, emitting flames of various hue, but all uniting in a soft, impurpled radiance. He now knelt by his wife's side, watching her earnestly, but without alarm; for he was confident in his science, and felt that he could draw a magic circle round her within which no evil might intrude.

"Where am I? Ah, I remember," said Georgiana, faintly; and she placed her hand over her cheek to hide the terrible mark from her husband's eyes.

"Fear not, dearest!" exclaimed he. "Do not shrink from me! Believe me, Georgiana, I even rejoice in this single imperfection, since it will be such a rapture to remove it."

"Oh, spare me!" sadly replied his wife. "Pray do not look at it again. I never can forget that convulsive shudder."

In order to soothe Georgiana, and, as it were, to release her mind from the burden of actual things, Aylmer now put in practice some of the light and playful secrets which science had taught him among its profounder lore. Airy figures, absolutely bodiless ideas, and forms of unsubstantial beauty came and danced before her, imprinting their momentary footsteps on beams of light. Though she had some indistinct idea of the method of these optical phenomena, still the illusion was almost perfect enough to warrant the belief that her husband possessed sway over the spiritual world. Then again, when she felt a wish to look forth from her seclusion, immediately, as if her thoughts were answered, the procession of external existence flitted across a screen. The scenery and the figures of actual life were perfectly represented, but with that bewitching, yet indescribable difference which always makes a picture, an image, or a shadow so much more attractive than the original. When wearied of this, Aylmer bade her cast her eyes upon a vessel containing a quantity of earth. She did so, with little interest at first; but was soon startled to perceive the germ of a plant shooting upward from the soil. Then came the slender stalk; the leaves gradually unfolded themselves; and amid them was a perfect and lovely flower.

"It is magical!" cried Georgiana. "I dare not touch it."

"Nay, pluck it," answered Aylmer,—"pluck it, and inhale its brief perfume while you may. The flower will wither in a few

moments and leave nothing save its brown seed vessels; but thence may be perpetuated a race as ephemeral as itself."

But Georgiana had no sooner touched the flower than the whole plant suffered a blight, its leaves turning coal-black as if by the agency of fire.

"There was too powerful a stimulus," said Aylmer, thoughtfully.

To make up for this abortive experiment, he proposed to take her portrait by a scientific process of his own invention. It was to be effected by rays of light striking upon a polished plate of metal. Georgiana assented; but, on looking at the result, was affrighted to find the features of the portrait blurred and indefinable; while the minute figure of a hand appeared where the cheek should have been. Aylmer snatched the metallic plate and threw it into a jar of corrosive acid.

Soon, however, he forgot these mortifying failures. In the intervals of study and chemical experiment he came to her flushed and exhausted, but seemed invigorated by her presence, and spoke in glowing language of the resources of his art. He gave a history of the long dynasty of the alchemists, who spent so many ages in quest of the universal solvent by which the golden principle might be elicited from all things vile and base. Aylmer appeared to believe that, by the plainest scientific logic, it was altogether within the limits of possibility to discover this long-sought medium; "but," he added, "a philosopher who should go deep enough to acquire the power would attain too lofty a wisdom to stoop to the exercise of it." Not less singular were his opinions in regard to the elixir vitae. He more than intimated that it was at his option to concoct a liquid that should prolong life for years, perhaps interminably; but that it would produce a discord in Nature which all the world, and chiefly the quaffer of the immortal nostrum, would find cause to curse.

"Aylmer, are you in earnest?" asked Georgiana, looking at him with amazement and fear. "It is terrible to possess such power, or even to dream of possessing it."

"Oh, do not tremble, my love," said her husband. "I would not wrong either you or myself by working such inharmonious effects upon our lives; but I would have you consider how trifling, in comparison, is the skill requisite to remove this little hand."

At the mention of the birthmark, Georgiana, as usual, shrank as if a redhot iron had touched her cheek.

Again Aylmer applied himself to his labors. She could hear his voice in the distant furnace room giving directions to Aminadab, whose harsh, uncouth, misshapen tones were audible in response, more like the grunt or growl of a brute than human speech. After hours of absence, Aylmer reappeared and proposed that she should now examine his cabinet of chemical products and natural treasures of the earth. Among the former he showed her a small vial, in which, he remarked, was contained a gentle yet most powerful fragrance, capable of impregnating all the breezes that blow across a kingdom. They were of inestimable value, the contents of that little vial; and, as he said so, he threw some of the perfume into the air and filled the room with piercing and invigorating delight.

"And what is this?" asked Georgiana, pointing to a small crystal globe containing a gold-colored liquid. "It is so beautiful to the eye that I could imagine it the elixir of life."

"In one sense it is," replied Aylmer; "or, rather, the elixir of immortality. It is the most precious poison that ever was concocted in this world. By its aid I could apportion the lifetime of any mortal at whom you might point your finger. The strength of the dose would determine whether he were to linger out years, or drop dead in the midst of a breath. No king on his guarded throne could keep his life if I, in my private station, should deem that the welfare of millions justified me in depriving him of it."

"Why do you keep such a terrific drug?" inquired Georgiana in horror.

"Do not mistrust me, dearest," said her husband, smiling; "its virtuous potency is yet greater than its harmful one. But see! here is a powerful cosmetic. With a few drops of this in a vase of water, freckles may be washed away as easily as the hands are cleansed. A stronger infusion would take the blood out of the cheek, and leave the rosiest beauty a pale ghost."

"Is it with this lotion that you intend to bathe my cheek?" asked Georgiana, anxiously.

"Oh, no," hastily replied her husband; "this is merely superficial. Your case demands a remedy that shall go deeper."

In his interviews with Georgiana, Aylmer generally made minute inquiries as to her sensations and whether the confinement of the rooms and the temperature of the atmosphere agreed with her. These questions had such a particular drift that Georgiana began to conjecture that she was already subjected to certain physical influences, either breathed in with the fragrant air or taken with her food. She fancied likewise, but it might be altogether fancy, that there was a stirring up of her system—a strange, indefinite sensation creeping through her veins, and tingling, half painfully, half pleasurably, at her heart. Still, whenever she dared to look into the mirror, there she beheld herself pale as a white rose and with the crimson birthmark stamped upon her cheek. Not even Aylmer now hated it so much as she.

To dispel the tedium of the hours which her husband found it necessary to devote to the processes of combination and analysis, Georgiana turned over the volumes of his scientific library. In many dark old tomes she met with chapters full of romance and poetry. They were the works of philosophers of the middle ages, such as Albertus Magnus, Cornelius Agrippa,

Paracelsus, and the famous friar who created the prophetic Brazen Head. All these antique naturalists stood in advance of their centuries, yet were imbued with some of their credulity, and therefore were believed, and perhaps imagined themselves to have acquired from the investigation of Nature a power above Nature, and from physics a sway over the spiritual world. Hardly less curious and imaginative were the early volumes of the Transactions of the Royal Society, in which the members, knowing little of the limits of natural possibility, were continually recording wonders or proposing methods whereby wonders might be wrought.

But to Georgiana the most engrossing volume was a large folio from her husband's own hand, in which he had recorded every experiment of his scientific career, its original aim, the methods adopted for its development, and its final success or failure, with the circumstances to which either event was attributable. The book, in truth, was both the history and emblem of his ardent, ambitious, imaginative, yet practical and laborious life. He handled physical details as if there were nothing beyond them; yet spiritualized them all, and redeemed himself from materialism by his strong and eager aspiration towards the infinite. In his grasp the veriest clod of earth assumed a soul. Georgiana, as she read, reverenced Aylmer and loved him more profoundly than ever, but with a less entire dependence on his judgment than heretofore. Much as he had accomplished, she could not but observe that his most splendid successes were almost invariably failures, if compared with the ideal at which he aimed. His brightest diamonds were the merest pebbles, and felt to be so by himself, in comparison with the inestimable gems which lay hidden beyond his reach. The volume, rich with achievements that had won renown for its author, was yet as melancholy a record as ever mortal hand had penned. It was the sad confession and continual exemplification of the shortcomings of the composite man, the spirit burdened with clay and working in matter, and of the despair that assails the higher nature at finding itself so miserably thwarted by the earthly part. Perhaps every man of genius in whatever sphere might recognize the image of his own experience in Aylmer's journal.

So deeply did these reflections affect Georgiana that she laid her face upon the open volume and burst into tears. In this situation she was found by her husband.

"It is dangerous to read in a sorcerer's books," said he with a smile, though his countenance was uneasy and displeased. "Georgiana, there are pages in that volume which I can scarcely glance over and keep my senses. Take heed lest it prove as detrimental to you."

"It has made me worship you more than ever," said she.

"Ah, wait for this one success," rejoined he, "then worship me if you will. I shall deem myself hardly unworthy of it. But come, I have sought you for the luxury of your voice. Sing to me, dearest."

So she poured out the liquid music of her voice to quench the thirst of his spirit. He then took his leave with a boyish exuberance of gayety, assuring her that her seclusion would endure but a little longer, and that the result was already certain. Scarcely had he departed when Georgiana felt irresistibly impelled to follow him. She had forgotten to inform Aylmer of a symptom which for two or three hours past had begun to excite her attention. It was a sensation in the fatal birthmark, not painful, but which induced a restlessness throughout her system. Hastening after her husband, she intruded for the first time into the laboratory.

The first thing that struck her eye was the furnace, that hot and feverish worker, with the intense glow of its fire, which by the quantities of soot clustered above it seemed to have been burning for ages. There was a distilling apparatus in full operation. Around the room were retorts, tubes, cylinders, crucibles, and other apparatus of chemical research. An electrical machine stood ready for immediate use. The atmosphere felt oppressively close, and was tainted with gaseous odors which had been tormented forth by the processes of science. The severe and homely simplicity of the apartment, with its naked walls and brick pavement, looked strange, accustomed as Georgiana had become to the fantastic elegance of her boudoir. But what chiefly, indeed almost solely, drew her attention, was the aspect of Aylmer himself.

He was pale as death, anxious and absorbed, and hung over the furnace as if it depended upon his utmost watchfulness whether the liquid which it was distilling should be the draught of immortal happiness or misery. How different from the sanguine and joyous mien that he had assumed for Georgiana's encouragement!

"Carefully now, Aminadab; carefully, thou human machine; carefully, thou man of clay!" muttered Aylmer, more to himself than his assistant. "Now, if there be a thought too much or too little, it is all over."

"Ho! ho!" mumbled Aminadab. "Look, master! look!"

Aylmer raised his eyes hastily, and at first reddened, then grew paler than ever, on beholding Georgiana. He rushed towards her and seized her arm with a gripe that left the print of his fingers upon it.

"Why do you come hither? Have you no trust in your husband?" cried he, impetuously. "Would you throw the blight of that fatal birthmark over my labors? It is not well done. Go, prying woman, go!"

"Nay, Aylmer," said Georgiana with the firmness of which she possessed no stinted endowment, "it is not you that have a right to complain. You mistrust your wife; you have concealed the

anxiety with which you watch the development of this experiment. Think not so unworthily of me, my husband. Tell me all the risk we run, and fear not that I shall shrink; for my share in it is far less than your own."

"No, no, Georgiana!" said Aylmer, impatiently; "it must not be."

"I submit," replied she calmly. "And, Aylmer, I shall quaff whatever draught you bring me; but it will be on the same principle that would induce me to take a dose of poison if offered by your hand."

"My noble wife," said Aylmer, deeply moved, "I knew not the height and depth of your nature until now. Nothing shall be concealed. Know, then, that this crimson hand, superficial as it seems, has clutched its grasp into your being with a strength of which I had no previous conception. I have already administered agents powerful enough to do aught except to change your entire physical system. Only one thing remains to be tried. If that fail us we are ruined."

"Why did you hesitate to tell me this?" asked she.

"Because, Georgiana," said Aylmer, in a low voice, "there is danger."

"Danger? There is but one danger—that this horrible stigma shall be left upon my cheek!" cried Georgiana. "Remove it, remove it, whatever be the cost, or we shall both go mad!"

"Heaven knows your words are too true," said Aylmer, sadly. "And now, dearest, return to your boudoir. In a little while all will be tested."

He conducted her back and took leave of her with a solemn tenderness which spoke far more than his words how much was now at stake. After his departure Georgiana became rapt in musings. She considered the character of Aylmer, and did it completer justice than at any previous moment. Her heart exulted, while it trembled, at his honorable love—so pure and lofty that it would accept nothing less than perfection nor miserably make itself contented with an earthlier nature than he had dreamed of. She felt how much more precious was such a sentiment than that meaner kind which would have borne with the imperfection for her sake, and have been guilty of treason to holy love by degrading its perfect idea to the level of the actual; and with her whole spirit she prayed that, for a single moment, she might satisfy his highest and deepest conception. Longer than one moment she well knew it could not be; for his spirit was ever on the march, ever ascending, and each instant required something that was beyond the scope of the instant before.

The sound of her husband's footsteps aroused her. He bore a crystal goblet containing a liquor colorless as water, but bright enough to be the draught of immortality. Aylmer was pale; but it seemed rather the consequence of a highly-wrought state of mind and tension of spirit than of fear or doubt.

"The concoction of the draught has been perfect," said he, in answer to Georgiana's look. "Unless all my science have deceived me, it cannot fail."

"Save on your account, my dearest Aylmer," observed his wife, "I might wish to put off this birthmark of mortality by relinquishing mortality itself in preference to any other mode. Life is but a sad possession to those who have attained precisely the degree of moral advancement at which I stand. Were I weaker and blinder it might be happiness. Were I stronger, it might be endured hopefully. But, being what I find myself, methinks I am of all mortals the most fit to die."

"You are fit for heaven without tasting death!" replied her husband "But why do we speak of dying? The draught cannot fail. Behold its effect upon this plant."

On the window seat there stood a geranium diseased with yellow blotches, which had overspread all its leaves. Aylmer poured a small quantity of the liquid upon the soil in which it grew. In a little time, when the roots of the plant had taken up the moisture, the unsightly blotches began to be extinguished in a living verdure.

"There needed no proof," said Georgiana, quietly. "Give me the goblet I joyfully stake all upon your word."

"Drink, then, thou lofty creature!" exclaimed Aylmer, with fervid admiration. "There is no taint of imperfection on thy spirit. Thy sensible frame, too, shall soon be all perfect."

She quaffed the liquid and returned the goblet to his hand.

"It is grateful," said she with a placid smile. "Methinks it is like water from a heavenly fountain; for it contains I know not what of unobtrusive fragrance and deliciousness. It allays a feverish thirst that had parched me for many days. Now, dearest, let me sleep. My earthly senses are closing over my spirit like the leaves around the heart of a rose at sunset."

She spoke the last words with a gentle reluctance, as if it required almost more energy than she could command to pronounce the faint and lingering syllables. Scarcely had they loitered through her lips ere she was lost in slumber. Aylmer sat by her side, watching her aspect with the emotions proper to a man the whole value of whose existence was involved in the process now to be tested. Mingled with this mood, however, was the philosophic investigation characteristic of the man of science. Not the minutest symptom escaped him. A heightened flush of the cheek, a slight irregularity of breath, a quiver of the eyelid, a hardly perceptible tremor through the frame,—such were the details which, as the moments passed, he wrote down in his folio volume. Intense thought had set its stamp upon every previous page of that volume, but the thoughts of years were all concentrated upon the last.

While thus employed, he failed not to gaze often at the fatal hand, and not without a shudder. Yet once, by a strange and

unaccountable impulse he pressed it with his lips. His spirit recoiled, however, in the very act, and Georgiana, out of the midst of her deep sleep, moved uneasily and murmured as if in remonstrance. Again Aylmer resumed his watch. Nor was it without avail. The crimson hand, which at first had been strongly visible upon the marble paleness of Georgiana's cheek, now grew more faintly outlined. She remained not less pale than ever; but the birthmark with every breath that came and went, lost somewhat of its former distinctness. Its presence had been awful; its departure was more awful still. Watch the stain of the rainbow fading out the sky, and you will know how that mysterious symbol passed away.

"By Heaven! it is well-nigh gone!" said Aylmer to himself, in almost irrepressible ecstasy. "I can scarcely trace it now. Success! success! And now it is like the faintest rose color. The lightest flush of blood across her cheek would overcome it. But she is so pale!"

He drew aside the window curtain and suffered the light of natural day to fall into the room and rest upon her cheek. At the same time he heard a gross, hoarse chuckle, which he had long known as his servant Aminadab's expression of delight.

"Ah, clod! ah, earthly mass!" cried Aylmer, laughing in a sort of frenzy, "you have served me well! Matter and spirit—earth and heaven—have both done their part in this! Laugh, thing of the senses! You have earned the right to laugh."

These exclamations broke Georgiana's sleep. She slowly unclosed her eyes and gazed into the mirror which her husband had arranged for that purpose. A faint smile flitted over her lips when she recognized how barely perceptible was now that crimson hand which had once blazed forth with such disastrous brilliancy as to scare away all their happiness. But then her eyes sought Aylmer's face with a trouble and anxiety that he could by no means account for.

"My poor Aylmer!" murmured she.

"Poor? Nay, richest, happiest, most favored!" exclaimed he. "My peerless bride, it is successful! You are perfect!"

"My poor Aylmer," she repeated, with a more than human tenderness, "you have aimed loftily; you have done nobly. Do not repent that with so high and pure a feeling, you have rejected the best the earth could offer. Aylmer, dearest Aylmer, I am dying!"

Alas! it was too true! The fatal hand had grappled with the mystery of life, and was the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame. As the last crimson tint of the birthmark—that sole token of human imperfection—faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere, and her soul, lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenward flight. Then a hoarse, chuckling laugh was heard again! Thus ever does the gross fatality of earth exult in its invariable triumph over the immortal essence which, in this dim sphere of half development, demands the completeness of a higher state. Yet, had Alymer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the happiness which would have woven his mortal life of the selfsame texture with the celestial. The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present.

This page titled 3.5: Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (1846) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.4: Hawthorne, Nathaniel "The Birthmark" (1846)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

3.6: Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat" (1926)



Image 5.16 | Zora Neale Hurston, circa 1935
Photographer | Unknown
Source | Wikimedia Commons
License | Public Domain

Zora Neale Hurston was born in 1891 in Alabama, moving with her family when she was a young child to Eatonville, Florida, one of the nation's first all-black towns. Hurston enjoyed a happy childhood in Eatonville. In 1904, however, Hurston's idyllic young life came to an end when her mother died. Hurston's father soon remarried, and family life for Hurston became complicated. She moved frequently, living with relatives and working to support herself. Eventually, she attended Howard University where she nurtured her writing talent. She later attended Barnard College where she studied anthropology, earning her bachelor's degree in 1928. In the 1920s, Hurston became one of the most important figures of the Harlem Renaissance, producing a number of literary pieces and working with Langston Hughes to launch a literary magazine that promoted the talents of young African-American writers. In the 1930s, Hurston enjoyed one of her most productive decades. She conducted anthropological fieldwork across the South, studying African-American folklore, and she traveled in Haiti and Jamaica, where she conducted research on spiritual practices including hoodoo and voodoo. Her book *Mules and Men*, published in 1935, remains an important work on African-American folklore. In 1937, she published her most well-known novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, an early African-American feminist work that inspired later writers such as Alice Walker. During the next twenty years, Hurston continued to work as a journalist and a freelance writer. She married twice, but each marriage ended. By the time of her death, she was living in Florida in relative obscurity and poverty, dying of a stroke in 1960.

Unlike her contemporaries, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, Hurston in her fiction did not take on overtly political or racial themes. Like many artists in the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s, Hurston's art was essentially apolitical. Hurston's work celebrated racial pride and African-American culture without any filtering, and characters' power came from their own self-discoveries and their own inner resources. In her most critically acclaimed novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the main character Janie Crawford comes of age, moving from a young girl taught by her grandmother that she must be cared for by a man to a young woman trapped in an abusive marriage to a self-actualized woman who loves herself and lives life on her own terms, including freely expressing her sexuality. In "Sweat," Hurston explores a similar theme of self-liberation. Delia Jones, trapped in an abusive marriage to Sykes, a brutal man who beats her and uses her for material gain, finds within herself the power to stand up to him and order him from the home and business she has built through her own sweat. When he plans retribution by exposing Delia to a rattlesnake in her home, she beats him at his own game. Sykes, at the end of the story, sweats for a change.

"Sweat"

Please click the link to access this selection.

Exercise 5.17.1

Reading and Review Questions

1. Analyze the title of the story "Sweat." How does the title comment upon the theme of the story?

2. Why does Delia continue to stay with a husband who abuses her?
3. How do the community members react to Sykes's treatment of Delia?
4. How does Delia's discovery of Sykes's bullwhip foreshadow what is to come later in the story?
5. When Delia finally stands up to Sykes and tells him to leave her house, how does he react? Why doesn't he carry through with his threats to hurt her?
6. Why does Delia not attempt to save Sykes? Do you think she will later have regrets?

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present* by Berke, Bleil, Cofer, and Davis, source: University of Georgia Press, CC-BY-SA

3.6: Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat" (1926) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **5.17: Zora Neale Hurston's The Sweat** has no license indicated.

3.7: Anton Chekhov's "The Lady with the Dog" (1899)

The Lady with the Dog

The Lady with the Dog License: Public Domain Anton Chekhov Constance Garnett I

It was said that a new person had appeared on the sea-front: a lady with a little dog. Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, who had by then been a fortnight at Yalta, and so was fairly at home there, had begun to take an interest in new arrivals. Sitting in Verney's pavilion, he saw, walking on the sea-front, a fair-haired young lady of medium height, wearing a béret; a white Pomeranian dog was running behind her.

And afterwards he met her in the public gardens and in the square several times a day. She was walking alone, always wearing the same béret, and always with the same white dog; no one knew who she was, and every one called her simply "the lady with the dog."

"If she is here alone without a husband or friends, it wouldn't be amiss to make her acquaintance," Gurov reflected.

He was under forty, but he had a daughter already twelve years old, and two sons at school. He had been married young, when he was a student in his second year, and by now his wife seemed half as old again as he. She was a tall, erect woman with dark eyebrows, staid and dignified, and, as she said of herself, intellectual. She read a great deal, used phonetic spelling, called her husband, not Dmitri, but Dimitri, and he secretly considered her unintelligent, narrow, inelegant, was afraid of her, and did not like to be at home. He had begun being unfaithful to her long ago—had been unfaithful to her often, and, probably on that account, almost always spoke ill of women, and when they were talked about in his presence, used to call them "the lower race."

It seemed to him that he had been so schooled by bitter experience that he might call them what he liked, and yet he could not get on for two days together without "the lower race." In the society of men he was bored and not himself, with them he was cold and uncommunicative; but when he was in the company of women he felt free, and knew what to say to them and how to behave; and he was at ease with them even when he was silent. In his appearance, in his character, in his whole nature, there was something attractive and elusive which allured women and disposed them in his favour; he knew that, and some force seemed to draw him, too, to them.

Experience often repeated, truly bitter experience, had taught him long ago that with decent people, especially Moscow people—always slow to move and irresolute—every intimacy, which at first so agreeably diversifies life and appears a light and charming adventure, inevitably grows into a regular problem of extreme intricacy, and in the long run the situation becomes unbearable. But at every fresh meeting with an interesting woman this experience seemed to slip out of his memory, and he was eager for life, and everything seemed simple and amusing.

One evening he was dining in the gardens, and the lady in the béret came up slowly to take the next table. Her expression, her gait, her dress, and the way she did her hair told him that she was a lady, that she was married, that she was in Yalta for the first time and alone, and that she was dull there. . . . The stories told of the immorality in such places as Yalta are to a great extent untrue; he despised them, and knew that such stories were for the most part made up by persons who would themselves have been glad to sin if they had been able; but when the lady sat down at the next table three paces from him, he remembered these tales of easy conquests, of trips to the mountains, and the tempting thought of a swift, fleeting love affair, a romance with an unknown woman, whose name he did not know, suddenly took possession of him.

He beckoned coaxingly to the Pomeranian, and when the dog came up to him he shook his finger at it. The Pomeranian growled: Gurov shook his finger at it again.

The lady looked at him and at once dropped her eyes.

"He doesn't bite," she said, and blushed.

"May I give him a bone?" he asked; and when she nodded he asked courteously, "Have you been long in Yalta?"

"Five days."

"And I have already dragged out a fortnight here."

There was a brief silence.

"Time goes fast, and yet it is so dull here!" she said, not looking at him.

"That's only the fashion to say it is dull here. A provincial will live in Belyov or Zhidra and not be dull, and when he comes here it's 'Oh, the dullness! Oh, the dust!' One would think he came from Grenada."

She laughed. Then both continued eating in silence, like strangers, but after dinner they walked side by side; and there sprang up between them the light jesting conversation of people who are free and satisfied, to whom it does not matter where they go or what they talk about. They walked and talked of the strange light on the sea: the water was of a soft warm lilac hue, and there was a golden streak from the moon upon it. They talked of how sultry it was after a hot day. Gurov told her that he came from Moscow, that he had taken his degree in Arts, but had a post in a bank; that he had trained as an opera-singer, but had given it up, that he owned two houses in Moscow. . . . And from her he learnt that she had grown up in Petersburg, but had lived in S---- since her marriage two years before, that she was staying another month in Yalta, and that her husband, who needed a holiday too, might perhaps come and fetch her. She was not sure whether her husband had a post in a Crown Department or under the Provincial Council—and was amused by her own ignorance. And Gurov learnt, too, that she was called Anna Sergeyevna.

Afterwards he thought about her in his room at the hotel—thought she would certainly meet him next day; it would be sure to happen. As he got into bed he thought how lately she had been a girl at school, doing lessons like his own daughter; he recalled the diffidence, the angularity, that was still manifest in her laugh and her manner of talking with a stranger. This must have been the first time in her life she had been alone in surroundings in which she was followed, looked at, and spoken to merely from a secret motive which she could hardly fail to guess. He recalled her slender, delicate neck, her lovely grey eyes.

"There's something pathetic about her, anyway," he thought, and fell asleep.

II

A week had passed since they had made acquaintance. It was a holiday. It was sultry indoors, while in the street the wind whirled the dust round and round, and blew people's hats off. It was a thirsty day, and Gurov often went into the pavilion, and pressed Anna Sergeyevna to have syrup and water or an ice. One did not know what to do with oneself.

In the evening when the wind had dropped a little, they went out on the groyne to see the steamer come in. There were a great many people walking about the harbour; they had gathered to welcome someone, bringing bouquets. And two peculiarities of a well-dressed Yalta crowd were very conspicuous: the elderly ladies were dressed like young ones, and there were great numbers of generals.

Owing to the roughness of the sea, the steamer arrived late, after the sun had set, and it was a long time turning about before it reached the groyne. Anna Sergeyevna looked through her lorgnette at the steamer and the passengers as though looking for acquaintances, and when she turned to Gurov her eyes were shining. She talked a great deal and asked disconnected questions, forgetting next moment what she had asked; then she dropped her lorgnette in the crush.

The festive crowd began to disperse; it was too dark to see people's faces. The wind had completely dropped, but Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna still stood as though waiting to see someone else come from the steamer. Anna Sergeyevna was silent now, and sniffed the flowers without looking at Gurov.

"The weather is better this evening," he said. "Where shall we go now? Shall we drive somewhere?"

She made no answer.

Then he looked at her intently, and all at once put his arm round her and kissed her on the lips, and breathed in the moisture and the fragrance of the flowers; and he immediately looked round him, anxiously wondering whether anyone had seen them.

"Let us go to your hotel," he said softly. And both walked quickly.

The room was close and smelt of the scent she had bought at the Japanese shop. Gurov looked at her and thought: "What different people one meets in the world!" From the past he preserved memories of careless, good-natured women, who loved cheerfully and were grateful to him for the happiness he gave them, however brief it might be; and of women like his wife who loved without any genuine feeling, with superfluous phrases, affectedly, hysterically, with an expression that suggested that it was not love nor passion, but something more significant; and of two or three others, very beautiful, cold women, on whose faces he had caught a glimpse of a rapacious expression—an obstinate desire to snatch from life more than it could give, and these were capricious, unreflecting, domineering, unintelligent women not in their first youth, and when Gurov grew cold to them their beauty excited his hatred, and the lace on their linen seemed to him like scales.

But in this case there was still the diffidence, the angularity of inexperienced youth, an awkward feeling; and there was a sense of consternation as though someone had suddenly knocked at the door. The attitude of Anna Sergeyevna—"the lady with the dog"—to

what had happened was somehow peculiar, very grave, as though it were her fall—so it seemed, and it was strange and inappropriate. Her face dropped and faded, and on both sides of it her long hair hung down mournfully; she mused in a dejected attitude like "the woman who was a sinner" in an old-fashioned picture.

"It's wrong," she said. "You will be the first to despise me now."

There was a water-melon on the table. Gurov cut himself a slice and began eating it without haste. There followed at least half an hour of silence.

Anna Sergeyevna was touching; there was about her the purity of a good, simple woman who had seen little of life. The solitary candle burning on the table threw a faint light on her face, yet it was clear that she was very unhappy.

"How could I despise you?" asked Gurov. "You don't know what you are saying."

"God forgive me," she said, and her eyes filled with tears. "It's awful."

"You seem to feel you need to be forgiven."

"Forgiven? No. I am a bad, low woman; I despise myself and don't attempt to justify myself. It's not my husband but myself I have deceived. And not only just now; I have been deceiving myself for a long time. My husband may be a good, honest man, but he is a flunkey! I don't know what he does there, what his work is, but I know he is a flunkey! I was twenty when I was married to him. I have been tormented by curiosity; I wanted something better. 'There must be a different sort of life,' I said to myself. I wanted to live! To live, to live! . . . I was fired by curiosity . . . you don't understand it, but, I swear to God, I could not control myself; something happened to me: I could not be restrained. I told my husband I was ill, and came here. . . . And here I have been walking about as though I were dazed, like a mad creature; . . . and now I have become a vulgar, contemptible woman whom any one may despise."

Gurov felt bored already, listening to her. He was irritated by the naïve tone, by this remorse, so unexpected and inopportune; but for the tears in her eyes, he might have thought she was jesting or playing a part.

"I don't understand," he said softly. "What is it you want?"

She hid her face on his breast and pressed close to him.

"Believe me, believe me, I beseech you . . ." she said. "I love a pure, honest life, and sin is loathsome to me. I don't know what I am doing. Simple people say: 'The Evil One has beguiled me.' And I may say of myself now that the Evil One has beguiled me."

"Hush, hush! . . ." he muttered.

He looked at her fixed, scared eyes, kissed her, talked softly and affectionately, and by degrees she was comforted, and her gaiety returned; they both began laughing.

Afterwards when they went out there was not a soul on the sea-front. The town with its cypresses had quite a deathlike air, but the sea still broke noisily on the shore; a single barge was rocking on the waves, and a lantern was blinking sleepily on it.

They found a cab and drove to Oreanda.

"I found out your surname in the hall just now: it was written on the board—Von Diderits," said Gurov. "Is your husband a German?"

"No; I believe his grandfather was a German, but he is an Orthodox Russian himself."

At Oreanda they sat on a seat not far from the church, looked down at the sea, and were silent. Yalta was hardly visible through the morning mist; white clouds stood motionless on the mountain-tops. The leaves did not stir on the trees, grasshoppers chirruped, and the monotonous hollow sound of the sea rising up from below, spoke of the peace, of the eternal sleep awaiting us. So it must have sounded when there was no Yalta, no Oreanda here; so it sounds now, and it will sound as indifferently and monotonously when we are all no more. And in this constancy, in this complete indifference to the life and death of each of us, there lies hid, perhaps, a pledge of our eternal salvation, of the unceasing movement of life upon earth, of unceasing progress towards perfection. Sitting beside a young woman who in the dawn seemed so lovely, soothed and spellbound in these magical surroundings—the sea, mountains, clouds, the open sky—Gurov thought how in reality everything is beautiful in this world when one reflects: everything except what we think or do ourselves when we forget our human dignity and the higher aims of our existence.

A man walked up to them—probably a keeper—looked at them and walked away. And this detail seemed mysterious and beautiful, too. They saw a steamer come from Theodosia, with its lights out in the glow of dawn.

"There is dew on the grass," said Anna Sergeyevna, after a silence.

"Yes. It's time to go home."

They went back to the town.

Then they met every day at twelve o'clock on the sea-front, lunched and dined together, went for walks, admired the sea. She complained that she slept badly, that her heart throbbed violently; asked the same questions, troubled now by jealousy and now by the fear that he did not respect her sufficiently. And often in the square or gardens, when there was no one near them, he suddenly drew her to him and kissed her passionately. Complete idleness, these kisses in broad daylight while he looked round in dread of someone's seeing them, the heat, the smell of the sea, and the continual passing to and fro before him of idle, well-dressed, well-fed people, made a new man of him; he told Anna Sergeyevna how beautiful she was, how fascinating. He was impatiently passionate, he would not move a step away from her, while she was often pensive and continually urged him to confess that he did not respect her, did not love her in the least, and thought of her as nothing but a common woman. Rather late almost every evening they drove somewhere out of town, to Oreanda or to the waterfall; and the expedition was always a success, the scenery invariably impressed them as grand and beautiful.

They were expecting her husband to come, but a letter came from him, saying that there was something wrong with his eyes, and he entreated his wife to come home as quickly as possible. Anna Sergeyevna made haste to go.

"It's a good thing I am going away," she said to Gurov. "It's the finger of destiny!"

She went by coach and he went with her. They were driving the whole day. When she had got into a compartment of the express, and when the second bell had rung, she said:

"Let me look at you once more . . . look at you once again. That's right."

She did not shed tears, but was so sad that she seemed ill, and her face was quivering.

"I shall remember you . . . think of you," she said. "God be with you; be happy. Don't remember evil against me. We are parting forever —it must be so, for we ought never to have met. Well, God be with you."

The train moved off rapidly, its lights soon vanished from sight, and a minute later there was no sound of it, as though everything had conspired together to end as quickly as possible that sweet delirium, that madness. Left alone on the platform, and gazing into the dark distance, Gurov listened to the chirrup of the grasshoppers and the hum of the telegraph wires, feeling as though he had only just waked up. And he thought, musing, that there had been another episode or adventure in his life, and it, too, was at an end, and nothing was left of it but a memory. . . . He was moved, sad, and conscious of a slight remorse. This young woman whom he would never meet again had not been happy with him; he was genuinely warm and affectionate with her, but yet in his manner, his tone, and his caresses there had been a shade of light irony, the coarse condescension of a happy man who was, besides, almost twice her age. All the time she had called him kind, exceptional, lofty; obviously he had seemed to her different from what he really was, so he had unintentionally deceived her. . . .

Here at the station was already a scent of autumn; it was a cold evening.

"It's time for me to go north," thought Gurov as he left the platform. "High time!"

III

At home in Moscow everything was in its winter routine; the stoves were heated, and in the morning it was still dark when the children were having breakfast and getting ready for school, and the nurse would light the lamp for a short time. The frosts had begun already. When the first snow has fallen, on the first day of sledge-driving it is pleasant to see the white earth, the white roofs, to draw soft, delicious breath, and the season brings back the days of one's youth. The old limes and birches, white with hoar-frost, have a good-natured expression; they are nearer to one's heart than cypresses and palms, and near them one doesn't want to be thinking of the sea and the mountains.

Gurov was Moscow born; he arrived in Moscow on a fine frosty day, and when he put on his fur coat and warm gloves, and walked along Petrovka, and when on Saturday evening he heard the ringing of the bells, his recent trip and the places he had seen lost all charm for him. Little by little he became absorbed in Moscow life, greedily read three newspapers a day, and declared he did not read the Moscow papers on principle! He already felt a longing to go to restaurants, clubs, dinner-parties, anniversary celebrations, and he felt flattered at entertaining distinguished lawyers and artists, and at playing cards with a professor at the doctors' club. He could already eat a whole plateful of salt fish and cabbage.

In another month, he fancied, the image of Anna Sergeyevna would be shrouded in a mist in his memory, and only from time to time would visit him in his dreams with a touching smile as others did. But more than a month passed, real winter had come, and everything was still clear in his memory as though he had parted with Anna Sergeyevna only the day before. And his memories glowed more and more vividly. When in the evening stillness he heard from his study the voices of his children, preparing their lessons, or when he listened to a song or the organ at the restaurant, or the storm howled in the chimney, suddenly everything would rise up in his memory: what had happened on the groyne, and the early morning with the mist on the mountains, and the steamer coming from Theodosia, and the kisses. He would pace a long time about his room, remembering it all and smiling; then his memories passed into dreams, and in his fancy the past was mingled with what was to come. Anna Sergeyevna did not visit him in dreams, but followed him about everywhere like a shadow and haunted him. When he shut his eyes he saw her as though she were living before him, and she seemed to him lovelier, younger, tenderer than she was; and he imagined himself finer than he had been in Yalta. In the evenings she peeped out at him from the bookcase, from the fireplace, from the corner—he heard her breathing, the caressing rustle of her dress. In the street he watched the women, looking for someone like her.

He was tormented by an intense desire to confide his memories to someone. But in his home it was impossible to talk of his love, and he had no one outside; he could not talk to his tenants nor to any one at the bank. And what had he to talk of? Had he been in love, then? Had there been anything beautiful, poetical, or edifying or simply interesting in his relations with Anna Sergeyevna? And there was nothing for him but to talk vaguely of love, of woman, and no one guessed what it meant; only his wife twitched her black eyebrows, and said:

"The part of a lady-killer does not suit you at all, Dimitri."

One evening, coming out of the doctors' club with an official with whom he had been playing cards, he could not resist saying:

"If only you knew what a fascinating woman I made the acquaintance of in Yalta!"

The official got into his sledge and was driving away, but turned suddenly and shouted:

"Dmitri Dmitritch!"

"What?"

"You were right this evening: the sturgeon was a bit too strong!"

These words, so ordinary, for some reason moved Gurov to indignation, and struck him as degrading and unclean. What savage manners, what people! What senseless nights, what uninteresting, uneventful days! The rage for card-playing, the gluttony, the drunkenness, the continual talk always about the same thing. Useless pursuits and conversations always about the same things absorb the better part of one's time, the better part of one's strength, and in the end there is left a life grovelling and curtailed, worthless and trivial, and there is no escaping or getting away from it—just as though one were in a madhouse or a prison.

Gurov did not sleep all night, and was filled with indignation. And he had a headache all next day. And the next night he slept badly; he sat up in bed, thinking, or paced up and down his room. He was sick of his children, sick of the bank; he had no desire to go anywhere or to talk of anything.

In the holidays in December he prepared for a journey, and told his wife he was going to Petersburg to do something in the interests of a young friend—and he set off for S----. What for? He did not very well know himself. He wanted to see Anna Sergeyevna and to talk with her—to arrange a meeting, if possible.

He reached S---- in the morning, and took the best room at the hotel, in which the floor was covered with grey army cloth, and on the table was an inkstand, grey with dust and adorned with a figure on horseback, with its hat in its hand and its head broken off. The hotel porter gave him the necessary information; Von Diderits lived in a house of his own in Old Gontcharny Street—it was not far from the hotel: he was rich and lived in good style, and had his own horses; everyone in the town knew him. The porter pronounced the name "Dridirits."

Gurov went without haste to Old Gontcharny Street and found the house. Just opposite the house stretched a long grey fence adorned with nails.

"One would run away from a fence like that," thought Gurov, looking from the fence to the windows of the house and back again.

He considered: to-day was a holiday, and the husband would probably be at home. And in any case it would be tactless to go into the house and upset her. If he were to send her a note it might fall into her husband's hands, and then it might ruin everything. The best thing was to trust to chance. And he kept walking up and down the street by the fence, waiting for the chance. He saw a beggar go in at the gate and dogs fly at him; then an hour later he heard a piano, and the sounds were faint and indistinct. Probably it was

Anna Sergeyevna playing. The front door suddenly opened, and an old woman came out, followed by the familiar white Pomeranian. Gurov was on the point of calling to the dog, but his heart began beating violently, and in his excitement he could not remember the dog's name.

He walked up and down, and loathed the grey fence more and more, and by now he thought irritably that Anna Sergeyevna had forgotten him, and was perhaps already amusing herself with someone else, and that that was very natural in a young woman who had nothing to look at from morning till night but that confounded fence. He went back to his hotel room and sat for a long while on the sofa, not knowing what to do, then he had dinner and a long nap.

"How stupid and worrying it is!" he thought when he woke and looked at the dark windows: it was already evening. "Here I've had a good sleep for some reason. What shall I do in the night?"

He sat on the bed, which was covered by a cheap grey blanket, such as one sees in hospitals, and he taunted himself in his vexation:

"So much for the lady with the dog . . . so much for the adventure . . . . You're in a nice fix. . . ."

That morning at the station a poster in large letters had caught his eye. "The Geisha" was to be performed for the first time. He thought of this and went to the theatre.

"It's quite possible she may go to the first performance," he thought.

The theatre was full. As in all provincial theatres, there was a fog above the chandelier, the gallery was noisy and restless; in the front row the local dandies were standing up before the beginning of the performance, with their hands behind them; in the Governor's box the Governor's daughter, wearing a boa, was sitting in the front seat, while the Governor himself lurked modestly behind the curtain with only his hands visible; the orchestra was a long time tuning up; the stage curtain swayed. All the time the audience were coming in and taking their seats Gurov looked at them eagerly.

Anna Sergeyevna, too, came in. She sat down in the third row, and when Gurov looked at her his heart contracted, and he understood clearly that for him there was in the whole world no creature so near, so precious, and so important to him; she, this little woman, in no way remarkable, lost in a provincial crowd, with a vulgar lorgnette in her hand, filled his whole life now, was his sorrow and his joy, the one happiness that he now desired for himself, and to the sounds of the inferior orchestra, of the wretched provincial violins, he thought how lovely she was. He thought and dreamed.

A young man with small side-whiskers, tall and stooping, came in with Anna Sergeyevna and sat down beside her; he bent his head at every step and seemed to be continually bowing. Most likely this was the husband whom at Yalta, in a rush of bitter feeling, she had called a flunkey. And there really was in his long figure, his side-whiskers, and the small bald patch on his head, something of the flunkey's obsequiousness; his smile was sugary, and in his buttonhole there was some badge of distinction like the number on a waiter.

During the first interval the husband went away to smoke; she remained alone in her stall. Gurov, who was sitting in the stalls, too, went up to her and said in a trembling voice, with a forced smile:

"Good-evening."

She glanced at him and turned pale, then glanced again with horror, unable to believe her eyes, and tightly gripped the fan and the lorgnette in her hands, evidently struggling with herself not to faint. Both were silent. She was sitting, he was standing, frightened by her confusion and not venturing to sit down beside her. The violins and the flute began tuning up. He felt suddenly frightened; it seemed as though all the people in the boxes were looking at them. She got up and went quickly to the door; he followed her, and both walked senselessly along passages, and up and down stairs, and figures in legal, scholastic, and civil service uniforms, all wearing badges, flitted before their eyes. They caught glimpses of ladies, of fur coats hanging on pegs; the draughts blew on them, bringing a smell of stale tobacco. And Gurov, whose heart was beating violently, thought:

"Oh, heavens! Why are these people here and this orchestra! . . ."

And at that instant he recalled how when he had seen Anna Sergeyevna off at the station he had thought that everything was over and they would never meet again. But how far they were still from the end!

On the narrow, gloomy staircase over which was written "To the Amphitheatre," she stopped.

"How you have frightened me!" she said, breathing hard, still pale and overwhelmed. "Oh, how you have frightened me! I am half dead. Why have you come? Why?"

"But do understand, Anna, do understand . . ." he said hastily in a low voice. "I entreat you to understand. . . ."

She looked at him with dread, with entreaty, with love; she looked at him intently, to keep his features more distinctly in her memory.

"I am so unhappy," she went on, not heeding him. "I have thought of nothing but you all the time; I live only in the thought of you. And I wanted to forget, to forget you; but why, oh, why, have you come?"

On the landing above them two schoolboys were smoking and looking down, but that was nothing to Gurov; he drew Anna Sergeyevna to him, and began kissing her face, her cheeks, and her hands.

"What are you doing, what are you doing!" she cried in horror, pushing him away. "We are mad. Go away to-day; go away at once. . . . I beseech you by all that is sacred, I implore you. . . . There are people coming this way!"

Someone was coming up the stairs.

"You must go away," Anna Sergeyevna went on in a whisper. "Do you hear, Dmitri Dmitritch? I will come and see you in Moscow. I have never been happy; I am miserable now, and I never, never shall be happy, never! Don't make me suffer still more! I swear I'll come to Moscow. But now let us part. My precious, good, dear one, we must part!"

She pressed his hand and began rapidly going downstairs, looking round at him, and from her eyes he could see that she really was unhappy. Gurov stood for a little while, listened, then, when all sound had died away, he found his coat and left the theatre.

IV

And Anna Sergeyevna began coming to see him in Moscow. Once in two or three months she left S----, telling her husband that she was going to consult a doctor about an internal complaint—and her husband believed her, and did not believe her. In Moscow she stayed at the Slaviansky Bazaar hotel, and at once sent a man in a red cap to Gurov. Gurov went to see her, and no one in Moscow knew of it.

Once he was going to see her in this way on a winter morning (the messenger had come the evening before when he was out). With him walked his daughter, whom he wanted to take to school: it was on the way. Snow was falling in big wet flakes.

"It's three degrees above freezing-point, and yet it is snowing," said Gurov to his daughter. "The thaw is only on the surface of the earth; there is quite a different temperature at a greater height in the atmosphere."

"And why are there no thunderstorms in the winter, father?"

He explained that, too. He talked, thinking all the while that he was going to see her, and no living soul knew of it, and probably never would know. He had two lives: one, open, seen and known by all who cared to know, full of relative truth and of relative falsehood, exactly like the lives of his friends and acquaintances; and another life running its course in secret. And through some strange, perhaps accidental, conjunction of circumstances, everything that was essential, of interest and of value to him, everything in which he was sincere and did not deceive himself, everything that made the kernel of his life, was hidden from other people; and all that was false in him, the sheath in which he hid himself to conceal the truth—such, for instance, as his work in the bank, his discussions at the club, his "lower race," his presence with his wife at anniversary festivities—all that was open. And he judged of others by himself, not believing in what he saw, and always believing that every man had his real, most interesting life under the cover of secrecy and under the cover of night. All personal life rested on secrecy, and possibly it was partly on that account that civilised man was so nervously anxious that personal privacy should be respected.

After leaving his daughter at school, Gurov went on to the Slaviansky Bazaar. He took off his fur coat below, went upstairs, and softly knocked at the door. Anna Sergeyevna, wearing his favourite grey dress, exhausted by the journey and the suspense, had been expecting him since the evening before. She was pale; she looked at him, and did not smile, and he had hardly come in when she fell on his breast. Their kiss was slow and prolonged, as though they had not met for two years.

"Well, how are you getting on there?" he asked. "What news?"

"Wait; I'll tell you directly. . . . I can't talk."

She could not speak; she was crying. She turned away from him, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Let her have her cry out. I'll sit down and wait," he thought, and he sat down in an arm-chair.

Then he rang and asked for tea to be brought him, and while he drank his tea she remained standing at the window with her back to him. She was crying from emotion, from the miserable consciousness that their life was so hard for them; they could only meet in secret, hiding themselves from people, like thieves! Was not their life shattered?

"Come, do stop!" he said.

It was evident to him that this love of theirs would not soon be over, that he could not see the end of it. Anna Sergeyevna grew more and more attached to him. She adored him, and it was unthinkable to say to her that it was bound to have an end some day; besides, she would not have believed it!

He went up to her and took her by the shoulders to say something affectionate and cheering, and at that moment he saw himself in the looking-glass.

His hair was already beginning to turn grey. And it seemed strange to him that he had grown so much older, so much plainer during the last few years. The shoulders on which his hands rested were warm and quivering. He felt compassion for this life, still so warm and lovely, but probably already not far from beginning to fade and wither like his own. Why did she love him so much? He always seemed to women different from what he was, and they loved in him not himself, but the man created by their imagination, whom they had been eagerly seeking all their lives; and afterwards, when they noticed their mistake, they loved him all the same. And not one of them had been happy with him. Time passed, he had made their acquaintance, got on with them, parted, but he had never once loved; it was anything you like, but not love.

And only now when his head was grey he had fallen properly, really in love—for the first time in his life.

Anna Sergeyevna and he loved each other like people very close and akin, like husband and wife, like tender friends; it seemed to them that fate itself had meant them for one another, and they could not understand why he had a wife and she a husband; and it was as though they were a pair of birds of passage, caught and forced to live in different cages. They forgave each other for what they were ashamed of in their past, they forgave everything in the present, and felt that this love of theirs had changed them both.

In moments of depression in the past he had comforted himself with any arguments that came into his mind, but now he no longer cared for arguments; he felt profound compassion, he wanted to be sincere and tender. . . .

"Don't cry, my darling," he said. "You've had your cry; that's enough. . . . Let us talk now, let us think of some plan."

Then they spent a long while taking counsel together, talked of how to avoid the necessity for secrecy, for deception, for living in different towns and not seeing each other for long at a time. How could they be free from this intolerable bondage?

"How? How?" he asked, clutching his head. "How?"

And it seemed as though in a little while the solution would be found, and then a new and splendid life would begin; and it was clear to both of them that they had still a long, long road before them, and that the most complicated and difficult part of it was only just beginning.

This page titled 3.7: Anton Chekhov's "The Lady with the Dog" (1899) is shared under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anita Turlington, Matthew Horton, Karen Dodson, Laura Getty, Kyounghye Kwon, Georgia, & Laura Ng (GALILEO Open Learning Materials) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- **2.2.2.1: The Lady with the Dog** by Anita Turlington, Matthew Horton, Karen Dodson, Laura Getty, Kyounghye Kwon, Georgia, & Laura Ng is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0. Original source: https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/english-textbooks/18/.

3.8: Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" (1922)

This translation, which has been prepared by Ian Johnston of Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC, Canada, is in the public domain and may be used by anyone, in whole or in part, without permission and without charge, provided the source is acknowledged, released October 2003.

In the last decades interest in hunger artists has declined considerably. Whereas in earlier days there was good money to be earned putting on major productions of this sort under one's own management, nowadays that is totally impossible. Those were different times. Back then the hunger artist captured the attention of the entire city. From day to day while the fasting lasted, participation increased. Everyone wanted to see the hunger artist at least daily. During the final days there were people with subscription tickets who sat all day in front of the small barred cage. And there were even viewing hours at night, their impact heightened by torchlight. On fine days the cage was dragged out into the open air, and then the hunger artist was put on display particularly for the children. While for grown-ups the hunger artist was often merely a joke, something they participated in because it was fashionable, the children looked on amazed, their mouths open, holding each other's hands for safety, as he sat there on scattered straw—spurning a chair—in a black tights, looking pale, with his ribs sticking out prominently, sometimes nodding politely, answering questions with a forced smile, even sticking his arm out through the bars to let people feel how emaciated he was, but then completely sinking back into himself, so that he paid no attention to anything, not even to what was so important to him, the striking of the clock, which was the single furnishing in the cage, merely looking out in front of him with his eyes almost shut and now and then sipping from a tiny glass of water to moisten his lips.

Apart from the changing groups of spectators there were also constant observers chosen by the public—strangely enough they were usually butchers—who, always three at a time, were given the task of observing the hunger artist day and night, so that he didn't get something to eat in some secret manner. It was, however, merely a formality, introduced to reassure the masses, for those who understood knew well enough that during the period of fasting the hunger artist would never, under any circumstances, have eaten the slightest thing, not even if compelled by force. The honour of his art forbade it. Naturally, none of the watchers understood that. Sometimes there were nightly groups of watchers who carried out their vigil very laxly, deliberately sitting together in a distant corner and putting all their attention into playing cards there, clearly intending to allow the hunger artist a small refreshment, which, according to their way of thinking, he could get from some secret supplies. Nothing was more excruciating to the hunger artist than such watchers. They depressed him. They made his fasting terribly difficult. Sometimes he overcame his weakness and sang during the time they were observing, for as long as he could keep it up, to show people how unjust their suspicions about him were. But that was little help. For then they just wondered among themselves about his skill at being able to eat even while singing. He much preferred the observers who sat down right against the bars and, not satisfied with the dim backlighting of the room, illuminated him with electric flashlights. The glaring light didn't bother him in the slightest. Generally he couldn't sleep at all, and he could always doze under any lighting and at any hour, even in an overcrowded, noisy auditorium. With such observers, he was very happily prepared to spend the entire night without sleeping. He was very pleased to joke with them, to recount stories from his nomadic life and then, in turn, to listen their stories—doing everything just to keep them awake, so that he could keep showing them once again that he had nothing to eat in his cage and that he was fasting as none of them could.

He was happiest, however, when morning came and a lavish breakfast was brought for them at his own expense, on which they hurled themselves with the appetite of healthy men after a hard night's work without sleep. True, there were still people who wanted to see in this breakfast an unfair means of influencing the observers, but that was going too far, and if they were asked whether they wanted to undertake the observers' night shift for its own sake, without the breakfast, they excused themselves. But nonetheless they stood by their suspicions.

However, it was, in general, part of fasting that these doubts were inextricably associated with it. For, in fact, no one was in a position to spend time watching the hunger artist every day and night, so no one could know, on the basis of his own observation, whether this was a case of truly uninterrupted, flawless fasting. The hunger artist himself was the only one who could know that and, at the same time, the only spectator capable of being completely satisfied with his own fasting. But the reason he was never satisfied was something different. Perhaps it was not fasting at all which made him so very emaciated that many people, to their own regret, had to stay away from his performance, because they couldn't bear to look at him. For he was also so skeletal out of dissatisfaction with himself, because he alone knew something that even initiates didn't know—how easy it was to fast. It was the easiest thing in the world. About this he did not remain silent, but people did not believe him. At best they thought he was being modest. Most of them, however, believed he was a publicity seeker or a total swindler, for whom, at all events, fasting was easy, because he understood how to make it easy, and then had the nerve to half admit it. He had to accept all that. Over the years he had

become accustomed to it. But this dissatisfaction kept gnawing at his insides all the time and never yet—and this one had to say to his credit—had he left the cage of his own free will after any period of fasting.

The impresario had set the maximum length of time for the fast at forty days—he would never allow the fasting go on beyond that point, not even in the cosmopolitan cities. And, in fact, he had a good reason. Experience had shown that for about forty days one could increasingly whip up a city's interest by gradually increasing advertising, but that then the people turned away—one could demonstrate a significant decline in popularity. In this respect, there were, of course, small differences among different towns and among different countries, but as a rule it was true that forty days was the maximum length of time.

So then on the fortieth day the door of the cage—which was covered with flowers—was opened, an enthusiastic audience filled the amphitheatre, a military band played, two doctors entered the cage, in order to take the necessary measurements of the hunger artist, the results were announced to the auditorium through a megaphone, and finally two young ladies arrived, happy about the fact that they were the ones who had just been selected by lot, seeking to lead the hunger artist down a couple of steps out of the cage, where on a small table a carefully chosen hospital meal was laid out. And at this moment the hunger artist always fought back. Of course, he still freely laid his bony arms in the helpful outstretched hands of the ladies bending over him, but he did not want to stand up. Why stop right now after forty days? He could have kept going for even longer, for an unlimited length of time. Why stop right now, when he was in his best form, indeed, not yet even in his best fasting form? Why did people want to rob him of the fame of fasting longer, not just so that he could become the greatest hunger artist of all time, which he probably was already, but also so that he could surpass himself in some unimaginable way, for he felt there were no limits to his capacity for fasting. Why did this crowd, which pretended to admire him so much, have so little patience with him? If he kept going and kept fasting longer, why would they not tolerate it? Then, too, he was tired and felt good sitting in the straw. Now he was supposed to stand up straight and tall and go to eat, something which, when he just imagined it, made him feel nauseous right away. With great difficulty he repressed mentioning this only out of consideration for the women. And he looked up into the eyes of these women, apparently so friendly but in reality so cruel, and shook his excessively heavy head on his feeble neck.

But then happened what always happened. The impresario came and in silence—the music made talking impossible—raised his arms over the hunger artist, as if inviting heaven to look upon its work here on the straw, this unfortunate martyr, something the hunger artist certainly was, only in a completely different sense, then grabbed the hunger artist around his thin waist, in the process wanting with his exaggerated caution to make people believe that here he had to deal with something fragile, and handed him over —not without secretly shaking him a little, so that the hunger artist's legs and upper body swung back and forth uncontrollably—to the women, who had in the meantime turned as pale as death. At this point, the hunger artist endured everything. His head lay on his chest—it was as if it had inexplicably rolled around and just stopped there—his body was arched back, his legs, in an impulse of self-preservation, pressed themselves together at the knees, but scraped the ground, as if they were not really on the floor but were looking for the real ground, and the entire weight of his body, admittedly very small, lay against one of the women, who appealed for help with flustered breath, for she had not imagined her post of honour would be like this, and then stretched her neck as far as possible, to keep her face from the least contact with the hunger artist, but then, when she couldn't manage this and her more fortunate companion didn't come to her assistance but trembled and remained content to hold in front of her the hunger artist's hand, that small bundle of knuckles, she broke into tears, to the delighted laughter of the auditorium, and had to be relieved by an attendant who had been standing ready for some time. Then came the meal. The impresario put a little food into mouth of the hunger artist, now half unconscious, as if fainting, and kept up a cheerful patter designed to divert attention away from the hunger artist's condition. Then a toast was proposed to the public, which was supposedly whispered to the impresario by the hunger artist, the orchestra confirmed everything with a great fanfare, people dispersed, and no one had the right to be dissatisfied with the event, no one except the hunger artist—he was always the only one.

He lived this way, taking small regular breaks, for many years, apparently in the spotlight, honoured by the world, but for all that his mood was usually gloomy, and it kept growing gloomier all the time, because no one understood how to take him seriously. But how was he to find consolation? What was there left for him to wish for? And if a good-natured man who felt sorry for him ever wanted to explain to him that his sadness probably came from his fasting, then it could happen that the hunger artist responded with an outburst of rage and began to shake the bars like an animal, frightening everyone. But the impresario had a way of punishing moments like this, something he was happy to use. He would make an apology for the hunger artist to the assembled public, conceding that the irritability had been provoked only by his fasting, something quite intelligible to well-fed people and capable of excusing the behaviour of the hunger artist without further explanation. From there he would move on to speak about the equally hard to understand claim of the hunger artist that he could go on fasting for much longer than he was doing. He would praise the lofty striving, the good will, and the great self-denial no doubt contained in this claim, but then would try to contradict it simply by producing photographs, which were also on sale, for in the pictures one could see the hunger artist on the fortieth day of his fast, in

bed, almost dead from exhaustion. Although the hunger artist was very familiar with this perversion of the truth, it always strained his nerves again and was too much for him. What was a result of the premature ending of the fast people were now proposing as its cause! It was impossible to fight against this lack of understanding, against this world of misunderstanding. In good faith he always listened eagerly to the impresario at the bars of his cage, but each time, once the photographs came out, he would let go of the bars and, with a sigh, sink back into the straw, and a reassured public could come up again and view him.

When those who had witnessed such scenes thought back on them a few years later, often they were unable to understand themselves. For in the meantime that change mentioned above had set it. It happened almost immediately. There may have been more profound reasons for it, but who bothered to discover what they were? At any rate, one day the pampered hunger artist saw himself abandoned by the crowd of pleasure seekers, who preferred to stream to other attractions. The impresario chased around half of Europe one more time with him, to see whether he could still re-discover the old interest here and there. It was all futile. It was as if a secret agreement against the fasting performances had developed everywhere. Naturally, it couldn't really have happened all at once, and people later remembered some things which in the days of intoxicating success they hadn't paid sufficient attention to, some inadequately suppressed indications, but now it was too late to do anything to counter them. Of course, it was certain that the popularity of fasting would return once more someday, but for those now alive that was no consolation. What was the hunger artist to do now? A man whom thousands of people had cheered on could not display himself in show booths at small fun fairs. The hunger artist was not only too old to take up a different profession, but was fanatically devoted to fasting more than anything else. So he said farewell to the impresario, an incomparable companion on his life's road, and let himself be hired by a large circus. In order to spare his own feelings, he didn't even look at the terms of his contract at all.

A large circus with its huge number of men, animals, and gimmicks, which are constantly being let go and replenished, can use anyone at any time, even a hunger artist, provided, of course, his demands are modest. Moreover, in this particular case it was not only the hunger artist himself who was engaged, but also his old and famous name. In fact, given the characteristic nature of his art, which was not diminished by his advancing age, one could never claim that a worn out artist, who no longer stood at the pinnacle of his ability, wanted to escape to a quiet position in the circus. On the contrary, the hunger artist declared that he could fast just as well as in earlier times—something that was entirely credible. Indeed, he even affirmed that if people would let him do what he wanted—and he was promised this without further ado—he would really now legitimately amaze the world for the first time, an assertion which, however, given the mood of the time, which the hunger artist in his enthusiasm easily overlooked, only brought smiles from the experts.

However, basically the hunger artist had not forgotten his sense of the way things really were, and he took it as self-evident that people would not set him and his cage up as the star attraction somewhere in the middle of the arena, but would move him outside in some other readily accessible spot near the animal stalls. Huge brightly painted signs surrounded the cage and announced what there was to look at there. During the intervals in the main performance, when the general public pushed out towards the menagerie in order to see the animals, they could hardly avoid moving past the hunger artist and stopping there a moment. They would perhaps have remained with him longer, if those pushing up behind them in the narrow passage way, who did not understand this pause on the way to the animal stalls they wanted to see, had not made a longer peaceful observation impossible. This was also the reason why the hunger artist began to tremble at these visiting hours, which he naturally used to long for as the main purpose of his life. In the early days he could hardly wait for the pauses in the performances. He had looked forward with delight to the crowd pouring around him, until he became convinced only too quickly—and even the most stubborn, almost deliberate self-deception could not hold out against the experience—that, judging by their intentions, most of these people were, again and again without exception, only visiting the menagerie. And this view from a distance still remained his most beautiful moment. For when they had come right up to him, he immediately got an earful from the shouting of the two steadily increasing groups, the ones who wanted to take their time looking at the hunger artist, not with any understanding but on a whim or from mere defiance—for him these ones were soon the more painful—and a second group of people whose only demand was to go straight to the animal stalls.

Once the large crowds had passed, the late comers would arrive, and although there was nothing preventing these people any more from sticking around for as long as they wanted, they rushed past with long strides, almost without a sideways glance, to get to the animals in time. And it was an all-too-rare stroke of luck when the father of a family came by with his children, pointed his finger at the hunger artist, gave a detailed explanation about what was going on here, and talked of earlier years, when he had been present at similar but incomparably more magnificent performances, and then the children, because they had been inadequately prepared at school and in life, always stood around still uncomprehendingly. What was fasting to them? But nonetheless the brightness of the look in their searching eyes revealed something of new and more gracious times coming. Perhaps, the hunger artist said to himself sometimes, everything would be a little better if his location were not quite so near the animal stalls. That way it would be easy for people to make their choice, to say nothing of the fact that he was very upset and constantly depressed by the

stink from the stalls, the animals' commotion at night, the pieces of raw meat dragged past him for the carnivorous beasts, and the roars at feeding time. But he did not dare to approach the administration about it. In any case, he had the animals to thank for the crowds of visitors among whom, here and there, there could be one destined for him. And who knew where they would hide him if he wished to remind them of his existence and, along with that, of the fact that, strictly speaking, he was only an obstacle on the way to the menagerie.

A small obstacle, at any rate, a constantly diminishing obstacle. People got used to the strange notion that in these times they would want to pay attention to a hunger artist, and with this habitual awareness the judgment on him was pronounced. He might fast as well as he could—and he did—but nothing could save him any more. People went straight past him. Try to explain the art of fasting to anyone! If someone doesn't feel it, then he cannot be made to understand it. The beautiful signs became dirty and illegible. People tore them down, and no one thought of replacing them. The small table with the number of days the fasting had lasted, which early on had been carefully renewed every day, remained unchanged for a long time, for after the first weeks the staff grew tired of even this small task. And so the hunger artist kept fasting on and on, as he once had dreamed about in earlier times, and he had no difficulty succeeding in achieving what he had predicted back then, but no one was counting the days—no one, not even the hunger artist himself, knew how great his achievement was by this point, and his heart grew heavy. And when once in a while a person strolling past stood there making fun of the old number and talking of a swindle, that was in a sense the stupidest lie which indifference and innate maliciousness could invent, for the hunger artist was not being deceptive—he was working honestly—but the world was cheating him of his reward.

Many days went by once more, and this, too, came to an end. Finally the cage caught the attention of a supervisor, and he asked the attendant why they had left this perfectly useful cage standing here unused with rotting straw inside. Nobody knew, until one man, with the help of the table with the number on it, remembered the hunger artist. They pushed the straw around with a pole and found the hunger artist in there. "Are you still fasting?" the supervisor asked. "When are you finally going to stop?" "Forgive me everything," whispered the hunger artist. Only the supervisor, who was pressing his ear up against the cage, understood him. "Certainly," said the supervisor, tapping his forehead with his finger in order to indicate to the spectators the state the hunger artist was in, "we forgive you." "I always wanted you to admire my fasting," said the hunger artist. "But we do admire it," said the supervisor obligingly. "But you shouldn't admire it," said the hunger artist. "Well then, we don't admire it," said the supervisor, "but why shouldn't we admire it?" "Because I had to fast. I can't do anything else," said the hunger artist. "Just look at you," said the supervisor, "why can't you do anything else?" "Because," said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and, with his lips pursed as if for a kiss, speaking right into the supervisor's ear so that he wouldn't miss anything, "because I couldn't find a food which I enjoyed. If had found that, believe me, I would not have made a spectacle of myself and would have eaten to my heart's content, like you and everyone else." Those were his last words, but in his failing eyes there was the firm, if no longer proud, conviction that he was continuing to fast.

"All right, tidy this up now," said the supervisor. And they buried the hunger artist along with the straw. But in his cage they put a young panther. Even for a person with the dullest mind it was clearly refreshing to see this wild animal throwing itself around in this cage, which had been dreary for such a long time. It lacked nothing. Without thinking about it for any length of time, the guards brought the animal food. It enjoyed the taste and never seemed to miss its freedom. This noble body, equipped with everything necessary, almost to the point of bursting, also appeared to carry freedom around with it. That seem to be located somewhere or other in its teeth, and its joy in living came with such strong passion from its throat that it was not easy for spectators to keep watching. But they controlled themselves, kept pressing around the cage, and had no desire to move on.

3.8: Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" (1922) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **5.14: A Hunger Artist by Franz Kafka** has no license indicated.

3.9: Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894)

The Story of an Hour

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will--as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under hte breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him--sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

"Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhold, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door."

"Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed

at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.
When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease--of the joy that kills.

Exercise 5.2.1

Questions

1. What is the significance of Mrs. Mallard's "heart trouble"?
2. What is the significance of freedom in the story? How does the author portray this idea?
3. Describe Mrs. Mallard's reaction to the death of her husband. Why do you think she feels this way?
4. What does Richards represent in the story?
5. What does Josephine represent in the story?
6. What view of marriage is portrayed in the story? Can this view still apply today?
7. Describe Mrs. Mallard's journey in the story.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from Accelerated English by Ashley Paul, license CC-BY-SA

This page titled 3.9: Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.2: Chopin, Kate "The Story of an Hour" (1894)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

3.10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)

The Yelllow Wallpaper

by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

1

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and *perhaps*—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—*perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see, he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to "work" until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid; but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a *draught*, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself,—before him, at least,—and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! But John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery, at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was a nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate, and provoke study, and when you follow the lame, uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions.

The color is repellant, almost revolting; a smouldering, unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away,—he hates to have me write a word.

2

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no *reason* to suffer, and that satisfies him.

Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!

Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able—to dress and entertain, and order things.

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!

And yet I *cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous.

I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wallpaper!

At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

He said that after the wallpaper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

“You know the place is doing you good,” he said, “and really, dear, I don’t care to renovate the house just for a three months’ rental.”

“Then do let us go downstairs,” I said, “there are such pretty rooms there.”

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down cellar if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain.

But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.

It is as airy and comfortable a room as any one need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I’m really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper.

Out of one window I can see the garden, those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees.

Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.

I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fire-works in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it *knew* what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside-down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn’t match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have! I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed, which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

But I don’t mind it a bit—only the paper.

There comes John’s sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing.

She is a perfect, and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows.

There is one that commands the road, a lovely, shaded, winding road, and one that just looks off over the country. A lovely country, too, full of great elms and velvet meadows.

This wallpaper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.

But in the places where it isn't faded, and where the sun is just so, I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.

There's sister on the stairs!

3

Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are gone and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we just had mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.

But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall.

But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I don't feel as if it was worth while to turn my hand over for anything, and I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases, and Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want her to.

So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal.

I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper. Perhaps *because* of the wallpaper.

It dwells in my mind so!

I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say, at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of a conclusion.

I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way each breadth stands alone, the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of "debased Romanesque" with *delirium tremens*—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze, and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the room where it is almost intact, and there, when the cross-lights fade and the low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation after all,—the interminable grotesques seem to form around a common center and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap, I guess.

4

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I musn't lose my strength, and has me take cod-liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness, I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper.

If we had not used it that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all. I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them any more,—I am too wise,—but I keep watch of it all the same.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!

5

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night.

It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around, just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move, and when I came back John was awake.

“What is it, little girl?” he said. “Don’t go walking about like that—you’ll get cold.”

I though it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

“Why darling!” said he, “our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can’t see how to leave before.

“The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better. I feel really much easier about you.”

“I don’t weigh a bit more,” said I, “nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening, when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away.”

“Bless her little heart!” said he with a big hug; “she shall be as sick as she pleases! But now let’s improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning!”

“And you won’t go away?” I asked gloomily.

“Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really, dear, you are better!”

“Better in body perhaps”—I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

“My darling,” said he, “I beg of you, for my sake and for our child’s sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?”

So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn’t,—I lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing.

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well under way in following, it turns a back somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions,—why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes.

When the sun shoots in through the east window—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it.

That is why I watch it always.

By moonlight—the moon shines in all night when there is a moon—I wouldn’t know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn’t realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind,—that dim sub-pattern,—but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can.

Indeed, he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit, I am convinced, for, you see, I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake,—oh, no!

The fact is, I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis, that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times *looking at the paper!* And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, and looked quite angry—asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful!

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!

6

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wallpaper.

I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was *because* of the wallpaper—he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away.

I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough.

7

I'm feeling ever so much better! I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch developments; but I sleep a good deal in the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and perplexing.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously.

It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things.

But there is something else about that paper—the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here.

It creeps all over the house.

I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it—there is that smell!

Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like.

It is not bad—at first, and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.

In this damp weather it is awful. I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell.

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the *color* of the paper! A yellow smell.

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs round the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even *smooch*, as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!

8

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside-down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad.

9

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her!

I can see her out of every one of my windows!

It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I see her on that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden.

I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.

And John is so queer now, that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at one time.

And though I always see her she *may* be able to creep faster than I can turn!

I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind.

10

If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night, for all I'm so quiet!

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't see through him!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are secretly affected by it.

11

Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John is to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing! but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight, and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me I declared I would finish it to-day!

We go away to-morrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing.

She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but I must not get tired.

How she betrayed herself that time!

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me—not *alive!*

She tried to get me out of the room—it was too patent! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could; and not to wake me even for dinner—I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but that great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs to-night, and take the boat home to-morrow.

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.

I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.

I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will *not* move!

I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to *look* out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?

But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don't get *me* out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why, there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying for an axe.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"John dear!" said I in the gentlest voice, "the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

Then he said—very quietly indeed, "Open the door, my darling!"

"I can't," said I. "The key is down by the front door under a plantain leaf!"

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it, of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing!"

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

Exercise 5.3.1

Questions

1. What is the meaning of the title? Why did Gilman use first person narration? Why is the female protagonist unnamed throughout the text?

2. How would you describe the narrator's voice in this text? How does that voice evolve over the course of the novella? How does the fragmented style of the narrative influence you as a reader?

3. How does Gilman engage with traditional ideas of femininity in this story? What do the house and wallpaper symbolize? What does the woman/women in the wallpaper represent?

4. What is the meaning of the last scene? Has this woman liberated herself from patriarchy as an individual through her madness or has she experienced the ultimate victimization?

5. Gilman was very much an activist writer and authored texts in many different voices (the social scientist, the journalist, the utopian writer, the Gothic writer). What is she advocating in this story? What are the risks of this narrative strategy for a politically-oriented feminist writer?

6. What contemporary issues does "The Yellow Wallpaper" evoke? Why do you think it has become one of the five most popular readings in college courses?

Optional Reading

Readings about the author and literary analysis of the story can be found here.

Contributors and Attributions

Section on questions adapted from Introduction to Women and Gender Studies from MIT Open Courseware, license CC-BY-NC-SA

This page titled 3.10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) is shared under a Public Domain license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.3: Gilman, Charlotte Perkins "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed Public Domain.

3.11: Additional Readings

3.11: Additional Readings is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

3.11.1: Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820)

Found Among the Paper of the Late Diedrich Knickerbocker

> ***A pleasing land of drowsy head it was,***
> ***Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye;***
> ***And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,***
> ***Forever flushing round a summer sky.***
> ***CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.***

In the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore of the Hudson, at that broad expansion of the river denominated by the ancient Dutch navigators the Tappan Zee, and where they always prudently shortened sail and implored the protection of St. Nicholas when they crossed, there lies a small market town or rural port, which by some is called Greensburgh, but which is more generally and properly known by the name of Tarry Town. This name was given, we are told, in former days, by the good housewives of the adjacent country, from the inveterate propensity of their husbands to linger about the village tavern on market days. Be that as it may, I do not vouch for the fact, but merely advert to it, for the sake of being precise and authentic. Not far from this village, perhaps about two miles, there is a little valley or rather lap of land among high hills, which is one of the quietest places in the whole world. A small brook glides through it, with just murmur enough to lull one to repose; and the occasional whistle of a quail or tapping of a woodpecker is almost the only sound that ever breaks in upon the uniform tranquillity.

I recollect that, when a stripling, my first exploit in squirrel-shooting was in a grove of tall walnut-trees that shades one side of the valley. I had wandered into it at noontime, when all nature is peculiarly quiet, and was startled by the roar of my own gun, as it broke the Sabbath stillness around and was prolonged and reverberated by the angry echoes. If ever I should wish for a retreat whither I might steal from the world and its distractions, and dream quietly away the remnant of a troubled life, I know of none more promising than this little valley.

From the listless repose of the place, and the peculiar character of its inhabitants, who are descendants from the original Dutch settlers, this sequestered glen has long been known by the name of SLEEPY HOLLOW, and its rustic lads are called the Sleepy Hollow Boys throughout all the neighboring country. A drowsy, dreamy influence seems to hang over the land, and to pervade the very atmosphere. Some say that the place was bewitched by a High German doctor, during the early days of the settlement; others, that an old Indian chief, the prophet or wizard of his tribe, held his powwows there before the country was discovered by Master Hendrick Hudson. Certain it is, the place still continues under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie. They are given to all kinds of marvellous beliefs, are subject to trances and visions, and frequently see strange sights, and hear music and voices in the air. The whole neighborhood abounds with local tales, haunted spots, and twilight superstitions; stars shoot and meteors glare oftener across the valley than in any other part of the country, and the nightmare, with her whole ninefold, seems to make it the favorite scene of her gambols.

The dominant spirit, however, that haunts this enchanted region, and seems to be commander-in-chief of all the powers of the air, is the apparition of a figure on horseback, without a head. It is said by some to be the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannon-ball, in some nameless battle during the Revolutionary War, and who is ever and anon seen by the country folk hurrying along in the gloom of night, as if on the wings of the wind. His haunts are not confined to the valley, but extend at times to the adjacent roads, and especially to the vicinity of a church at no great distance. Indeed, certain of the most authentic historians of those parts, who have been careful in collecting and collating the floating facts concerning this spectre, allege that the body of the trooper having been buried in the churchyard, the ghost rides forth to the scene of battle in nightly quest of his head, and that the rushing speed with which he sometimes passes along the Hollow, like a midnight blast, is owing to his being belated, and in a hurry to get back to the churchyard before daybreak.

Such is the general purport of this legendary superstition, which has furnished materials for many a wild story in that region of shadows; and the spectre is known at all the country firesides, by the name of the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow.

It is remarkable that the visionary propensity I have mentioned is not confined to the native inhabitants of the valley, but is unconsciously imbibed by every one who resides there for a time. However wide awake they may have been before they entered

that sleepy region, they are sure, in a little time, to inhale the witching influence of the air, and begin to grow imaginative, to dream dreams, and see apparitions.

I mention this peaceful spot with all possible laud, for it is in such little retired Dutch valleys, found here and there embosomed in the great State of New York, that population, manners, and customs remain fixed, while the great torrent of migration and improvement, which is making such incessant changes in other parts of this restless country, sweeps by them unobserved. They are like those little nooks of still water, which border a rapid stream, where we may see the straw and bubble riding quietly at anchor, or slowly revolving in their mimic harbor, undisturbed by the rush of the passing current. Though many years have elapsed since I trod the drowsy shades of Sleepy Hollow, yet I question whether I should not still find the same trees and the same families vegetating in its sheltered bosom.

In this by-place of nature there abode, in a remote period of American history, that is to say, some thirty years since, a worthy wight of the name of Ichabod Crane, who sojourned, or, as he expressed it, “tarried,” in Sleepy Hollow, for the purpose of instructing the children of the vicinity. He was a native of Connecticut, a State which supplies the Union with pioneers for the mind as well as for the forest, and sends forth yearly its legions of frontier woodmen and country schoolmasters. The cognomen of Crane was not inapplicable to his person. He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose, so that it looked like a weather-cock perched upon his spindle neck to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield.

His schoolhouse was a low building of one large room, rudely constructed of logs; the windows partly glazed, and partly patched with leaves of old copybooks. It was most ingeniously secured at vacant hours, by a withe twisted in the handle of the door, and stakes set against the window shutters; so that though a thief might get in with perfect ease, he would find some embarrassment in getting out,—an idea most probably borrowed by the architect, Yost Van Houten, from the mystery of an eelpot. The schoolhouse stood in a rather lonely but pleasant situation, just at the foot of a woody hill, with a brook running close by, and a formidable birch-tree growing at one end of it. From hence the low murmur of his pupils’ voices, conning over their lessons, might be heard in a drowsy summer’s day, like the hum of a beehive; interrupted now and then by the authoritative voice of the master, in the tone of menace or command, or, peradventure, by the appalling sound of the birch, as he urged some tardy loiterer along the flowery path of knowledge. Truth to say, he was a conscientious man, and ever bore in mind the golden maxim, “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” Ichabod Crane’s scholars certainly were not spoiled.

I would not have it imagined, however, that he was one of those cruel potentates of the school who joy in the smart of their subjects; on the contrary, he administered justice with discrimination rather than severity; taking the burden off the backs of the weak, and laying it on those of the strong. Your mere puny stripling, that winced at the least flourish of the rod, was passed by with indulgence; but the claims of justice were satisfied by inflicting a double portion on some little tough wrong-headed, broad-skirted Dutch urchin, who sulked and swelled and grew dogged and sullen beneath the birch. All this he called “doing his duty by their parents;” and he never inflicted a chastisement without following it by the assurance, so consolatory to the smarting urchin, that “he would remember it and thank him for it the longest day he had to live.”

When school hours were over, he was even the companion and playmate of the larger boys; and on holiday afternoons would convoy some of the smaller ones home, who happened to have pretty sisters, or good housewives for mothers, noted for the comforts of the cupboard. Indeed, it behooved him to keep on good terms with his pupils. The revenue arising from his school was small, and would have been scarcely sufficient to furnish him with daily bread, for he was a huge feeder, and, though lank, had the dilating powers of an anaconda; but to help out his maintenance, he was, according to country custom in those parts, boarded and lodged at the houses of the farmers whose children he instructed. With these he lived successively a week at a time, thus going the rounds of the neighborhood, with all his worldly effects tied up in a cotton handkerchief.

That all this might not be too onerous on the purses of his rustic patrons, who are apt to consider the costs of schooling a grievous burden, and schoolmasters as mere drones, he had various ways of rendering himself both useful and agreeable. He assisted the farmers occasionally in the lighter labors of their farms, helped to make hay, mended the fences, took the horses to water, drove the cows from pasture, and cut wood for the winter fire. He laid aside, too, all the dominant dignity and absolute sway with which he lorded it in his little empire, the school, and became wonderfully gentle and ingratiating. He found favor in the eyes of the mothers by petting the children, particularly the youngest; and like the lion bold, which whilom so magnanimously the lamb did hold, he would sit with a child on one knee, and rock a cradle with his foot for whole hours together.

In addition to his other vocations, he was the singing-master of the neighborhood, and picked up many bright shillings by instructing the young folks in psalmody. It was a matter of no little vanity to him on Sundays, to take his station in front of the church gallery, with a band of chosen singers; where, in his own mind, he completely carried away the palm from the parson. Certain it is, his voice resounded far above all the rest of the congregation; and there are peculiar quavers still to be heard in that church, and which may even be heard half a mile off, quite to the opposite side of the millpond, on a still Sunday morning, which are said to be legitimately descended from the nose of Ichabod Crane. Thus, by divers little makeshifts, in that ingenious way which is commonly denominated “by hook and by crook,” the worthy pedagogue got on tolerably enough, and was thought, by all who understood nothing of the labor of headwork, to have a wonderfully easy life of it.

The schoolmaster is generally a man of some importance in the female circle of a rural neighborhood; being considered a kind of idle, gentlemanlike personage, of vastly superior taste and accomplishments to the rough country swains, and, indeed, inferior in learning only to the parson. His appearance, therefore, is apt to occasion some little stir at the tea-table of a farmhouse, and the addition of a supernumerary dish of cakes or sweetmeats, or, peradventure, the parade of a silver teapot. Our man of letters, therefore, was peculiarly happy in the smiles of all the country damsels. How he would figure among them in the churchyard, between services on Sundays; gathering grapes for them from the wild vines that overran the surrounding trees; reciting for their amusement all the epitaphs on the tombstones; or sauntering, with a whole bevy of them, along the banks of the adjacent millpond; while the more bashful country bumpkins hung sheepishly back, envying his superior elegance and address.

From his half-itinerant life, also, he was a kind of travelling gazette, carrying the whole budget of local gossip from house to house, so that his appearance was always greeted with satisfaction. He was, moreover, esteemed by the women as a man of great erudition, for he had read several books quite through, and was a perfect master of Cotton Mather’s “History of New England Witchcraft,” in which, by the way, he most firmly and potently believed.

He was, in fact, an odd mixture of small shrewdness and simple credulity. His appetite for the marvellous, and his powers of digesting it, were equally extraordinary; and both had been increased by his residence in this spell-bound region. No tale was too gross or monstrous for his capacious swallow. It was often his delight, after his school was dismissed in the afternoon, to stretch himself on the rich bed of clover bordering the little brook that whimpered by his schoolhouse, and there con over old Mather’s direful tales, until the gathering dusk of evening made the printed page a mere mist before his eyes. Then, as he wended his way by swamp and stream and awful woodland, to the farmhouse where he happened to be quartered, every sound of nature, at that witching hour, fluttered his excited imagination,—the moan of the whip-poor-will from the hillside, the boding cry of the tree toad, that harbinger of storm, the dreary hooting of the screech owl, or the sudden rustling in the thicket of birds frightened from their roost. The fireflies, too, which sparkled most vividly in the darkest places, now and then startled him, as one of uncommon brightness would stream across his path; and if, by chance, a huge blockhead of a beetle came winging his blundering flight against him, the poor varlet was ready to give up the ghost, with the idea that he was struck with a witch’s token. His only resource on such occasions, either to drown thought or drive away evil spirits, was to sing psalm tunes and the good people of Sleepy Hollow, as they sat by their doors of an evening, were often filled with awe at hearing his nasal melody, “in linked sweetness long drawn out,” floating from the distant hill, or along the dusky road.

Another of his sources of fearful pleasure was to pass long winter evenings with the old Dutch wives, as they sat spinning by the fire, with a row of apples roasting and spluttering along the hearth, and listen to their marvellous tales of ghosts and goblins, and haunted fields, and haunted brooks, and haunted bridges, and haunted houses, and particularly of the headless horseman, or Galloping Hessian of the Hollow, as they sometimes called him. He would delight them equally by his anecdotes of witchcraft, and of the direful omens and portentous sights and sounds in the air, which prevailed in the earlier times of Connecticut; and would frighten them woefully with speculations upon comets and shooting stars; and with the alarming fact that the world did absolutely turn round, and that they were half the time topsy-turvy!

But if there was a pleasure in all this, while snugly cuddling in the chimney corner of a chamber that was all of a ruddy glow from the crackling wood fire, and where, of course, no spectre dared to show its face, it was dearly purchased by the terrors of his subsequent walk homewards. What fearful shapes and shadows beset his path, amidst the dim and ghastly glare of a snowy night! With what wistful look did he eye every trembling ray of light streaming across the waste fields from some distant window! How often was he appalled by some shrub covered with snow, which, like a sheeted spectre, beset his very path! How often did he shrink with curdling awe at the sound of his own steps on the frosty crust beneath his feet; and dread to look over his shoulder, lest he should behold some uncouth being tramping close behind him! And how often was he thrown into complete dismay by some rushing blast, howling among the trees, in the idea that it was the Galloping Hessian on one of his nightly scourings!

All these, however, were mere terrors of the night, phantoms of the mind that walk in darkness; and though he had seen many spectres in his time, and been more than once beset by Satan in divers shapes, in his lonely perambulations, yet daylight put an end to all these evils; and he would have passed a pleasant life of it, in despite of the Devil and all his works, if his path had not been crossed by a being that causes more perplexity to mortal man than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together, and that was—a woman.

Among the musical disciples who assembled, one evening in each week, to receive his instructions in psalmody, was Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter and only child of a substantial Dutch farmer. She was a blooming lass of fresh eighteen; plump as a partridge; ripe and melting and rosy-cheeked as one of her father's peaches, and universally famed, not merely for her beauty, but her vast expectations. She was withal a little of a coquette, as might be perceived even in her dress, which was a mixture of ancient and modern fashions, as most suited to set off her charms. She wore the ornaments of pure yellow gold, which her great-great-grandmother had brought over from Saardam; the tempting stomacher of the olden time, and withal a provokingly short petticoat, to display the prettiest foot and ankle in the country round.

Ichabod Crane had a soft and foolish heart towards the sex; and it is not to be wondered at that so tempting a morsel soon found favor in his eyes, more especially after he had visited her in her paternal mansion. Old Baltus Van Tassel was a perfect picture of a thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer. He seldom, it is true, sent either his eyes or his thoughts beyond the boundaries of his own farm; but within those everything was snug, happy and well-conditioned. He was satisfied with his wealth, but not proud of it; and piqued himself upon the hearty abundance, rather than the style in which he lived. His stronghold was situated on the banks of the Hudson, in one of those green, sheltered, fertile nooks in which the Dutch farmers are so fond of nestling. A great elm tree spread its broad branches over it, at the foot of which bubbled up a spring of the softest and sweetest water, in a little well formed of a barrel; and then stole sparkling away through the grass, to a neighboring brook, that babbled along among alders and dwarf willows. Hard by the farmhouse was a vast barn, that might have served for a church; every window and crevice of which seemed bursting forth with the treasures of the farm; the flail was busily resounding within it from morning to night; swallows and martins skimmed twittering about the eaves; and rows of pigeons, some with one eye turned up, as if watching the weather, some with their heads under their wings or buried in their bosoms, and others swelling, and cooing, and bowing about their dames, were enjoying the sunshine on the roof. Sleek unwieldy porkers were grunting in the repose and abundance of their pens, from whence sallied forth, now and then, troops of sucking pigs, as if to snuff the air. A stately squadron of snowy geese were riding in an adjoining pond, convoying whole fleets of ducks; regiments of turkeys were gobbling through the farmyard, and Guinea fowls fretting about it, like ill-tempered housewives, with their peevish, discontented cry. Before the barn door strutted the gallant cock, that pattern of a husband, a warrior and a fine gentleman, clapping his burnished wings and crowing in the pride and gladness of his heart,—sometimes tearing up the earth with his feet, and then generously calling his ever-hungry family of wives and children to enjoy the rich morsel which he had discovered.

The pedagogue's mouth watered as he looked upon this sumptuous promise of luxurious winter fare. In his devouring mind's eye, he pictured to himself every roasting-pig running about with a pudding in his belly, and an apple in his mouth; the pigeons were snugly put to bed in a comfortable pie, and tucked in with a coverlet of crust; the geese were swimming in their own gravy; and the ducks pairing cosily in dishes, like snug married couples, with a decent competency of onion sauce. In the porkers he saw carved out the future sleek side of bacon, and juicy relishing ham; not a turkey but he beheld daintily trussed up, with its gizzard under its wing, and, peradventure, a necklace of savory sausages; and even bright chanticleer himself lay sprawling on his back, in a side dish, with uplifted claws, as if craving that quarter which his chivalrous spirit disdained to ask while living.

As the enraptured Ichabod fancied all this, and as he rolled his great green eyes over the fat meadow lands, the rich fields of wheat, of rye, of buckwheat, and Indian corn, and the orchards burdened with ruddy fruit, which surrounded the warm tenement of Van Tassel, his heart yearned after the damsel who was to inherit these domains, and his imagination expanded with the idea, how they might be readily turned into cash, and the money invested in immense tracts of wild land, and shingle palaces in the wilderness. Nay, his busy fancy already realized his hopes, and presented to him the blooming Katrina, with a whole family of children, mounted on the top of a wagon loaded with household trumpery, with pots and kettles dangling beneath; and he beheld himself bestriding a pacing mare, with a colt at her heels, setting out for Kentucky, Tennessee,—or the Lord knows where!

When he entered the house, the conquest of his heart was complete. It was one of those spacious farmhouses, with high-ridged but lowly sloping roofs, built in the style handed down from the first Dutch settlers; the low projecting eaves forming a piazza along the front, capable of being closed up in bad weather. Under this were hung flails, harness, various utensils of husbandry, and nets for fishing in the neighboring river. Benches were built along the sides for summer use; and a great spinning-wheel at one end, and a churn at the other, showed the various uses to which this important porch might be devoted. From this piazza the wondering

Ichabod entered the hall, which formed the centre of the mansion, and the place of usual residence. Here rows of resplendent pewter, ranged on a long dresser, dazzled his eyes. In one corner stood a huge bag of wool, ready to be spun; in another, a quantity of linsey-woolsey just from the loom; ears of Indian corn, and strings of dried apples and peaches, hung in gay festoons along the walls, mingled with the gaud of red peppers; and a door left ajar gave him a peep into the best parlor, where the claw-footed chairs and dark mahogany tables shone like mirrors; andirons, with their accompanying shovel and tongs, glistened from their covert of asparagus tops; mock-oranges and conch-shells decorated the mantelpiece; strings of various-colored birds eggs were suspended above it; a great ostrich egg was hung from the centre of the room, and a corner cupboard, knowingly left open, displayed immense treasures of old silver and well-mended china.

From the moment Ichabod laid his eyes upon these regions of delight, the peace of his mind was at an end, and his only study was how to gain the affections of the peerless daughter of Van Tassel. In this enterprise, however, he had more real difficulties than generally fell to the lot of a knight-errant of yore, who seldom had anything but giants, enchanters, fiery dragons, and such like easily conquered adversaries, to contend with and had to make his way merely through gates of iron and brass, and walls of adamant to the castle keep, where the lady of his heart was confined; all which he achieved as easily as a man would carve his way to the centre of a Christmas pie; and then the lady gave him her hand as a matter of course. Ichabod, on the contrary, had to win his way to the heart of a country coquette, beset with a labyrinth of whims and caprices, which were forever presenting new difficulties and impediments; and he had to encounter a host of fearful adversaries of real flesh and blood, the numerous rustic admirers, who beset every portal to her heart, keeping a watchful and angry eye upon each other, but ready to fly out in the common cause against any new competitor.

Among these, the most formidable was a burly, roaring, roystering blade, of the name of Abraham, or, according to the Dutch abbreviation, Brom Van Brunt, the hero of the country round, which rang with his feats of strength and hardihood. He was broad-shouldered and double-jointed, with short curly black hair, and a bluff but not unpleasant countenance, having a mingled air of fun and arrogance. From his Herculean frame and great powers of limb he had received the nickname of BROM BONES, by which he was universally known. He was famed for great knowledge and skill in horsemanship, being as dexterous on horseback as a Tartar. He was foremost at all races and cock fights; and, with the ascendancy which bodily strength always acquires in rustic life, was the umpire in all disputes, setting his hat on one side, and giving his decisions with an air and tone that admitted of no gainsay or appeal. He was always ready for either a fight or a frolic; but had more mischief than ill-will in his composition; and with all his overbearing roughness, there was a strong dash of waggish good humor at bottom. He had three or four boon companions, who regarded him as their model, and at the head of whom he scoured the country, attending every scene of feud or merriment for miles round. In cold weather he was distinguished by a fur cap, surmounted with a flaunting fox's tail; and when the folks at a country gathering descried this well-known crest at a distance, whisking about among a squad of hard riders, they always stood by for a squall. Sometimes his crew would be heard dashing along past the farmhouses at midnight, with whoop and halloo, like a troop of Don Cossacks; and the old dames, startled out of their sleep, would listen for a moment till the hurry-scurry had clattered by, and then exclaim, "Ay, there goes Brom Bones and his gang!" The neighbors looked upon him with a mixture of awe, admiration, and good-will; and, when any madcap prank or rustic brawl occurred in the vicinity, always shook their heads, and warranted Brom Bones was at the bottom of it.

This rantipole hero had for some time singled out the blooming Katrina for the object of his uncouth gallantries, and though his amorous toyings were something like the gentle caresses and endearments of a bear, yet it was whispered that she did not altogether discourage his hopes. Certain it is, his advances were signals for rival candidates to retire, who felt no inclination to cross a lion in his amours; insomuch, that when his horse was seen tied to Van Tassel's paling, on a Sunday night, a sure sign that his master was courting, or, as it is termed, "sparking," within, all other suitors passed by in despair, and carried the war into other quarters.

Such was the formidable rival with whom Ichabod Crane had to contend, and, considering all things, a stouter man than he would have shrunk from the competition, and a wiser man would have despaired. He had, however, a happy mixture of pliability and perseverance in his nature; he was in form and spirit like a supple-jack—yielding, but tough; though he bent, he never broke; and though he bowed beneath the slightest pressure, yet, the moment it was away—jerk!—he was as erect, and carried his head as high as ever.

To have taken the field openly against his rival would have been madness; for he was not a man to be thwarted in his amours, any more than that stormy lover, Achilles. Ichabod, therefore, made his advances in a quiet and gently insinuating manner. Under cover of his character of singing-master, he made frequent visits at the farmhouse; not that he had anything to apprehend from the meddlesome interference of parents, which is so often a stumbling-block in the path of lovers. Balt Van Tassel was an easy indulgent soul; he loved his daughter better even than his pipe, and, like a reasonable man and an excellent father, let her have her

way in everything. His notable little wife, too, had enough to do to attend to her housekeeping and manage her poultry; for, as she sagely observed, ducks and geese are foolish things, and must be looked after, but girls can take care of themselves. Thus, while the busy dame bustled about the house, or plied her spinning-wheel at one end of the piazza, honest Balt would sit smoking his evening pipe at the other, watching the achievements of a little wooden warrior, who, armed with a sword in each hand, was most valiantly fighting the wind on the pinnacle of the barn. In the mean time, Ichabod would carry on his suit with the daughter by the side of the spring under the great elm, or sauntering along in the twilight, that hour so favorable to the lover's eloquence.

I profess not to know how women's hearts are wooed and won. To me they have always been matters of riddle and admiration. Some seem to have but one vulnerable point, or door of access; while others have a thousand avenues, and may be captured in a thousand different ways. It is a great triumph of skill to gain the former, but a still greater proof of generalship to maintain possession of the latter, for man must battle for his fortress at every door and window. He who wins a thousand common hearts is therefore entitled to some renown; but he who keeps undisputed sway over the heart of a coquette is indeed a hero. Certain it is, this was not the case with the redoubtable Brom Bones; and from the moment Ichabod Crane made his advances, the interests of the former evidently declined: his horse was no longer seen tied to the palings on Sunday nights, and a deadly feud gradually arose between him and the preceptor of Sleepy Hollow.

Brom, who had a degree of rough chivalry in his nature, would fain have carried matters to open warfare and have settled their pretensions to the lady, according to the mode of those most concise and simple reasoners, the knights-errant of yore,—by single combat; but Ichabod was too conscious of the superior might of his adversary to enter the lists against him; he had overheard a boast of Bones, that he would "double the schoolmaster up, and lay him on a shelf of his own schoolhouse;" and he was too wary to give him an opportunity. There was something extremely provoking in this obstinately pacific system; it left Brom no alternative but to draw upon the funds of rustic waggery in his disposition, and to play off boorish practical jokes upon his rival. Ichabod became the object of whimsical persecution to Bones and his gang of rough riders. They harried his hitherto peaceful domains; smoked out his singing school by stopping up the chimney; broke into the schoolhouse at night, in spite of its formidable fastenings of withe and window stakes, and turned everything topsy-turvy, so that the poor schoolmaster began to think all the witches in the country held their meetings there. But what was still more annoying, Brom took all opportunities of turning him into ridicule in presence of his mistress, and had a scoundrel dog whom he taught to whine in the most ludicrous manner, and introduced as a rival of Ichabod's, to instruct her in psalmody.

In this way matters went on for some time, without producing any material effect on the relative situations of the contending powers. On a fine autumnal afternoon, Ichabod, in pensive mood, sat enthroned on the lofty stool from whence he usually watched all the concerns of his little literary realm. In his hand he swayed a ferule, that sceptre of despotic power; the birch of justice reposed on three nails behind the throne, a constant terror to evil doers, while on the desk before him might be seen sundry contraband articles and prohibited weapons, detected upon the persons of idle urchins, such as half-munched apples, popguns, whirligigs, fly-cages, and whole legions of rampant little paper gamecocks. Apparently there had been some appalling act of justice recently inflicted, for his scholars were all busily intent upon their books, or slyly whispering behind them with one eye kept upon the master; and a kind of buzzing stillness reigned throughout the schoolroom. It was suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a negro in tow-cloth jacket and trowsers, a round-crowned fragment of a hat, like the cap of Mercury, and mounted on the back of a ragged, wild, half-broken colt, which he managed with a rope by way of halter. He came clattering up to the school door with an invitation to Ichabod to attend a merry-making or "quilting frolic," to be held that evening at Mynheer Van Tassel's; and having delivered his message with that air of importance, and effort at fine language, which a negro is apt to display on petty embassies of the kind, he dashed over the brook, and was seen scampering away up the hollow, full of the importance and hurry of his mission.

All was now bustle and hubbub in the late quiet schoolroom. The scholars were hurried through their lessons without stopping at trifles; those who were nimble skipped over half with impunity, and those who were tardy had a smart application now and then in the rear, to quicken their speed or help them over a tall word. Books were flung aside without being put away on the shelves, inkstands were overturned, benches thrown down, and the whole school was turned loose an hour before the usual time, bursting forth like a legion of young imps, yelping and racketing about the green in joy at their early emancipation.

The gallant Ichabod now spent at least an extra half hour at his toilet, brushing and furbishing up his best, and indeed only suit of rusty black, and arranging his locks by a bit of broken looking-glass that hung up in the schoolhouse. That he might make his appearance before his mistress in the true style of a cavalier, he borrowed a horse from the farmer with whom he was domiciliated, a choleric old Dutchman of the name of Hans Van Ripper, and, thus gallantly mounted, issued forth like a knight-errant in quest of adventures. But it is meet I should, in the true spirit of romantic story, give some account of the looks and equipments of my hero and his steed. The animal he bestrode was a broken-down plow-horse, that had outlived almost everything but its viciousness. He

was gaunt and shagged, with a ewe neck, and a head like a hammer; his rusty mane and tail were tangled and knotted with burs; one eye had lost its pupil, and was glaring and spectral, but the other had the gleam of a genuine devil in it. Still he must have had fire and mettle in his day, if we may judge from the name he bore of Gunpowder. He had, in fact, been a favorite steed of his master's, the choleric Van Ripper, who was a furious rider, and had infused, very probably, some of his own spirit into the animal; for, old and broken-down as he looked, there was more of the lurking devil in him than in any young filly in the country.

Ichabod was a suitable figure for such a steed. He rode with short stirrups, which brought his knees nearly up to the pommel of the saddle; his sharp elbows stuck out like grasshoppers'; he carried his whip perpendicularly in his hand, like a sceptre, and as his horse jogged on, the motion of his arms was not unlike the flapping of a pair of wings. A small wool hat rested on the top of his nose, for so his scanty strip of forehead might be called, and the skirts of his black coat fluttered out almost to the horses tail. Such was the appearance of Ichabod and his steed as they shambled out of the gate of Hans Van Ripper, and it was altogether such an apparition as is seldom to be met with in broad daylight.

It was, as I have said, a fine autumnal day; the sky was clear and serene, and nature wore that rich and golden livery which we always associate with the idea of abundance. The forests had put on their sober brown and yellow, while some trees of the tenderer kind had been nipped by the frosts into brilliant dyes of orange, purple, and scarlet. Streaming files of wild ducks began to make their appearance high in the air; the bark of the squirrel might be heard from the groves of beech and hickory-nuts, and the pensive whistle of the quail at intervals from the neighboring stubble field.

The small birds were taking their farewell banquets. In the fullness of their revelry, they fluttered, chirping and frolicking from bush to bush, and tree to tree, capricious from the very profusion and variety around them. There was the honest cock robin, the favorite game of stripling sportsmen, with its loud querulous note; and the twittering blackbirds flying in sable clouds; and the golden-winged woodpecker with his crimson crest, his broad black gorget, and splendid plumage; and the cedar bird, with its red-tipt wings and yellow-tipt tail and its little monteiro cap of feathers; and the blue jay, that noisy coxcomb, in his gay light blue coat and white underclothes, screaming and chattering, nodding and bobbing and bowing, and pretending to be on good terms with every songster of the grove.

As Ichabod jogged slowly on his way, his eye, ever open to every symptom of culinary abundance, ranged with delight over the treasures of jolly autumn. On all sides he beheld vast store of apples; some hanging in oppressive opulence on the trees; some gathered into baskets and barrels for the market; others heaped up in rich piles for the cider-press. Farther on he beheld great fields of Indian corn, with its golden ears peeping from their leafy coverts, and holding out the promise of cakes and hasty-pudding; and the yellow pumpkins lying beneath them, turning up their fair round bellies to the sun, and giving ample prospects of the most luxurious of pies; and anon he passed the fragrant buckwheat fields breathing the odor of the beehive, and as he beheld them, soft anticipations stole over his mind of dainty slapjacks, well buttered, and garnished with honey or treacle, by the delicate little dimpled hand of Katrina Van Tassel.

Thus feeding his mind with many sweet thoughts and "sugared suppositions," he journeyed along the sides of a range of hills which look out upon some of the goodliest scenes of the mighty Hudson. The sun gradually wheeled his broad disk down in the west. The wide bosom of the Tappan Zee lay motionless and glassy, excepting that here and there a gentle undulation waved and prolonged the blue shadow of the distant mountain. A few amber clouds floated in the sky, without a breath of air to move them. The horizon was of a fine golden tint, changing gradually into a pure apple green, and from that into the deep blue of the mid-heaven. A slanting ray lingered on the woody crests of the precipices that overhung some parts of the river, giving greater depth to the dark gray and purple of their rocky sides. A sloop was loitering in the distance, dropping slowly down with the tide, her sail hanging uselessly against the mast; and as the reflection of the sky gleamed along the still water, it seemed as if the vessel was suspended in the air.

It was toward evening that Ichabod arrived at the castle of the Heer Van Tassel, which he found thronged with the pride and flower of the adjacent country. Old farmers, a spare leathern-faced race, in homespun coats and breeches, blue stockings, huge shoes, and magnificent pewter buckles. Their brisk, withered little dames, in close-crimped caps, long-waisted short gowns, homespun petticoats, with scissors and pincushions, and gay calico pockets hanging on the outside. Buxom lasses, almost as antiquated as their mothers, excepting where a straw hat, a fine ribbon, or perhaps a white frock, gave symptoms of city innovation. The sons, in short square-skirted coats, with rows of stupendous brass buttons, and their hair generally queued in the fashion of the times, especially if they could procure an eel-skin for the purpose, it being esteemed throughout the country as a potent nourisher and strengthener of the hair.

Brom Bones, however, was the hero of the scene, having come to the gathering on his favorite steed Daredevil, a creature, like himself, full of mettle and mischief, and which no one but himself could manage. He was, in fact, noted for preferring vicious

animals, given to all kinds of tricks which kept the rider in constant risk of his neck, for he held a tractable, well-broken horse as unworthy of a lad of spirit.

Fain would I pause to dwell upon the world of charms that burst upon the enraptured gaze of my hero, as he entered the state parlor of Van Tassel's mansion. Not those of the bevy of buxom lasses, with their luxurious display of red and white; but the ample charms of a genuine Dutch country tea-table, in the sumptuous time of autumn. Such heaped up platters of cakes of various and almost indescribable kinds, known only to experienced Dutch housewives! There was the doughty doughnut, the tender oly koek, and the crisp and crumbling cruller; sweet cakes and short cakes, ginger cakes and honey cakes, and the whole family of cakes. And then there were apple pies, and peach pies, and pumpkin pies; besides slices of ham and smoked beef; and moreover delectable dishes of preserved plums, and peaches, and pears, and quinces; not to mention broiled shad and roasted chickens; together with bowls of milk and cream, all mingled higgledy-piggledy, pretty much as I have enumerated them, with the motherly teapot sending up its clouds of vapor from the midst—Heaven bless the mark! I want breath and time to discuss this banquet as it deserves, and am too eager to get on with my story. Happily, Ichabod Crane was not in so great a hurry as his historian, but did ample justice to every dainty.

He was a kind and thankful creature, whose heart dilated in proportion as his skin was filled with good cheer, and whose spirits rose with eating, as some men's do with drink. He could not help, too, rolling his large eyes round him as he ate, and chuckling with the possibility that he might one day be lord of all this scene of almost unimaginable luxury and splendor. Then, he thought, how soon he'd turn his back upon the old schoolhouse; snap his fingers in the face of Hans Van Ripper, and every other niggardly patron, and kick any itinerant pedagogue out of doors that should dare to call him comrade!

Old Baltus Van Tassel moved about among his guests with a face dilated with content and good humor, round and jolly as the harvest moon. His hospitable attentions were brief, but expressive, being confined to a shake of the hand, a slap on the shoulder, a loud laugh, and a pressing invitation to "fall to, and help themselves."

And now the sound of the music from the common room, or hall, summoned to the dance. The musician was an old gray-headed negro, who had been the itinerant orchestra of the neighborhood for more than half a century. His instrument was as old and battered as himself. The greater part of the time he scraped on two or three strings, accompanying every movement of the bow with a motion of the head; bowing almost to the ground, and stamping with his foot whenever a fresh couple were to start.

Ichabod prided himself upon his dancing as much as upon his vocal powers. Not a limb, not a fibre about him was idle; and to have seen his loosely hung frame in full motion, and clattering about the room, you would have thought St. Vitus himself, that blessed patron of the dance, was figuring before you in person. He was the admiration of all the negroes; who, having gathered, of all ages and sizes, from the farm and the neighborhood, stood forming a pyramid of shining black faces at every door and window, gazing with delight at the scene, rolling their white eyeballs, and showing grinning rows of ivory from ear to ear. How could the flogger of urchins be otherwise than animated and joyous? The lady of his heart was his partner in the dance, and smiling graciously in reply to all his amorous oglings; while Brom Bones, sorely smitten with love and jealousy, sat brooding by himself in one corner.

When the dance was at an end, Ichabod was attracted to a knot of the sager folks, who, with Old Van Tassel, sat smoking at one end of the piazza, gossiping over former times, and drawing out long stories about the war.

This neighborhood, at the time of which I am speaking, was one of those highly favored places which abound with chronicle and great men. The British and American line had run near it during the war; it had, therefore, been the scene of marauding and infested with refugees, cowboys, and all kinds of border chivalry. Just sufficient time had elapsed to enable each storyteller to dress up his tale with a little becoming fiction, and, in the indistinctness of his recollection, to make himself the hero of every exploit.

There was the story of Doffue Martling, a large blue-bearded Dutchman, who had nearly taken a British frigate with an old iron nine-pounder from a mud breastwork, only that his gun burst at the sixth discharge. And there was an old gentleman who shall be nameless, being too rich a mynheer to be lightly mentioned, who, in the battle of White Plains, being an excellent master of defence, parried a musket-ball with a small sword, insomuch that he absolutely felt it whiz round the blade, and glance off at the hilt; in proof of which he was ready at any time to show the sword, with the hilt a little bent. There were several more that had been equally great in the field, not one of whom but was persuaded that he had a considerable hand in bringing the war to a happy termination.

But all these were nothing to the tales of ghosts and apparitions that succeeded. The neighborhood is rich in legendary treasures of the kind. Local tales and superstitions thrive best in these sheltered, long-settled retreats; but are trampled under foot by the shifting throng that forms the population of most of our country places. Besides, there is no encouragement for ghosts in most of our villages, for they have scarcely had time to finish their first nap and turn themselves in their graves, before their surviving friends

have travelled away from the neighborhood; so that when they turn out at night to walk their rounds, they have no acquaintance left to call upon. This is perhaps the reason why we so seldom hear of ghosts except in our long-established Dutch communities.

The immediate cause, however, of the prevalence of supernatural stories in these parts, was doubtless owing to the vicinity of Sleepy Hollow. There was a contagion in the very air that blew from that haunted region; it breathed forth an atmosphere of dreams and fancies infecting all the land. Several of the Sleepy Hollow people were present at Van Tassel's, and, as usual, were doling out their wild and wonderful legends. Many dismal tales were told about funeral trains, and mourning cries and wailings heard and seen about the great tree where the unfortunate Major André was taken, and which stood in the neighborhood. Some mention was made also of the woman in white, that haunted the dark glen at Raven Rock, and was often heard to shriek on winter nights before a storm, having perished there in the snow. The chief part of the stories, however, turned upon the favorite spectre of Sleepy Hollow, the Headless Horseman, who had been heard several times of late, patrolling the country; and, it was said, tethered his horse nightly among the graves in the churchyard.

The sequestered situation of this church seems always to have made it a favorite haunt of troubled spirits. It stands on a knoll, surrounded by locust-trees and lofty elms, from among which its decent, whitewashed walls shine modestly forth, like Christian purity beaming through the shades of retirement. A gentle slope descends from it to a silver sheet of water, bordered by high trees, between which, peeps may be caught at the blue hills of the Hudson. To look upon its grass-grown yard, where the sunbeams seem to sleep so quietly, one would think that there at least the dead might rest in peace. On one side of the church extends a wide woody dell, along which raves a large brook among broken rocks and trunks of fallen trees. Over a deep black part of the stream, not far from the church, was formerly thrown a wooden bridge; the road that led to it, and the bridge itself, were thickly shaded by overhanging trees, which cast a gloom about it, even in the daytime; but occasioned a fearful darkness at night. Such was one of the favorite haunts of the Headless Horseman, and the place where he was most frequently encountered. The tale was told of old Brouwer, a most heretical disbeliever in ghosts, how he met the Horseman returning from his foray into Sleepy Hollow, and was obliged to get up behind him; how they galloped over bush and brake, over hill and swamp, until they reached the bridge; when the Horseman suddenly turned into a skeleton, threw old Brouwer into the brook, and sprang away over the tree-tops with a clap of thunder.

This story was immediately matched by a thrice marvellous adventure of Brom Bones, who made light of the Galloping Hessian as an arrant jockey. He affirmed that on returning one night from the neighboring village of Sing Sing, he had been overtaken by this midnight trooper; that he had offered to race with him for a bowl of punch, and should have won it too, for Daredevil beat the goblin horse all hollow, but just as they came to the church bridge, the Hessian bolted, and vanished in a flash of fire.

All these tales, told in that drowsy undertone with which men talk in the dark, the countenances of the listeners only now and then receiving a casual gleam from the glare of a pipe, sank deep in the mind of Ichabod. He repaid them in kind with large extracts from his invaluable author, Cotton Mather, and added many marvellous events that had taken place in his native State of Connecticut, and fearful sights which he had seen in his nightly walks about Sleepy Hollow.

The revel now gradually broke up. The old farmers gathered together their families in their wagons, and were heard for some time rattling along the hollow roads, and over the distant hills. Some of the damsels mounted on pillions behind their favorite swains, and their light-hearted laughter, mingling with the clatter of hoofs, echoed along the silent woodlands, sounding fainter and fainter, until they gradually died away,—and the late scene of noise and frolic was all silent and deserted. Ichabod only lingered behind, according to the custom of country lovers, to have a tête-à-tête with the heiress; fully convinced that he was now on the high road to success. What passed at this interview I will not pretend to say, for in fact I do not know. Something, however, I fear me, must have gone wrong, for he certainly sallied forth, after no very great interval, with an air quite desolate and chapfallen. Oh, these women! these women! Could that girl have been playing off any of her coquettish tricks? Was her encouragement of the poor pedagogue all a mere sham to secure her conquest of his rival? Heaven only knows, not I! Let it suffice to say, Ichabod stole forth with the air of one who had been sacking a henroost, rather than a fair lady's heart. Without looking to the right or left to notice the scene of rural wealth, on which he had so often gloated, he went straight to the stable, and with several hearty cuffs and kicks roused his steed most uncourteously from the comfortable quarters in which he was soundly sleeping, dreaming of mountains of corn and oats, and whole valleys of timothy and clover.

It was the very witching time of night that Ichabod, heavy-hearted and crestfallen, pursued his travels homewards, along the sides of the lofty hills which rise above Tarry Town, and which he had traversed so cheerily in the afternoon. The hour was as dismal as himself. Far below him the Tappan Zee spread its dusky and indistinct waste of waters, with here and there the tall mast of a sloop, riding quietly at anchor under the land. In the dead hush of midnight, he could even hear the barking of the watchdog from the opposite shore of the Hudson; but it was so vague and faint as only to give an idea of his distance from this faithful companion of

man. Now and then, too, the long-drawn crowing of a cock, accidentally awakened, would sound far, far off, from some farmhouse away among the hills—but it was like a dreaming sound in his ear. No signs of life occurred near him, but occasionally the melancholy chirp of a cricket, or perhaps the guttural twang of a bullfrog from a neighboring marsh, as if sleeping uncomfortably and turning suddenly in his bed.

All the stories of ghosts and goblins that he had heard in the afternoon now came crowding upon his recollection. The night grew darker and darker; the stars seemed to sink deeper in the sky, and driving clouds occasionally hid them from his sight. He had never felt so lonely and dismal. He was, moreover, approaching the very place where many of the scenes of the ghost stories had been laid. In the centre of the road stood an enormous tulip-tree, which towered like a giant above all the other trees of the neighborhood, and formed a kind of landmark. Its limbs were gnarled and fantastic, large enough to form trunks for ordinary trees, twisting down almost to the earth, and rising again into the air. It was connected with the tragical story of the unfortunate André, who had been taken prisoner hard by; and was universally known by the name of Major André's tree. The common people regarded it with a mixture of respect and superstition, partly out of sympathy for the fate of its ill-starred namesake, and partly from the tales of strange sights, and doleful lamentations, told concerning it.

As Ichabod approached this fearful tree, he began to whistle; he thought his whistle was answered; it was but a blast sweeping sharply through the dry branches. As he approached a little nearer, he thought he saw something white, hanging in the midst of the tree: he paused and ceased whistling but, on looking more narrowly, perceived that it was a place where the tree had been scathed by lightning, and the white wood laid bare. Suddenly he heard a groan—his teeth chattered, and his knees smote against the saddle: it was but the rubbing of one huge bough upon another, as they were swayed about by the breeze. He passed the tree in safety, but new perils lay before him.

About two hundred yards from the tree, a small brook crossed the road, and ran into a marshy and thickly-wooded glen, known by the name of Wiley's Swamp. A few rough logs, laid side by side, served for a bridge over this stream. On that side of the road where the brook entered the wood, a group of oaks and chestnuts, matted thick with wild grape-vines, threw a cavernous gloom over it. To pass this bridge was the severest trial. It was at this identical spot that the unfortunate André was captured, and under the covert of those chestnuts and vines were the sturdy yeomen concealed who surprised him. This has ever since been considered a haunted stream, and fearful are the feelings of the schoolboy who has to pass it alone after dark.

As he approached the stream, his heart began to thump; he summoned up, however, all his resolution, gave his horse half a score of kicks in the ribs, and attempted to dash briskly across the bridge; but instead of starting forward, the perverse old animal made a lateral movement, and ran broadside against the fence. Ichabod, whose fears increased with the delay, jerked the reins on the other side, and kicked lustily with the contrary foot: it was all in vain; his steed started, it is true, but it was only to plunge to the opposite side of the road into a thicket of brambles and alder bushes. The schoolmaster now bestowed both whip and heel upon the starveling ribs of old Gunpowder, who dashed forward, snuffling and snorting, but came to a stand just by the bridge, with a suddenness that had nearly sent his rider sprawling over his head. Just at this moment a plashy tramp by the side of the bridge caught the sensitive ear of Ichabod. In the dark shadow of the grove, on the margin of the brook, he beheld something huge, misshapen and towering. It stirred not, but seemed gathered up in the gloom, like some gigantic monster ready to spring upon the traveller.

The hair of the affrighted pedagogue rose upon his head with terror. What was to be done? To turn and fly was now too late; and besides, what chance was there of escaping ghost or goblin, if such it was, which could ride upon the wings of the wind? Summoning up, therefore, a show of courage, he demanded in stammering accents, "Who are you?" He received no reply. He repeated his demand in a still more agitated voice. Still there was no answer. Once more he cudgelled the sides of the inflexible Gunpowder, and, shutting his eyes, broke forth with involuntary fervor into a psalm tune. Just then the shadowy object of alarm put itself in motion, and with a scramble and a bound stood at once in the middle of the road. Though the night was dark and dismal, yet the form of the unknown might now in some degree be ascertained. He appeared to be a horseman of large dimensions, and mounted on a black horse of powerful frame. He made no offer of molestation or sociability, but kept aloof on one side of the road, jogging along on the blind side of old Gunpowder, who had now got over his fright and waywardness.

Ichabod, who had no relish for this strange midnight companion, and bethought himself of the adventure of Brom Bones with the Galloping Hessian, now quickened his steed in hopes of leaving him behind. The stranger, however, quickened his horse to an equal pace. Ichabod pulled up, and fell into a walk, thinking to lag behind,—the other did the same. His heart began to sink within him; he endeavored to resume his psalm tune, but his parched tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he could not utter a stave. There was something in the moody and dogged silence of this pertinacious companion that was mysterious and appalling. It was soon fearfully accounted for. On mounting a rising ground, which brought the figure of his fellow-traveller in relief against the sky,

gigantic in height, and muffled in a cloak, Ichabod was horror-struck on perceiving that he was headless!—but his horror was still more increased on observing that the head, which should have rested on his shoulders, was carried before him on the pommel of his saddle! His terror rose to desperation; he rained a shower of kicks and blows upon Gunpowder, hoping by a sudden movement to give his companion the slip; but the spectre started full jump with him. Away, then, they dashed through thick and thin; stones flying and sparks flashing at every bound. Ichabod's flimsy garments fluttered in the air, as he stretched his long lank body away over his horse's head, in the eagerness of his flight.

They had now reached the road which turns off to Sleepy Hollow; but Gunpowder, who seemed possessed with a demon, instead of keeping up it, made an opposite turn, and plunged headlong downhill to the left. This road leads through a sandy hollow shaded by trees for about a quarter of a mile, where it crosses the bridge famous in goblin story; and just beyond swells the green knoll on which stands the whitewashed church.

As yet the panic of the steed had given his unskilful rider an apparent advantage in the chase, but just as he had got half way through the hollow, the girths of the saddle gave way, and he felt it slipping from under him. He seized it by the pommel, and endeavored to hold it firm, but in vain; and had just time to save himself by clasping old Gunpowder round the neck, when the saddle fell to the earth, and he heard it trampled under foot by his pursuer. For a moment the terror of Hans Van Ripper's wrath passed across his mind,—for it was his Sunday saddle; but this was no time for petty fears; the goblin was hard on his haunches; and (unskilful rider that he was!) he had much ado to maintain his seat; sometimes slipping on one side, sometimes on another, and sometimes jolted on the high ridge of his horse's backbone, with a violence that he verily feared would cleave him asunder.

An opening in the trees now cheered him with the hopes that the church bridge was at hand. The wavering reflection of a silver star in the bosom of the brook told him that he was not mistaken. He saw the walls of the church dimly glaring under the trees beyond. He recollected the place where Brom Bones's ghostly competitor had disappeared. "If I can but reach that bridge," thought Ichabod, "I am safe." Just then he heard the black steed panting and blowing close behind him; he even fancied that he felt his hot breath. Another convulsive kick in the ribs, and old Gunpowder sprang upon the bridge; he thundered over the resounding planks; he gained the opposite side; and now Ichabod cast a look behind to see if his pursuer should vanish, according to rule, in a flash of fire and brimstone. Just then he saw the goblin rising in his stirrups, and in the very act of hurling his head at him. Ichabod endeavored to dodge the horrible missile, but too late. It encountered his cranium with a tremendous crash,—he was tumbled headlong into the dust, and Gunpowder, the black steed, and the goblin rider, passed by like a whirlwind.

The next morning the old horse was found without his saddle, and with the bridle under his feet, soberly cropping the grass at his master's gate. Ichabod did not make his appearance at breakfast; dinner-hour came, but no Ichabod. The boys assembled at the schoolhouse, and strolled idly about the banks of the brook; but no schoolmaster. Hans Van Ripper now began to feel some uneasiness about the fate of poor Ichabod, and his saddle. An inquiry was set on foot, and after diligent investigation they came upon his traces. In one part of the road leading to the church was found the saddle trampled in the dirt; the tracks of horses' hoofs deeply dented in the road, and evidently at furious speed, were traced to the bridge, beyond which, on the bank of a broad part of the brook, where the water ran deep and black, was found the hat of the unfortunate Ichabod, and close beside it a shattered pumpkin.

The brook was searched, but the body of the schoolmaster was not to be discovered. Hans Van Ripper as executor of his estate, examined the bundle which contained all his worldly effects. They consisted of two shirts and a half; two stocks for the neck; a pair or two of worsted stockings; an old pair of corduroy small-clothes; a rusty razor; a book of psalm tunes full of dog's-ears; and a broken pitch-pipe. As to the books and furniture of the schoolhouse, they belonged to the community, excepting Cotton Mather's "History of Witchcraft," a "New England Almanac," and a book of dreams and fortune-telling; in which last was a sheet of foolscap much scribbled and blotted in several fruitless attempts to make a copy of verses in honor of the heiress of Van Tassel. These magic books and the poetic scrawl were forthwith consigned to the flames by Hans Van Ripper; who, from that time forward, determined to send his children no more to school, observing that he never knew any good come of this same reading and writing. Whatever money the schoolmaster possessed, and he had received his quarter's pay but a day or two before, he must have had about his person at the time of his disappearance.

The mysterious event caused much speculation at the church on the following Sunday. Knots of gazers and gossips were collected in the churchyard, at the bridge, and at the spot where the hat and pumpkin had been found. The stories of Brouwer, of Bones, and a whole budget of others were called to mind; and when they had diligently considered them all, and compared them with the symptoms of the present case, they shook their heads, and came to the conclusion that Ichabod had been carried off by the Galloping Hessian. As he was a bachelor, and in nobody's debt, nobody troubled his head any more about him; the school was removed to a different quarter of the hollow, and another pedagogue reigned in his stead.

It is true, an old farmer, who had been down to New York on a visit several years after, and from whom this account of the ghostly adventure was received, brought home the intelligence that Ichabod Crane was still alive; that he had left the neighborhood partly through fear of the goblin and Hans Van Ripper, and partly in mortification at having been suddenly dismissed by the heiress; that he had changed his quarters to a distant part of the country; had kept school and studied law at the same time; had been admitted to the bar; turned politician; electioneered; written for the newspapers; and finally had been made a justice of the Ten Pound Court. Brom Bones, too, who, shortly after his rival's disappearance conducted the blooming Katrina in triumph to the altar, was observed to look exceedingly knowing whenever the story of Ichabod was related, and always burst into a hearty laugh at the mention of the pumpkin; which led some to suspect that he knew more about the matter than he chose to tell.

The old country wives, however, who are the best judges of these matters, maintain to this day that Ichabod was spirited away by supernatural means; and it is a favorite story often told about the neighborhood round the winter evening fire. The bridge became more than ever an object of superstitious awe; and that may be the reason why the road has been altered of late years, so as to approach the church by the border of the millpond. The schoolhouse being deserted soon fell to decay, and was reported to be haunted by the ghost of the unfortunate pedagogue and the plowboy, loitering homeward of a still summer evening, has often fancied his voice at a distance, chanting a melancholy psalm tune among the tranquil solitudes of Sleepy Hollow.

Postscript. Found in the Handwriting of Mr. Knickerbocker.

The preceding tale is given almost in the precise words in which I heard it related at a Corporation meeting at the ancient city of Manhattoes, at which were present many of its sagest and most illustrious burghers. The narrator was a pleasant, shabby, gentlemanly old fellow, in pepper-and-salt clothes, with a sadly humourous face, and one whom I strongly suspected of being poor--he made such efforts to be entertaining. When his story was concluded, there was much laughter and approbation, particularly from two or three deputy aldermen, who had been asleep the greater part of the time. There was, however, one tall, dry-looking old gentleman, with beetling eyebrows, who maintained a grave and rather severe face throughout, now and then folding his arms, inclining his head, and looking down upon the floor, as if turning a doubt over in his mind. He was one of your wary men, who never laugh but upon good grounds--when they have reason and law on their side. When the mirth of the rest of the company had subsided, and silence was restored, he leaned one arm on the elbow of his chair, and sticking the other akimbo, demanded, with a slight, but exceedingly sage motion of the head, and contraction of the brow, what was the moral of the story, and what it went to prove?

The story-teller, who was just putting a glass of wine to his lips, as a refreshment after his toils, paused for a moment, looked at his inquirer with an air of infinite deference, and, lowering the glass slowly to the table, observed that the story was intended most logically to prove--

"That there is no situation in life but has its advantages and pleasures--provided we will but take a joke as we find it:

"That, therefore, he that runs races with goblin troopers is likely to have rough riding of it.

"Ergo, for a country schoolmaster to be refused the hand of a Dutch heiress is a certain step to high preferment in the state."

The cautious old gentleman knit his brows tenfold closer after this explanation, being sorely puzzled by the ratiocination of the syllogism, while, methought, the one in pepper-and-salt eyed him with something of a triumphant leer. At length he observed that all this was very well, but still he thought the story a little on the extravagant--there were one or two points on which he had his doubts.

"Faith, sir," replied the story-teller, "as to that matter, I don't believe one-half of it myself." D. K.

THE END.

This page titled 3.11.1: Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.5: Irving, Washington "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

3.11.2: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844)

THE PURLOINED LETTER

> *Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nim*
>
> *Seneca.*

At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18-, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book-closet, au troisiême, No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence; while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G—, the Prefect of the Parisian police.

We gave him a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G.'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forebore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

"That is another of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had a fashion of calling every thing "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visiter with a pipe, and rolled towards him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?"

"Oh no; nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is very simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively odd."

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair is so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you do talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little too self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha—ha! ha! ha!—ho! ho! ho!" roared our visiter, profoundly amused, "oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!"

"And what, after all, is the matter on hand?" I asked.

"Why, I will tell you," replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. "I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold, were it known that I confided it to any one."

"Proceed," said I.

"Or not," said Dupin.

"Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance, has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession."

"How is this known?" asked Dupin.

"It is clearly inferred," replied the Prefect, "from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing out of the robber's possession; that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it."

"Be a little more explicit," I said.

"Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable." The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

"Still I do not quite understand," said Dupin.

"No? Well; the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized."

"But this ascendancy," I interposed, "would depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare—"

"The thief," said G., "is the Minister D—, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document in question—a letter, to be frank—had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal boudoir. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavor to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D—. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognises the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses, for some fifteen minutes, upon the public affairs. At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage who stood at her elbow. The minister decamped; leaving his own letter—one of no importance—upon the table."

"Here, then," said Dupin to me, "you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete—the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber."

"Yes," replied the Prefect; "and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me."

"Than whom," said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, "no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined."

"You flatter me," replied the Prefect; "but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained."

"It is clear," said I, "as you observe, that the letter is still in possession of the minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs."

"True," said G.; "and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make thorough search of the minister's hotel; and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design."

"But," said I, "you are quite au fait in these investigations. The Parisian police have done this thing often before."

"O yes; and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D— Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed."

"But is it not possible," I suggested, "that although the letter may be in possession of the minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?"

"This is barely possible," said Dupin. "The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D— is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document—its susceptibility of being produced at a moment's notice—a point of nearly equal importance with its possession."

"Its susceptibility of being produced?" said I.

"That is to say, of being destroyed," said Dupin.

"True," I observed; "the paper is clearly then upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the minister, we may consider that as out of the question."

"Entirely," said the Prefect. "He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigorously searched under my own inspection."

"You might have spared yourself this trouble," said Dupin. "D—, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings, as a matter of course."

"Not altogether a fool," said G., "but then he's a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool."

"True," said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his meerschaum, "although I have been guilty of certain doggrel myself."

"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search."

"Why the fact is, we took our time, and we searched every where. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the

entire building, room by room; devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police agent, such a thing as a secret drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a 'secret' drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is so plain. There is a certain amount of bulk—of space—to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules. The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with the fine long needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops."

"Why so?"

"Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way."

"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?" I asked.

"By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it. Besides, in our case, we were obliged to proceed without noise."

"But you could not have removed—you could not have taken to pieces all articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?"

"Certainly not; but we did better—we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and, indeed the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the glueing—any unusual gaping in the joints—would have sufficed to insure detection."

"I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bed-clothes, as well as the curtains and carpets."

"That of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before."

"The two houses adjoining!" I exclaimed; "you must have had a great deal of trouble."

"We had; but the reward offered is prodigious!"

"You include the grounds about the houses?"

"All the grounds are paved with brick. They gave us comparatively little trouble. We examined the moss between the bricks, and found it undisturbed."

"You looked among D—'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?"

"Certainly; we opened every package and parcel; we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers. We also measured the thickness of every book-cover, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope. Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation. Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles."

"You explored the floors beneath the carpets?"

"Beyond doubt. We removed every carpet, and examined the boards with the microscope."

"And the paper on the walls?"

"Yes."

"You looked into the cellars?"

"We did."

"Then," I said, "you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is not upon the premises, as you suppose."

"I fear you are right there," said the Prefect. "And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?"

"To make a thorough re-search of the premises."

"That is absolutely needless," replied G—. "I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the Hotel."

"I have no better advice to give you," said Dupin. "You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?"

"Oh yes!"—And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before. In about a month afterwards he paid us another visit, and found us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said,—

"Well, but G—, what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no such thing as overreaching the Minister?"

"Confound him, say I—yes; I made the re-examination, however, as Dupin suggested—but it was all labor lost, as I knew it would be."

"How much was the reward offered, did you say?" asked Dupin.

"Why, a very great deal—a very liberal reward—I don't like to say how much, precisely; but one thing I will say, that I wouldn't mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day; and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done."

"Why, yes," said Dupin, drawlingly, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, "I really—think, G—, you have not exerted yourself—to the utmost in this matter. You might—do a little more, I think, eh?"

"How?—in what way?'

"Why—puff, puff—you might—puff, puff—employ counsel in the matter, eh?—puff, puff, puff. Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy?"

"No; hang Abernethy!"

"To be sure! hang him and welcome. But, once upon a time, a certain rich miser conceived the design of spunging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician, as that of an imaginary individual.

"'We will suppose,' said the miser, 'that his symptoms are such and such; now, doctor, what would you have directed him to take?'

"'Take!' said Abernethy, 'why, take advice, to be sure.'"

"But," said the Prefect, a little discomposed, "I am perfectly willing to take advice, and to pay for it. I would really give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid me in the matter."

"In that case," replied Dupin, opening a drawer, and producing a check-book, "you may as well fill me up a check for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter."

I was astounded. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets; then, apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket-book; then, unlocking an escritoire, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

"The Parisian police," he said, "are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G— detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at the Hotel D—, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation—so far as his labors extended."

"So far as his labors extended?" said I.

"Yes," said Dupin. "The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it."

I merely laughed—but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

"The measures, then," he continued, "were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case, and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow, for the matter in hand; and many a schoolboy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of 'even and odd' attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one; if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks, 'are they even or odd?' Our schoolboy replies, 'odd,' and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself, 'the simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess odd;'—he guesses odd, and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the first, he would have reasoned thus: 'This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to himself, upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even;'—he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the schoolboy, whom his fellows termed 'lucky,'—what, in its last analysis, is it?"

"It is merely," I said, "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent."

"It is," said Dupin; "and, upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the thorough identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows: 'When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression.' This response of the schoolboy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucault, to La Bougive, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella."

"And the identification," I said, "of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured."

"For its practical value it depends upon this," replied Dupin; "and the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their own ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which they would have hidden it. They are right in this much—that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of the mass; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below. They have no variation of principle in their investigations; at best, when urged by some unusual emergency—by some extraordinary reward—they extend or exaggerate their old modes of practice, without touching their principles. What, for example, in this case of D—, has been done to vary the principle of action? What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinizing with the microscope and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches—what is it all but an exaggeration of the application of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions regarding human ingenuity, to which the Prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has been accustomed? Do you not see he has taken it for granted that all men proceed to conceal a letter,—not exactly in a gimlet hole bored in a chair-leg—but, at least, in some out-of-the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see also, that such recherchés nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects; for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed—a disposal of it in this recherché manner,—is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers; and where the case is of importance—or, what amounts to the same thing in the policial eyes, when the reward is of magnitude,—the qualities in question have never been known to fail. You will now understand what I meant in suggesting that, had the purloined letter been hidden any where within the limits of the Prefect's examination—in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the Prefect—its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister is a fool, because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect feels; and he is merely guilty of a non distributio medii in thence inferring that all poets are fools."

"But is this really the poet?" I asked. "There are two brothers, I know; and both have attained reputation in letters. The Minister I believe has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician, and no poet."

"You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As poet and mathematician, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect."

"You surprise me," I said, "by these opinions, which have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as the reason par excellence."

"'Il y a à parièr,'" replied Dupin, quoting from Chamfort, "'que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue est une sottise, car elle a convenue au plus grand nombre.' The mathematicians, I grant you, have done their best to promulgate the popular error to which you allude, and which is none the less an error for its promulgation as truth. With an art worthy a better cause, for example, they have insinuated the term 'analysis' into application to algebra. The French are the originators of this particular deception; but if a term is of any importance—if words derive any value from applicability—then 'analysis' conveys 'algebra' about as much as, in Latin, 'ambitus' implies 'ambition,' 'religio' 'religion,' or 'homines honesti,' a set of honorablemen."

"You have a quarrel on hand, I see," said I, "with some of the algebraists of Paris; but proceed."

"I dispute the availability, and thus the value, of that reason which is cultivated in any especial form other than the abstractly logical. I dispute, in particular, the reason educed by mathematical study. The mathematics are the science of form and quantity; mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity. The great error lies in

supposing that even the truths of what is called pure algebra, are abstract or general truths. And this error is so egregious that I am confounded at the universality with which it has been received. Mathematical axioms are not axioms of general truth. What is true of relation—of form and quantity—is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example. In this latter science it is very usually untrue that the aggregated parts are equal to the whole. In chemistry also the axiom fails. In the consideration of motive it fails; for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value when united, equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only truths within the limits of relation. But the mathematician argues, from his finite truths, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability—as the world indeed imagines them to be. Bryant, in his very learned 'Mythology,' mentions an analogous source of error, when he says that 'although the Pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually, and make inferences from them as existing realities.' With the algebraists, however, who are Pagans themselves, the 'Pagan fables' are believed, and the inferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory, as through an unaccountable addling of the brains. In short, I never yet encountered the mere mathematician who could be trusted out of equal roots, or one who did not clandestinely hold it as a point of his faith that x^2+px was absolutely and unconditionally equal to q. Say to one of these gentlemen, by way of experiment, if you please, that you believe occasions may occur where x^2+px is not altogether equal to q, and, having made him understand what you mean, get out of his reach as speedily as convenient, for, beyond doubt, he will endeavor to knock you down.

"I mean to say," continued Dupin, while I merely laughed at his last observations, "that if the Minister had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this check. I know him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold intriguant. Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate—and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate—the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as ruses, to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G—, in fact, did finally arrive—the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed—I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary nooks of concealment. He could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to simplicity, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so very self-evident."

"Yes," said I, "I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions."

"The material world," continued Dupin, "abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument, as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the vis inertiæ, for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true in the former, that a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent momentum is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again: have you ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop-doors, are the most attractive of attention?"

"I have never given the matter a thought," I said.

"There is a game of puzzles," he resumed, "which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word—the name of town, river, state or empire—any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the Minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

"But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D—; upon the fact that the

document must always have been at hand, if he intended to use it to good purpose; and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary's ordinary search—the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all.

"Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the Ministerial hotel. I found D— at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of ennui. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive—but that is only when nobody sees him.

"To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

"I paid especial attention to a large writing-table near which he sat, and upon which lay confusedly, some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

"At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery fillagree card-rack of pasteboard, that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon, from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantel-piece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six visiting cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle—as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless, had been altered, or stayed, in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D— cipher very conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D—, the minister, himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the uppermost divisions of the rack.

"No sooner had I glanced at this letter, than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D— cipher; there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S— family. Here, the address, to the Minister, diminutive and feminine; there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided; the size alone formed a point of correspondence. But, then, the radicalness of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the true methodical habits of D—, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document; these things, together with the hyper-obtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visiter, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect.

"I protracted my visit as long as possible, and, while I maintained a most animated discussion with the Minister upon a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In this examination, I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack; and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more chafed than seemed necessary. They presented the broken appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, re-directed, and re-sealed. I bade the Minister good morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

"The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus engaged, however, a loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a terrified mob. D— rushed to a casement, threw it open, and looked out. In the meantime, I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a fac-simile, (so far as regards externals,) which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings—imitating the D— cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread.

"The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behavior of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D— came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterwards I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay."

"But what purpose had you," I asked, "in replacing the letter by a fac-simile? Would it not have been better, at the first visit, to have seized it openly, and departed?"

"D—," replied Dupin, "is a desperate man, and a man of nerve. His hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted to his interests. Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the Ministerial presence alive. The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. You know my political prepossessions. In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For

eighteen months the Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers—since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction. His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about the facilis descensus Averni; but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy—at least no pity—for him who descends. He is that monstrum horrendum, an unprincipled man of genius. I confess, however, that I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the Prefect terms 'a certain personage' he is reduced to opening the letter which I left for him in the card-rack."

"How? did you put any thing particular in it?"

"Why—it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank—that would have been insulting. D—, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clue. He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words—

"'— — Un dessein si funeste, S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste. They are to be found in Crebillon's 'Atrée.'"

This page titled 3.11.2: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.8: Poe, Edgar Allan "The Purloined Letter" (1844)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

3.11.3: Herman Melville's "Bartleby, The Scrivener" (1853)

I am a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations for the last thirty years has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written:—I mean the law-copyists or scriveners. I have known very many of them, professionally and privately, and if I pleased, could relate divers histories, at which good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep. But I waive the biographies of all other scriveners for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scrivener of the strangest I ever saw or heard of. While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in his case those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, *that* is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report which will appear in the sequel.

Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my *employees*, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented.

Imprimis: I am a man who, from his youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best. Hence, though I belong to a profession proverbially energetic and nervous, even to turbulence, at times, yet nothing of that sort have I ever suffered to invade my peace. I am one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury, or in any way draws down public applause; but in the cool tranquility of a snug retreat, do a snug business among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title-deeds. All who know me, consider me an eminently *safe* man. The late John Jacob Astor, a personage little given to poetic enthusiasm, had no hesitation in pronouncing my first grand point to be prudence; my next, method. I do not speak it in vanity, but simply record the fact, that I was not unemployed in my profession by the late John Jacob Astor; a name which, I admit, I love to repeat, for it hath a rounded and orbicular sound to it, and rings like unto bullion. I will freely add, that I was not insensible to the late John Jacob Astor's good opinion.

Some time prior to the period at which this little history begins, my avocations had been largely increased. The good old office, now extinct in the State of New York, of a Master in Chancery, had been conferred upon me. It was not a very arduous office, but very pleasantly remunerative. I seldom lose my temper; much more seldom indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages; but I must be permitted to be rash here and declare, that I consider the sudden and violent abrogation of the office of Master in Chancery, by the new Constitution, as a—premature act; inasmuch as I had counted upon a life-lease of the profits, whereas I only received those of a few short years. But this is by the way.

My chambers were up stairs at No.—Wall-street. At one end they looked upon the white wall of the interior of a spacious sky-light shaft, penetrating the building from top to bottom. This view might have been considered rather tame than otherwise, deficient in what landscape painters call "life." But if so, the view from the other end of my chambers offered, at least, a contrast, if nothing more. In that direction my windows commanded an unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall, black by age and everlasting shade; which wall required no spy-glass to bring out its lurking beauties, but for the benefit of all near-sighted spectators, was pushed up to within ten feet of my window panes. Owing to the great height of the surrounding buildings, and my chambers being on the second floor, the interval between this wall and mine not a little resembled a huge square cistern.

At the period just preceding the advent of Bartleby, I had two persons as copyists in my employment, and a promising lad as an office-boy. First, Turkey; second, Nippers; third, Ginger Nut. These may seem names, the like of which are not usually found in the Directory. In truth they were nicknames, mutually conferred upon each other by my three clerks, and were deemed expressive of their respective persons or characters. Turkey was a short, pursy Englishman of about my own age, that is, somewhere not far from sixty. In the morning, one might say, his face was of a fine florid hue, but after twelve o'clock, meridian—his dinner hour—it blazed like a grate full of Christmas coals; and continued blazing—but, as it were, with a gradual wane—till 6 o'clock, P.M. or thereabouts, after which I saw no more of the proprietor of the face, which gaining its meridian with the sun, seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline the following day, with the like regularity and undiminished glory. There are many singular coincidences I have known in the course of my life, not the least among which was the fact, that exactly when Turkey displayed his fullest beams from his red and radiant countenance, just then, too, at that critical moment, began the daily period when I considered his business capacities as seriously disturbed for the remainder of the twenty-four hours. Not that he was absolutely idle, or averse to business then; far from it. The difficulty was, he was apt to be altogether too energetic. There was a strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity about him. He would be incautious in dipping his pen into his inkstand. All his blots upon my documents, were dropped there after twelve o'clock, meridian. Indeed, not only would he be reckless and sadly given to making blots in the afternoon, but some days he

went further, and was rather noisy. At such times, too, his face flamed with augmented blazonry, as if cannel coal had been heaped on anthracite. He made an unpleasant racket with his chair; spilled his sand-box; in mending his pens, impatiently split them all to pieces, and threw them on the floor in a sudden passion; stood up and leaned over his table, boxing his papers about in a most indecorous manner, very sad to behold in an elderly man like him. Nevertheless, as he was in many ways a most valuable person to me, and all the time before twelve o'clock, meridian, was the quickest, steadiest creature too, accomplishing a great deal of work in a style not easy to be matched—for these reasons, I was willing to overlook his eccentricities, though indeed, occasionally, I remonstrated with him. I did this very gently, however, because, though the civilest, nay, the blandest and most reverential of men in the morning, yet in the afternoon he was disposed, upon provocation, to be slightly rash with his tongue, in fact, insolent. Now, valuing his morning services as I did, and resolved not to lose them; yet, at the same time made uncomfortable by his inflamed ways after twelve o'clock; and being a man of peace, unwilling by my admonitions to call forth unseemly retorts from him; I took upon me, one Saturday noon (he was always worse on Saturdays), to hint to him, very kindly, that perhaps now that he was growing old, it might be well to abridge his labors; in short, he need not come to my chambers after twelve o'clock, but, dinner over, had best go home to his lodgings and rest himself till teatime. But no; he insisted upon his afternoon devotions. His countenance became intolerably fervid, as he oratorically assured me—gesticulating with a long ruler at the other end of the room—that if his services in the morning were useful, how indispensable, then, in the afternoon?

"With submission, sir," said Turkey on this occasion, "I consider myself your right-hand man. In the morning I but marshal and deploy my columns; but in the afternoon I put myself at their head, and gallantly charge the foe, thus!"—and he made a violent thrust with the ruler.

"But the blots, Turkey," intimated I.

"True,—but, with submission, sir, behold these hairs! I am getting old. Surely, sir, a blot or two of a warm afternoon is not to be severely urged against gray hairs. Old age—even if it blot the page—is honorable. With submission, sir, we *both* are getting old."

This appeal to my fellow-feeling was hardly to be resisted. At all events, I saw that go he would not. So I made up my mind to let him stay, resolving, nevertheless, to see to it, that during the afternoon he had to do with my less important papers.

Nippers, the second on my list, was a whiskered, sallow, and, upon the whole, rather piratical-looking young man of about five and twenty. I always deemed him the victim of two evil powers—ambition and indigestion. The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents. The indigestion seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying; unnecessary maledictions, hissed, rather than spoken, in the heat of business; and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked. Though of a very ingenious mechanical turn, Nippers could never get this table to suit him. He put chips under it, blocks of various sorts, bits of pasteboard, and at last went so far as to attempt an exquisite adjustment by final pieces of folded blotting paper. But no invention would answer. If, for the sake of easing his back, he brought the table lid at a sharp angle well up towards his chin, and wrote there like a man using the steep roof of a Dutch house for his desk:—then he declared that it stopped the circulation in his arms. If now he lowered the table to his waistbands, and stooped over it in writing, then there was a sore aching in his back. In short, the truth of the matter was, Nippers knew not what he wanted. Or, if he wanted any thing, it was to be rid of a scrivener's table altogether. Among the manifestations of his diseased ambition was a fondness he had for receiving visits from certain ambiguous-looking fellows in seedy coats, whom he called his clients. Indeed I was aware that not only was he, at times, considerable of a ward-politician, but he occasionally did a little business at the Justices' courts, and was not unknown on the steps of the Tombs. I have good reason to believe, however, that one individual who called upon him at my chambers, and who, with a grand air, he insisted was his client, was no other than a dun, and the alleged title-deed, a bill. But with all his failings, and the annoyances he caused me, Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, was a very useful man to me; wrote a neat, swift hand; and, when he chose, was not deficient in a gentlemanly sort of deportment. Added to this, he always dressed in a gentlemanly sort of way; and so, incidentally, reflected credit upon my chambers. Whereas with respect to Turkey, I had much ado to keep him from being a reproach to me. His clothes were apt to look oily and smell of eating-houses. He wore his pantaloons very loose and baggy in summer. His coats were execrable; his hat not to be handled. But while the hat was a thing of indifference to me, inasmuch as his natural civility and deference, as a dependent Englishman, always led him to doff it the moment he entered the room, yet his coat was another matter. Concerning his coats, I reasoned with him; but with no effect. The truth was, I suppose, that a man of so small an income, could not afford to sport such a lustrous face and a lustrous coat at one and the same time. As Nippers once observed, Turkey's money went chiefly for red ink. One winter day I presented Turkey with a highly-respectable looking coat of my own, a padded gray coat, of a most comfortable warmth, and which buttoned straight up from the knee to the neck. I thought Turkey would appreciate the

favor, and abate his rashness and obstreperousness of afternoons. But no. I verily believe that buttoning himself up in so downy and blanket-like a coat had a pernicious effect upon him; upon the same principle that too much oats are bad for horses. In fact, precisely as a rash, restive horse is said to feel his oats, so Turkey felt his coat. It made him insolent. He was a man whom prosperity harmed.

Though concerning the self-indulgent habits of Turkey I had my own private surmises, yet touching Nippers I was well persuaded that whatever might be his faults in other respects, he was, at least, a temperate young man. But indeed, nature herself seemed to have been his vintner, and at his birth charged him so thoroughly with an irritable, brandy-like disposition, that all subsequent potations were needless. When I consider how, amid the stillness of my chambers, Nippers would sometimes impatiently rise from his seat, and stooping over his table, spread his arms wide apart, seize the whole desk, and move it, and jerk it, with a grim, grinding motion on the floor, as if the table were a perverse voluntary agent, intent on thwarting and vexing him; I plainly perceive that for Nippers, brandy and water were altogether superfluous.

It was fortunate for me that, owing to its peculiar cause—indigestion—the irritability and consequent nervousness of Nippers, were mainly observable in the morning, while in the afternoon he was comparatively mild. So that Turkey's paroxysms only coming on about twelve o'clock, I never had to do with their eccentricities at one time. Their fits relieved each other like guards. When Nippers' was on, Turkey's was off; and *vice versa*. This was a good natural arrangement under the circumstances.

Ginger Nut, the third on my list, was a lad some twelve years old. His father was a carman, ambitious of seeing his son on the bench instead of a cart, before he died. So he sent him to my office as student at law, errand boy, and cleaner and sweeper, at the rate of one dollar a week. He had a little desk to himself, but he did not use it much. Upon inspection, the drawer exhibited a great array of the shells of various sorts of nuts. Indeed, to this quick-witted youth the whole noble science of the law was contained in a nut-shell. Not the least among the employments of Ginger Nut, as well as one which he discharged with the most alacrity, was his duty as cake and apple purveyor for Turkey and Nippers. Copying law papers being proverbially dry, husky sort of business, my two scriveners were fain to moisten their mouths very often with Spitzenbergs to be had at the numerous stalls nigh the Custom House and Post Office. Also, they sent Ginger Nut very frequently for that peculiar cake—small, flat, round, and very spicy—after which he had been named by them. Of a cold morning when business was but dull, Turkey would gobble up scores of these cakes, as if they were mere wafers—indeed they sell them at the rate of six or eight for a penny—the scrape of his pen blending with the crunching of the crisp particles in his mouth. Of all the fiery afternoon blunders and flurried rashnesses of Turkey, was his once moistening a ginger-cake between his lips, and clapping it on to a mortgage for a seal. I came within an ace of dismissing him then. But he mollified me by making an oriental bow, and saying—"With submission, sir, it was generous of me to find you in stationery on my own account."

Now my original business—that of a conveyancer and title hunter, and drawer-up of recondite documents of all sorts—was considerably increased by receiving the master's office. There was now great work for scriveners. Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help. In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning, stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now—pallidly neat, pitiably respectable, incurably forlorn! It was Bartleby.

After a few words touching his qualifications, I engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect, which I thought might operate beneficially upon the flighty temper of Turkey, and the fiery one of Nippers.

I should have stated before that ground glass folding-doors divided my premises into two parts, one of which was occupied by my scriveners, the other by myself. According to my humor I threw open these doors, or closed them. I resolved to assign Bartleby a corner by the folding-doors, but on my side of them, so as to have this quiet man within easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done. I placed his desk close up to a small side-window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grimy back-yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome. Still further to a satisfactory arrangement, I procured a high green folding screen, which might entirely isolate Bartleby from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were conjoined.

At first Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sun-light and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically.

It is, of course, an indispensable part of a scrivener's business to verify the accuracy of his copy, word by word. Where there are two or more scriveners in an office, they assist each other in this examination, one reading from the copy, the other holding the original. It is a very dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair. I can

readily imagine that to some sanguine temperaments it would be altogether intolerable. For example, I cannot credit that the mettlesome poet Byron would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document of, say five hundred pages, closely written in a crimpy hand.

Now and then, in the haste of business, it had been my habit to assist in comparing some brief document myself, calling Turkey or Nippers for this purpose. One object I had in placing Bartleby so handy to me behind the screen, was to avail myself of his services on such trivial occasions. It was on the third day, I think, of his being with me, and before any necessity had arisen for having his own writing examined, that, being much hurried to complete a small affair I had in hand, I abruptly called to Bartleby. In my haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance, I sat with my head bent over the original on my desk, and my right hand sideways, and somewhat nervously extended with the copy, so that immediately upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby might snatch it and proceed to business without the least delay.

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do—namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when without moving from his privacy, Bartleby in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, "I would prefer not to."

I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume. But in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, "I would prefer not to."

"Prefer not to," echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. "What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it," and I thrust it towards him.

"I would prefer not to," said he.

I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors. I stood gazing at him awhile, as he went on with his own writing, and then reseated myself at my desk. This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do? But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure. So calling Nippers from the other room, the paper was speedily examined.

A few days after this, Bartleby concluded four lengthy documents, being quadruplicates of a week's testimony taken before me in my High Court of Chancery. It became necessary to examine them. It was an important suit, and great accuracy was imperative. Having all things arranged I called Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut from the next room, meaning to place the four copies in the hands of my four clerks, while I should read from the original. Accordingly Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut had taken their seats in a row, each with his document in hand, when I called to Bartleby to join this interesting group.

"Bartleby! quick, I am waiting."

I heard a slow scrape of his chair legs on the uncarpeted floor, and soon he appeared standing at the entrance of his hermitage.

"What is wanted?" said he mildly.

"The copies, the copies," said I hurriedly. "We are going to examine them. There"—and I held towards him the fourth quadruplicate.

"I would prefer not to," he said, and gently disappeared behind the screen.

For a few moments I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks. Recovering myself, I advanced towards the screen, and demanded the reason for such extraordinary conduct.

"*Why* do you refuse?"

"I would prefer not to."

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me. I began to reason with him.

"These are your own copies we are about to examine. It is labor saving to you, because one examination will answer for your four papers. It is common usage. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you not speak? Answer!"

"I prefer not to," he replied in a flute-like tone. It seemed to me that while I had been addressing him, he carefully revolved every statement that I made; fully comprehended the meaning; could not gainsay the irresistible conclusions; but, at the same time, some paramount consideration prevailed with him to reply as he did.

"You are decided, then, not to comply with my request—a request made according to common usage and common sense?"

He briefly gave me to understand that on that point my judgment was sound. Yes: his decision was irreversible.

It is not seldom the case that when a man is browbeaten in some unprecedented and violently unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own plainest faith. He begins, as it were, vaguely to surmise that, wonderful as it may be, all the justice and all the reason is on the other side. Accordingly, if any disinterested

persons are present, he turns to them for some reinforcement for his own faltering mind.

"Turkey," said I, "what do you think of this? Am I not right?"

"With submission, sir," said Turkey, with his blandest tone, "I think that you are."

"Nippers," said I, "what do *you* think of it?"

"I think I should kick him out of the office."

(The reader of nice perceptions will here perceive that, it being morning, Turkey's answer is couched in polite and tranquil terms, but Nippers replies in ill-tempered ones. Or, to repeat a previous sentence, Nippers' ugly mood was on duty and Turkey's off.)

"Ginger Nut," said I, willing to enlist the smallest suffrage in my behalf, "what do you think of it?"

"I think, sir, he's a little *luny*," replied Ginger Nut with a grin.

"You hear what they say," said I, turning towards the screen, "come forth and do your duty."

But he vouchsafed no reply. I pondered a moment in sore perplexity. But once more business hurried me. I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure. With a little trouble we made out to examine the papers without Bartleby, though at every page or two, Turkey deferentially dropped his opinion that this proceeding was quite out of the common; while Nippers, twitching in his chair with a dyspeptic nervousness, ground out between his set teeth occasional hissing maledictions against the stubborn oaf behind the screen. And for his (Nippers') part, this was the first and the last time he would do another man's business without pay.

Meanwhile Bartleby sat in his hermitage, oblivious to every thing but his own peculiar business there.

Some days passed, the scrivener being employed upon another lengthy work. His late remarkable conduct led me to regard his ways narrowly. I observed that he never went to dinner; indeed that he never went any where. As yet I had never of my personal knowledge known him to be outside of my office. He was a perpetual sentry in the corner. At about eleven o'clock though, in the morning, I noticed that Ginger Nut would advance toward the opening in Bartleby's screen, as if silently beckoned thither by a gesture invisible to me where I sat. The boy would then leave the office jingling a few pence, and reappear with a handful of ginger-nuts which he delivered in the hermitage, receiving two of the cakes for his trouble.

He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking; he must be a vegetarian then; but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts. My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. Ginger-nuts are so called because they contain ginger as one of their peculiar constituents, and the final flavoring one. Now what was ginger? A hot, spicy thing. Was Bartleby hot and spicy? Not at all. Ginger, then, had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none.

Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance. If the individual so resisted be of a not inhumane temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity; then, in the better moods of the former, he will endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment. Even so, for the most part, I regarded Bartleby and his ways. Poor fellow! thought I, he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Yes. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange willfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. But this mood was not invariable with me. The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me. I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own. But indeed I might as well have essayed to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of Windsor soap. But one afternoon the evil impulse in me mastered me, and the following little scene ensued:

"Bartleby," said I, "when those papers are all copied, I will compare them with you."

"I would prefer not to."

"How? Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?"

No answer.

I threw open the folding-doors near by, and turning upon Turkey and
Nippers, exclaimed in an excited manner—

"He says, a second time, he won't examine his papers. What do you think of it, Turkey?"

It was afternoon, be it remembered. Turkey sat glowing like a brass boiler, his bald head steaming, his hands reeling among his blotted papers.

"Think of it?" roared Turkey; "I think I'll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him!"

So saying, Turkey rose to his feet and threw his arms into a pugilistic position. He was hurrying away to make good his promise, when I detained him, alarmed at the effect of incautiously rousing Turkey's combativeness after dinner.

"Sit down, Turkey," said I, "and hear what Nippers has to say. What do you think of it, Nippers? Would I not be justified in immediately dismissing Bartleby?"

"Excuse me, that is for you to decide, sir. I think his conduct quite unusual, and indeed unjust, as regards Turkey and myself. But it may only be a passing whim."

"Ah," exclaimed I, "you have strangely changed your mind then—you speak very gently of him now."

"All beer," cried Turkey; "gentleness is effects of beer—Nippers and I dined together to-day. You see how gentle *I* am, sir. Shall I go and black his eyes?"

"You refer to Bartleby, I suppose. No, not to-day, Turkey," I replied; "pray, put up your fists."

I closed the doors, and again advanced towards Bartleby. I felt additional incentives tempting me to my fate. I burned to be rebelled against again. I remembered that Bartleby never left the office.

"Bartleby," said I, "Ginger Nut is away; just step round to the Post Office, won't you? (it was but a three minute walk,) and see if there is any thing for me."

"I would prefer not to."

"You *will* not?"

"I *prefer* not."

I staggered to my desk, and sat there in a deep study. My blind inveteracy returned. Was there any other thing in which I could procure myself to be ignominiously repulsed by this lean, penniless wight?—my hired clerk? What added thing is there, perfectly reasonable, that he will be sure to refuse to do?

"Bartleby!"

No answer.

"Bartleby," in a louder tone.

No answer.

"Bartleby," I roared.

Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.

"Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me."

"I prefer not to," he respectfully and slowly said, and mildly disappeared.

"Very good, Bartleby," said I, in a quiet sort of serenely severe self-possessed tone, intimating the unalterable purpose of some terrible retribution very close at hand. At the moment I half intended something of the kind. But upon the whole, as it was drawing towards my dinner-hour, I thought it best to put on my hat and walk home for the day, suffering much from perplexity and distress of mind.

Shall I acknowledge it? The conclusion of this whole business was, that it soon became a fixed fact of my chambers, that a pale young scrivener, by the name of Bartleby, and a desk there; that he copied for me at the usual rate of four cents a folio (one hundred words); but he was permanently exempt from examining the work done by him, that duty being transferred to Turkey and Nippers, one of compliment doubtless to their superior acuteness; moreover, said Bartleby was never on any account to be dispatched on the most trivial errand of any sort; and that even if entreated to take upon him such a matter, it was generally understood that he would prefer not to—in other words, that he would refuse pointblank.

As days passed on, I became considerably reconciled to Bartleby. His steadiness, his freedom from all dissipation, his incessant industry (except when he chose to throw himself into a standing revery behind his screen), his great stillness, his unalterableness of demeanor under all circumstances, made him a valuable acquisition. One prime thing was this,—*he was always there;*—first in the morning, continually through the day, and the last at night. I had a singular confidence in his honesty. I felt my most precious papers perfectly safe in his hands. Sometimes to be sure I could not, for the very soul of me, avoid falling into sudden spasmodic passions with him. For it was exceeding difficult to bear in mind all the time those strange peculiarities, privileges, and unheard of exemptions, forming the tacit stipulations on Bartleby's part under which he remained in my office. Now and then, in the eagerness of dispatching pressing business, I would inadvertently summon Bartleby, in a short, rapid tone, to put his finger, say, on the incipient tie of a bit of red tape with which I was about compressing some papers. Of course, from behind the screen the usual answer, "I prefer not to," was sure to come; and then, how could a human creature with the common infirmities of our nature, refrain from bitterly exclaiming upon such perverseness—such unreasonableness. However, every added repulse of this sort which I received only tended to lessen the probability of my repeating the inadvertence.

Here it must be said, that according to the custom of most legal gentlemen occupying chambers in densely-populated law buildings, there were several keys to my door. One was kept by a woman residing in the attic, which person weekly scrubbed and daily swept and dusted my apartments. Another was kept by Turkey for convenience sake. The third I sometimes carried in my own pocket. The fourth I knew not who had.

Now, one Sunday morning I happened to go to Trinity Church, to hear a celebrated preacher, and finding myself rather early on the ground, I thought I would walk around to my chambers for a while. Luckily I had my key with me; but upon applying it to the lock, I found it resisted by something inserted from the

inside. Quite surprised, I called out; when to my consternation a key was turned from within; and thrusting his lean visage at me, and holding the door ajar, the apparition of Bartleby appeared, in his shirt sleeves, and otherwise in a strangely tattered dishabille, saying quietly that he was sorry, but he was deeply engaged just then, and—preferred not admitting me at present. In a brief word or two, he moreover added, that perhaps I had better walk round the block two or three times, and by that time he would probably have concluded his affairs.

Now, the utterly unsurmised appearance of Bartleby, tenanting my law-chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly *nonchalance*, yet withal firm and self-possessed, had such a strange effect upon me, that incontinently I slunk away from my own door, and did as desired. But not without sundry twinges of impotent rebellion against the mild effrontery of this unaccountable scrivener. Indeed, it was his wonderful mildness chiefly, which not only disarmed me, but unmanned me, as it were. For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unmanned when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own premises. Furthermore, I was full of uneasiness as to what Bartleby could possibly be doing in my office in his shirt sleeves, and in an otherwise dismantled condition of a Sunday morning. Was any thing amiss going on? Nay, that was out of the question. It was not to be thought of for a moment that Bartleby was an immoral person. But what could he be doing there?—copying? Nay again, whatever might be his eccentricities, Bartleby was an eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. Besides, it was Sunday; and there was something about Bartleby that forbade the supposition that he would by any secular occupation violate the proprieties of the day.

Nevertheless, my mind was not pacified; and full of a restless curiosity, at last I returned to the door. Without hindrance I inserted my key, opened it, and entered. Bartleby was not to be seen. I looked round anxiously, peeped behind his screen; but it was very plain that he was gone. Upon more closely examining the place, I surmised that for an indefinite period Bartleby must have ate, dressed, and slept in my office, and that too without plate, mirror, or bed. The cushioned seat of a rickety old sofa in one corner bore the faint impress of a lean, reclining form. Rolled away under his desk, I found a blanket; under the empty grate, a blacking box and brush; on a chair, a tin basin, with soap and a ragged towel; in a newspaper a few crumbs of ginger-nuts and a morsel of cheese. Yes, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartleby has been making his home here, keeping bachelor's hall all by himself. Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! Think of it. Of a Sunday, Wall-street is deserted as Petra; and every night of every day it is an emptiness. This building too, which of week-days hums with industry and life, at nightfall echoes with sheer vacancy, and all through Sunday is forlorn. And here Bartleby makes his home; sole spectator of a solitude which he has seen all populous—a sort of innocent and transformed Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage!

For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not-unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartleby were sons of Adam. I remembered the bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen that day, in gala trim, swan-like sailing down the Mississippi of Broadway; and I contrasted them with the pallid copyist, and thought to myself, Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery there is none. These sad fancyings—chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain—led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby. Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me. The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding sheet.

Suddenly I was attracted by Bartleby's closed desk, the key in open sight left in the lock.

I mean no mischief, seek the gratification of no heartless curiosity, thought I; besides, the desk is mine, and its contents too, so I will make bold to look within. Every thing was methodically arranged, the papers smoothly placed. The pigeon holes were deep, and removing the files of documents, I groped into their recesses. Presently I felt something there, and dragged it out. It was an old bandanna handkerchief, heavy and knotted. I opened it, and saw it was a savings' bank.

I now recalled all the quiet mysteries which I had noted in the man. I remembered that he never spoke but to answer; that though at intervals he had considerable time to himself, yet I had never seen him reading—no, not even a newspaper; that for long periods he would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall; I was quite sure he never visited any refectory or eating house; while his pale face clearly indicated that he never drank beer like Turkey, or tea and coffee even, like other men; that he never went any where in particular that I could learn; never went out for a walk, unless indeed that was the case at present; that he had declined telling who he was, or whence he came, or whether he had any relatives in the world; that though so thin and pale, he never complained of ill health. And more than all, I remembered a certain unconscious air of pallid—how shall I call it?—of pallid haughtiness, say, or rather an austere reserve about him, which had positively awed me into my tame compliance with his eccentricities, when I had feared to ask him to do the slightest incidental thing for me, even though I might know, from his

long-continued motionlessness, that behind his screen he must be standing in one of those dead-wall reveries of his.

Revolving all these things, and coupling them with the recently discovered fact that he made my office his constant abiding place and home, and not forgetful of his morbid moodiness; revolving all these things, a prudential feeling began to steal over me. My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. So true it is, and so terrible too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.

I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning. Somehow, the things I had seen disqualified me for the time from church-going. I walked homeward, thinking what I would do with Bartleby. Finally, I resolved upon this;—I would put certain calm questions to him the next morning, touching his history, etc., and if he declined to answer them openly and unreservedly (and I supposed he would prefer not), then to give him a twenty dollar bill over and above whatever I might owe him, and tell him his services were no longer required; but that if in any other way I could assist him, I would be happy to do so, especially if he desired to return to his native place, wherever that might be, I would willingly help to defray the expenses. Moreover, if, after reaching home, he found himself at any time in want of aid, a letter from him would be sure of a reply.

The next morning came.

"Bartleby," said I, gently calling to him behind his screen.

No reply.

"Bartleby," said I, in a still gentler tone, "come here; I am not going to ask you to do any thing you would prefer not to do—I simply wish to speak to you."

Upon this he noiselessly slid into view.

"Will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?"

"I would prefer not to."

"Will you tell me *any thing* about yourself?"

"I would prefer not to."

"But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you."

He did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head.

"What is your answer, Bartleby?" said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth.

"At present I prefer to give no answer," he said, and retired into his hermitage.

It was rather weak in me I confess, but his manner on this occasion nettled me. Not only did there seem to lurk in it a certain calm disdain, but his perverseness seemed ungrateful, considering the undeniable good usage and indulgence he had received from me.

Again I sat ruminating what I should do. Mortified as I was at his behavior, and resolved as I had been to dismiss him when I entered my offices, nevertheless I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and forbidding me to carry out my purpose, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind. At last, familiarly drawing my chair behind his screen, I sat down and said: "Bartleby, never mind then about revealing your history; but let me entreat you, as a friend, to comply as far as may be with the usages of this office. Say now you will help to examine papers to-morrow or next day: in short, say now that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable:—say so, Bartleby."

"At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable," was his mildly cadaverous reply.

Just then the folding-doors opened, and Nippers approached. He seemed suffering from an unusually bad night's rest, induced by severer indigestion than common. He overheard those final words of Bartleby.

"*Prefer not*, eh?" gritted Nippers—"I'd *prefer* him, if I were you, sir," addressing me—"I'd *prefer* him; I'd give him preferences, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, pray, that he *prefers* not to do now?"

Bartleby moved not a limb.

"Mr. Nippers," said I, "I'd prefer that you would withdraw for the present."

Somehow, of late I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word "prefer" upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet

produce? This apprehension had not been without efficacy in determining me to summary means.

As Nippers, looking very sour and sulky, was departing, Turkey blandly and deferentially approached.

"With submission, sir," said he, "yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it would do much towards mending him, and enabling him to assist in examining his papers."

"So you have got the word too," said I, slightly excited.

"With submission, what word, sir," asked Turkey, respectfully crowding himself into the contracted space behind the screen, and by so doing, making me jostle the scrivener. "What word, sir?"

"I would prefer to be left alone here," said Bartleby, as if offended at being mobbed in his privacy.

"*That's* the word, Turkey," said I—"that's it."

"Oh, *prefer*? oh yes—queer word. I never use it myself. But, sir, as
I was saying, if he would but prefer—"

"Turkey," interrupted I, "you will please withdraw."

"Oh certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should."

As he opened the folding-door to retire, Nippers at his desk caught a glimpse of me, and asked whether I would prefer to have a certain paper copied on blue paper or white. He did not in the least roguishly accent the word prefer. It was plain that it involuntarily rolled from his tongue. I thought to myself, surely I must get rid of a demented man, who already has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and clerks. But I thought it prudent not to break the dismission at once.

The next day I noticed that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall revery. Upon asking him why he did not write, he said that he had decided upon doing no more writing.

"Why, how now? what next?" exclaimed I, "do no more writing?"

"No more."

"And what is the reason?"

"Do you not see the reason for yourself," he indifferently replied.

I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision.

I was touched. I said something in condolence with him. I hinted that of course he did wisely in abstaining from writing for a while; and urged him to embrace that opportunity of taking wholesome exercise in the open air. This, however, he did not do. A few days after this, my other clerks being absent, and being in a great hurry to dispatch certain letters by the mail, I thought that, having nothing else earthly to do, Bartleby would surely be less inflexible than usual, and carry these letters to the post-office. But he blankly declined. So, much to my inconvenience, I went myself.

Still added days went by. Whether Bartleby's eyes improved or not, I could not say. To all appearance, I thought they did. But when I asked him if they did, he vouchsafed no answer. At all events, he would do no copying. At last, in reply to my urgings, he informed me that he had permanently given up copying.

"What!" exclaimed I; "suppose your eyes should get entirely well—better than ever before—would you not copy then?"

"I have given up copying," he answered, and slid aside.

He remained as ever, a fixture in my chamber. Nay—if that were possible—he became still more of a fixture than before. What was to be done? He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there? In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflictive to bear. Yet I was sorry for him. I speak less than truth when I say that, on his own account, he occasioned me uneasiness. If he would but have named a single relative or friend, I would instantly have written, and urged their taking the poor fellow away to some convenient retreat. But he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic. At length, necessities connected with my business tyrannized over all other considerations. Decently as I could, I told Bartleby that in six days' time he must unconditionally leave the office. I warned him to take measures, in the interval, for procuring some other abode. I offered to assist him in this endeavor, if he himself would but take the first step towards a removal. "And when you finally quit me, Bartleby," added I, "I shall see that you go not away entirely unprovided. Six days from this hour, remember."

At the expiration of that period, I peeped behind the screen, and lo!
Bartleby was there.

I buttoned up my coat, balanced myself; advanced slowly towards him, touched his shoulder, and said, "The time has come; you must quit this place; I am sorry for you; here is money; but you must go."

"I would prefer not," he replied, with his back still towards me.

"You *must*."

He remained silent.

Now I had an unbounded confidence in this man's common honesty. He had frequently restored to me sixpences and shillings carelessly dropped upon the floor, for I am apt to be

very reckless in such shirt-button affairs. The proceeding then which followed will not be deemed extraordinary.

"Bartleby," said I, "I owe you twelve dollars on account; here are thirty-two; the odd twenty are yours.—Will you take it?" and I handed the bills towards him.

But he made no motion.

"I will leave them here then," putting them under a weight on the table. Then taking my hat and cane and going to the door I tranquilly turned and added—"After you have removed your things from these offices, Bartleby, you will of course lock the door—since every one is now gone for the day but you—and if you please, slip your key underneath the mat, so that I may have it in the morning. I shall not see you again; so good-bye to you. If hereafter in your new place of abode I can be of any service to you, do not fail to advise me by letter. Good-bye, Bartleby, and fare you well."

But he answered not a word; like the last column of some ruined temple, he remained standing mute and solitary in the middle of the otherwise deserted room.

As I walked home in a pensive mood, my vanity got the better of my pity. I could not but highly plume myself on my masterly management in getting rid of Bartleby. Masterly I call it, and such it must appear to any dispassionate thinker. The beauty of my procedure seemed to consist in its perfect quietness. There was no vulgar bullying, no bravado of any sort, no choleric hectoring, and striding to and fro across the apartment, jerking out vehement commands for Bartleby to bundle himself off with his beggarly traps. Nothing of the kind. Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart—as an inferior genius might have done—I *assumed* the ground that depart he must; and upon that assumption built all I had to say. The more I thought over my procedure, the more I was charmed with it. Nevertheless, next morning, upon awakening, I had my doubts,—I had somehow slept off the fumes of vanity. One of the coolest and wisest hours a man has, is just after he awakes in the morning. My procedure seemed as sagacious as ever.—but only in theory. How it would prove in practice—there was the rub. It was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed Bartleby's departure; but, after all, that assumption was simply my own, and none of Bartleby's. The great point was, not whether I had assumed that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions.

After breakfast, I walked down town, arguing the probabilities *pro* and *con*. One moment I thought it would prove a miserable failure, and Bartleby would be found all alive at my office as usual; the next moment it seemed certain that I should see his chair empty. And so I kept veering about. At the corner of Broadway and Canal-street, I saw quite an excited group of people standing in earnest conversation.

"I'll take odds he doesn't," said a voice as I passed.

"Doesn't go?—done!" said I, "put up your money."

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby, but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. In my intent frame of mind, I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared in my excitement, and were debating the same question with me. I passed on, very thankful that the uproar of the street screened my momentary absent-mindedness.

As I had intended, I was earlier than usual at my office door. I stood listening for a moment. All was still. He must be gone. I tried the knob. The door was locked. Yes, my procedure had worked to a charm; he indeed must be vanished. Yet a certain melancholy mixed with this: I was almost sorry for my brilliant success. I was fumbling under the door mat for the key, which Bartleby was to have left there for me, when accidentally my knee knocked against a panel, producing a summoning sound, and in response a voice came to me from within—"Not yet; I am occupied."

It was Bartleby.

I was thunderstruck. For an instant I stood like the man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless afternoon long ago in Virginia, by a summer lightning; at his own warm open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the dreamy afternoon, till some one touched him, when he fell.

"Not gone!" I murmured at last. But again obeying that wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener had over me, and from which ascendancy, for all my chafing, I could not completely escape, I slowly went down stairs and out into the street, and while walking round the block, considered what I should next do in this unheard-of perplexity. Turn the man out by an actual thrusting I could not; to drive him away by calling him hard names would not do; calling in the police was an unpleasant idea; and yet, permit him to enjoy his cadaverous triumph over me,—this too I could not think of. What was to be done? or, if nothing could be done, was there any thing further that I could *assume* in the matter? Yes, as before I had prospectively assumed that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively assume that departed he was. In the legitimate carrying out of this assumption, I might enter my office in a great hurry, and pretending not to see Bartleby at all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in a singular degree have the appearance of a home-thrust. It was hardly possible that Bartleby could withstand such an application of the doctrine of assumptions. But upon second thoughts the success of the plan seemed rather dubious. I resolved to argue the matter over with him again.

"Bartleby," said I, entering the office, with a quietly severe expression, "I am seriously displeased. I am pained, Bartleby. I had thought better of you. I had imagined you of such a

gentlemanly organization, that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would have suffice—in short, an assumption. But it appears I am deceived. Why," I added, unaffectedly starting, "you have not even touched that money yet," pointing to it, just where I had left it the evening previous.

He answered nothing.

"Will you, or will you not, quit me?" I now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him.

"I would prefer *not* to quit you," he replied, gently emphasizing the *not*.

"What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?"

He answered nothing.

"Are you ready to go on and write now? Are your eyes recovered? Could you copy a small paper for me this morning? or help examine a few lines? or step round to the post-office? In a word, will you do any thing at all, to give a coloring to your refusal to depart the premises?"

He silently retired into his hermitage.

I was now in such a state of nervous resentment that I thought it but prudent to check myself at present from further demonstrations. Bartleby and I were alone. I remembered the tragedy of the unfortunate Adams and the still more unfortunate Colt in the solitary office of the latter; and how poor Colt, being dreadfully incensed by Adams, and imprudently permitting himself to get wildly excited, was at unawares hurried into his fatal act—an act which certainly no man could possibly deplore more than the actor himself. Often it had occurred to me in my ponderings upon the subject, that had that altercation taken place in the public street, or at a private residence, it would not have terminated as it did. It was the circumstance of being alone in a solitary office, up stairs, of a building entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations—an uncarpeted office, doubtless, of a dusty, haggard sort of appearance;—this it must have been, which greatly helped to enhance the irritable desperation of the hapless Colt.

But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction: "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." Yes, this it was that saved me. Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle—a great safeguard to its possessor. Men have committed murder for jealousy's sake, and anger's sake, and hatred's sake, and selfishness' sake, and spiritual pride's sake; but no man that ever I heard of, ever committed a diabolical murder for sweet charity's sake. Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy. At any rate, upon the occasion in question, I strove to drown my exasperated feelings towards the scrivener by benevolently construing his conduct. Poor fellow, poor fellow! thought I, he don't mean any thing; and besides, he has seen hard times, and ought to be indulged.

I endeavored also immediately to occupy myself, and at the same time to comfort my despondency. I tried to fancy that in the course of the morning, at such time as might prove agreeable to him, Bartleby, of his own free accord, would emerge from his hermitage, and take up some decided line of march in the direction of the door. But no. Half-past twelve o'clock came; Turkey began to glow in the face, overturn his inkstand, and become generally obstreperous; Nippers abated down into quietude and courtesy; Ginger Nut munched his noon apple; and Bartleby remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest dead-wall reveries. Will it be credited? Ought I to acknowledge it? That afternoon I left the office without saying one further word to him.

Some days now passed, during which, at leisure intervals I looked a little into "Edwards on the Will," and "Priestly on Necessity." Under the circumstances, those books induced a salutary feeling. Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. Yes, Bartleby, stay there behind your screen, thought I; I shall persecute you no more; you are harmless and noiseless as any of these old chairs; in short, I never feel so private as when I know you are here. At last I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content. Others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain.

I believe that this wise and blessed frame of mind would have continued with me, had it not been for the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms. But thus it often is, that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous. Though to be sure, when I reflected upon it, it was not strange that people entering my office should be struck by the peculiar aspect of the unaccountable Bartleby, and so be tempted to throw out some sinister observations concerning him. Sometimes an attorney having business with me, and calling at my office and finding no one but the scrivener there, would undertake to obtain some sort of precise information from him touching my whereabouts; but without heeding his idle talk, Bartleby would remain standing immovable in the middle of the room. So after contemplating him in that position for a time, the attorney would depart, no wiser than he came.

Also, when a Reference was going on, and the room full of lawyers and witnesses and business was driving fast; some

deeply occupied legal gentleman present, seeing Bartleby wholly unemployed, would request him to run round to his (the legal gentleman's) office and fetch some papers for him. Thereupon, Bartleby would tranquilly decline, and yet remain idle as before. Then the lawyer would give a great stare, and turn to me. And what could I say? At last I was made aware that all through the circle of my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was running round, having reference to the strange creature I kept at my office. This worried me very much. And as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a general gloom over the premises; keeping soul and body together to the last upon his savings (for doubtless he spent but half a dime a day), and in the end perhaps outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right of his perpetual occupancy: as all these dark anticipations crowded upon me more and more, and my friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition in my room; a great change was wrought in me. I resolved to gather all my faculties together, and for ever rid me of this intolerable incubus.

Ere revolving any complicated project, however, adapted to this end, I first simply suggested to Bartleby the propriety of his permanent departure. In a calm and serious tone, I commended the idea to his careful and mature consideration. But having taken three days to meditate upon it, he apprised me that his original determination remained the same; in short, that he still preferred to abide with me.

What shall I do? I now said to myself, buttoning up my coat to the last button. What shall I do? what ought I to do? what does conscience say I *should* do with this man, or rather ghost. Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal,—you will not thrust such a helpless creature out of your door? you will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? No, I will not, I cannot do that. Rather would I let him live and die here, and then mason up his remains in the wall. What then will you do? For all your coaxing, he will not budge. Bribes he leaves under your own paperweight on your table; in short, it is quite plain that he prefers to cling to you.

Then something severe, something unusual must be done. What! surely you will not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pallor to the common jail? And upon what ground could you procure such a thing to be done?—a vagrant, is he? What! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge? It is because he will *not* be a vagrant, then, that you seek to count him *as* a vagrant. That is too absurd. No visible means of support: there I have him. Wrong again: for indubitably he *does* support himself, and that is the only unanswerable proof that any man can show of his possessing the means so to do. No more then. Since he will not quit me, I must quit him. I will change my offices; I will move elsewhere; and give him fair notice, that if I find him on my new premises I will then proceed against him as a common trespasser.

Acting accordingly, next day I thus addressed him: "I find these chambers too far from the City Hall; the air is unwholesome. In a word, I propose to remove my offices next week, and shall no longer require your services. I tell you this now, in order that you may seek another place."

He made no reply, and nothing more was said.

On the appointed day I engaged carts and men, proceeded to my chambers, and having but little furniture, every thing was removed in a few hours. Throughout, the scrivener remained standing behind the screen, which I directed to be removed the last thing. It was withdrawn; and being folded up like a huge folio, left him the motionless occupant of a naked room. I stood in the entry watching him a moment, while something from within me upbraided me.

I re-entered, with my hand in my pocket—and—and my heart in my mouth.

"Good-bye, Bartleby; I am going—good-bye, and God some way bless you; and take that," slipping something in his hand. But it dropped upon the floor, and then,—strange to say—I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to be rid of.

Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked, and started at every footfall in the passages. When I returned to my rooms after any little absence, I would pause at the threshold for an instant, and attentively listen, ere applying my key. But these fears were needless. Bartleby never came nigh me.

I thought all was going well, when a perturbed looking stranger visited me, inquiring whether I was the person who had recently occupied rooms at No.—Wall-street.

Full of forebodings, I replied that I was.

"Then sir," said the stranger, who proved a lawyer, "you are responsible for the man you left there. He refuses to do any copying; he refuses to do any thing; he says he prefers not to; and he refuses to quit the premises."

"I am very sorry, sir," said I, with assumed tranquility, but an inward tremor, "but, really, the man you allude to is nothing to me—he is no relation or apprentice of mine, that you should hold me responsible for him."

"In mercy's name, who is he?"

"I certainly cannot inform you. I know nothing about him. Formerly I employed him as a copyist; but he has done nothing for me now for some time past."

"I shall settle him then,—good morning, sir."

Several days passed, and I heard nothing more; and though I often felt a charitable prompting to call at the place and see poor Bartleby, yet a certain squeamishness of I know not what withheld me.

All is over with him, by this time, thought I at last, when through another week no further intelligence reached me. But coming to my room the day after, I found several persons waiting at my door in a high state of nervous excitement.

"That's the man—here he comes," cried the foremost one, whom I recognized as the lawyer who had previously called upon me alone.

"You must take him away, sir, at once," cried a portly person among them, advancing upon me, and whom I knew to be the landlord of No.—Wall-street. "These gentlemen, my tenants, cannot stand it any longer; Mr. B—" pointing to the lawyer, "has turned him out of his room, and he now persists in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by day, and sleeping in the entry by night. Every body is concerned; clients are leaving the offices; some fears are entertained of a mob; something you must do, and that without delay."

Aghast at this torrent, I fell back before it, and would fain have locked myself in my new quarters. In vain I persisted that Bartleby was nothing to me—no more than to any one else. In vain:—I was the last person known to have any thing to do with him, and they held me to the terrible account. Fearful then of being exposed in the papers (as one person present obscurely threatened) I considered the matter, and at length said, that if the lawyer would give me a confidential interview with the scrivener, in his (the lawyer's) own room, I would that afternoon strive my best to rid them of the nuisance they complained of.

Going up stairs to my old haunt, there was Bartleby silently sitting upon the banister at the landing.

"What are you doing here, Bartleby?" said I.

"Sitting upon the banister," he mildly replied.

I motioned him into the lawyer's room, who then left us.

"Bartleby," said I, "are you aware that you are the cause of great tribulation to me, by persisting in occupying the entry after being dismissed from the office?"

No answer.

"Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something, or something must be done to you. Now what sort of business would you like to engage in? Would you like to re-engage in copying for some one?"

"No; I would prefer not to make any change."

"Would you like a clerkship in a dry-goods store?"

"There is too much confinement about that. No, I would not like a clerkship; but I am not particular."

"Too much confinement," I cried, "why you keep yourself confined all the time!"

"I would prefer not to take a clerkship," he rejoined, as if to settle that little item at once.

"How would a bar-tender's business suit you? There is no trying of the eyesight in that."

"I would not like it at all; though, as I said before, I am not particular."

His unwonted wordiness inspirited me. I returned to the charge.

"Well then, would you like to travel through the country collecting bills for the merchants? That would improve your health."

"No, I would prefer to be doing something else."

"How then would going as a companion to Europe, to entertain some young gentleman with your conversation,—how would that suit you?"

"Not at all. It does not strike me that there is any thing definite about that. I like to be stationary. But I am not particular."

"Stationary you shall be then," I cried, now losing all patience, and for the first time in all my exasperating connection with him fairly flying into a passion. "If you do not go away from these premises before night, I shall feel bound—indeed I *am* bound—to—to—to quit the premises myself!" I rather absurdly concluded, knowing not with what possible threat to try to frighten his immobility into compliance. Despairing of all further efforts, I was precipitately leaving him, when a final thought occurred to me—one which had not been wholly unindulged before.

"Bartleby," said I, in the kindest tone I could assume under such exciting circumstances, "will you go home with me now—not to my office, but my dwelling—and remain there till we can conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure? Come, let us start now, right away."

"No: at present I would prefer not to make any change at all."

I answered nothing; but effectually dodging every one by the suddenness and rapidity of my flight, rushed from the building, ran up Wall-street towards Broadway, and jumping into the first omnibus was soon removed from pursuit. As soon as tranquility returned I distinctly perceived that I had now done all that I possibly could, both in respect to the demands of the landlord and his tenants, and with regard to my own desire and sense of duty, to benefit Bartleby, and shield him from rude persecution. I now strove to be entirely care-free and quiescent; and my conscience justified me in the attempt; though indeed it was not so successful as I could have wished. So fearful was I of being again hunted out by the incensed landlord and his exasperated tenants, that, surrendering my business to Nippers, for a few days I drove about the upper part of the town and through the

suburbs, in my rockaway; crossed over to Jersey City and Hoboken, and paid fugitive visits to Manhattanville and Astoria. In fact I almost lived in my rockaway for the time.

When again I entered my office, lo, a note from the landlord lay upon the desk. I opened it with trembling hands. It informed me that the writer had sent to the police, and had Bartleby removed to the Tombs as a vagrant. Moreover, since I knew more about him than any one else, he wished me to appear at that place, and make a suitable statement of the facts. These tidings had a conflicting effect upon me. At first I was indignant; but at last almost approved. The landlord's energetic, summary disposition had led him to adopt a procedure which I do not think I would have decided upon myself; and yet as a last resort, under such peculiar circumstances, it seemed the only plan.

As I afterwards learned, the poor scrivener, when told that he must be conducted to the Tombs, offered not the slightest obstacle, but in his pale unmoving way, silently acquiesced.

Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party; and headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent procession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon.

The same day I received the note I went to the Tombs, or to speak more properly, the Halls of Justice. Seeking the right officer, I stated the purpose of my call, and was informed that the individual I described was indeed within. I then assured the functionary that Bartleby was a perfectly honest man, and greatly to be compassionated, however unaccountably eccentric. I narrated all I knew, and closed by suggesting the idea of letting him remain in as indulgent confinement as possible till something less harsh might be done—though indeed I hardly knew what. At all events, if nothing else could be decided upon, the alms-house must receive him. I then begged to have an interview.

Being under no disgraceful charge, and quite serene and harmless in all his ways, they had permitted him freely to wander about the prison, and especially in the inclosed grass-platted yard thereof. And so I found him there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I saw peering out upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves.

"Bartleby!"

"I know you," he said, without looking round,—"and I want nothing to say to you."

"It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby," said I, keenly pained at his implied suspicion. "And to you, this should not be so vile a place. Nothing reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass."

"I know where I am," he replied, but would say nothing more, and so I left him.

As I entered the corridor again, a broad meat-like man, in an apron, accosted me, and jerking his thumb over his shoulder said—"Is that your friend?"

"Yes."

"Does he want to starve? If he does, let him live on the prison fare, that's all."

"Who are you?" asked I, not knowing what to make of such an unofficially speaking person in such a place.

"I am the grub-man. Such gentlemen as have friends here, hire me to provide them with something good to eat."

"Is this so?" said I, turning to the turnkey.

He said it was.

"Well then," said I, slipping some silver into the grub-man's hands (for so they called him). "I want you to give particular attention to my friend there; let him have the best dinner you can get. And you must be as polite to him as possible."

"Introduce me, will you?" said the grub-man, looking at me with an expression which seem to say he was all impatience for an opportunity to give a specimen of his breeding.

Thinking it would prove of benefit to the scrivener, I acquiesced; and asking the grub-man his name, went up with him to Bartleby.

"Bartleby, this is Mr. Cutlets; you will find him very useful to you."

"Your sarvant, sir, your sarvant," said the grub-man, making a low salutation behind his apron. "Hope you find it pleasant here, sir;—spacious grounds—cool apartments, sir—hope you'll stay with us some time—try to make it agreeable. May Mrs. Cutlets and I have the pleasure of your company to dinner, sir, in Mrs. Cutlets' private room?"

"I prefer not to dine to-day," said Bartleby, turning away. "It would disagree with me; I am unused to dinners." So saying he slowly moved to the other side of the inclosure, and took up a position fronting the dead-wall.

"How's this?" said the grub-man, addressing me with a stare of astonishment. "He's odd, aint he?"

"I think he is a little deranged," said I, sadly.

"Deranged? deranged is it? Well now, upon my word, I thought that friend of yourn was a gentleman forger; they are always pale and genteel-like, them forgers. I can't pity'em—can't help it, sir. Did you know Monroe Edwards?" he added touchingly, and paused. Then, laying his hand pityingly on my shoulder, sighed, "he died of consumption at Sing-Sing. So you weren't acquainted with Monroe?"

"No, I was never socially acquainted with any forgers. But I cannot stop longer. Look to my friend yonder. You will not lose by it. I will see you again."

Some few days after this, I again obtained admission to the Tombs, and went through the corridors in quest of Bartleby; but without finding him.

"I saw him coming from his cell not long ago," said a turnkey, "may be he's gone to loiter in the yards."

So I went in that direction.

"Are you looking for the silent man?" said another turnkey passing me. "Yonder he lies—sleeping in the yard there. 'Tis not twenty minutes since I saw him lie down."

The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness, kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed, wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung.

Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet.

The round face of the grub-man peered upon me now. "His dinner is ready. Won't he dine to-day, either? Or does he live without dining?"

"Lives without dining," said I, and closed his eyes.

"Eh!—He's asleep, aint he?"

"With kings and counselors," murmured I.

* * * * * * * *

There would seem little need for proceeding further in this history. Imagination will readily supply the meager recital of poor Bartleby's interment. But ere parting with the reader, let me say, that if this little narrative has sufficiently interested him, to awaken curiosity as to who Bartleby was, and what manner of life he led prior to the present narrator's making his acquaintance, I can only reply, that in such curiosity I fully share, but am wholly unable to gratify it. Yet here I hardly know whether I should divulge one little item of rumor, which came to my ear a few months after the scrivener's decease. Upon what basis it rested, I could never ascertain; and hence, how true it is I cannot now tell. But inasmuch as this vague report has not been without certain strange suggestive interest to me, however sad, it may prove the same with some others; and so I will briefly mention it. The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington, from which he had been suddenly removed by a change in the administration. When I think over this rumor, I cannot adequately express the emotions which seize me. Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames? For by the cart-load they are annually burned. Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring:—the finger it was meant for, perhaps, moulders in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity:—he whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death.

Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!

This page titled 3.11.3: Herman Melville's "Bartleby, The Scrivener" (1853) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.6: Melville, Herman. "Bartleby, The Scrivener" (1853)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

3.11.4: Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron-Mills" (1861)

> *“Is this the end?*
> *O Life, as futile, then, as frail!*
> *What hope of answer or redress?”*

A cloudy day: do you know what that is in a town of iron-works? The sky sank down before dawn, muddy, flat, immovable. The air is thick, clammy with the breath of crowded human beings. It stifles me. I open the window, and, looking out, can scarcely see through the rain the grocer's shop opposite, where a crowd of drunken Irishmen are puffing Lynchburg tobacco in their pipes. I can detect the scent through all the foul smells ranging loose in the air.

The idiosyncrasy of this town is smoke. It rolls sullenly in slow folds from the great chimneys of the iron-foundries, and settles down in black, slimy pools on the muddy streets. Smoke on the wharves, smoke on the dingy boats, on the yellow river,—clinging in a coating of greasy soot to the house-front, the two faded poplars, the faces of the passers-by. The long train of mules, dragging masses of pig-iron through the narrow street, have a foul vapor hanging to their reeking sides. Here, inside, is a little broken figure of an angel pointing upward from the mantel-shelf; but even its wings are covered with smoke, clotted and black. Smoke everywhere! A dirty canary chirps desolately in a cage beside me. Its dream of green fields and sunshine is a very old dream,—almost worn out, I think.

From the back-window I can see a narrow brick-yard sloping down to the river-side, strewed with rain-butts and tubs. The river, dull and tawny-colored, (la belle riviere!) drags itself sluggishly along, tired of the heavy weight of boats and coal-barges. What wonder? When I was a child, I used to fancy a look of weary, dumb appeal upon the face of the negro-like river slavishly bearing its burden day after day. Something of the same idle notion comes to me to-day, when from the street-window I look on the slow stream of human life creeping past, night and morning, to the great mills. Masses of men, with dull, besotted faces bent to the ground, sharpened here and there by pain or cunning; skin and muscle and flesh begrimed with smoke and ashes; stooping all night over boiling caldrons of metal, laired by day in dens of drunkenness and infamy; breathing from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot, vileness for soul and body. What do you make of a case like that, amateur psychologist? You call it an altogether serious thing to be alive: to these men it is a drunken jest, a joke,—horrible to angels perhaps, to them commonplace enough. My fancy about the river was an idle one: it is no type of such a life. What if it be stagnant and slimy here? It knows that beyond there waits for it odorous sunlight, quaint old gardens, dusky with soft, green foliage of apple-trees, and flushing crimson with roses,—air, and fields, and mountains. The future of the Welsh puddler passing just now is not so pleasant. To be stowed away, after his grimy work is done, in a hole in the muddy graveyard, and after that, not air, nor green fields, nor curious roses.

Can you see how foggy the day is? As I stand here, idly tapping the windowpane, and looking out through the rain at the dirty back-yard and the coalboats below, fragments of an old story float up before me,—a story of this house into which I happened to come to-day. You may think it a tiresome story enough, as foggy as the day, sharpened by no sudden flashes of pain or pleasure.—I know: only the outline of a dull life, that long since, with thousands of dull lives like its own, was vainly lived and lost: thousands of them, massed, vile, slimy lives, like those of the torpid lizards in yonder stagnant water-butt.—Lost? There is a curious point for you to settle, my friend, who study psychology in a lazy, dilettante way. Stop a moment. I am going to be honest. This is what I want you to do. I want you to hide your disgust, take no heed to your clean clothes, and come right down with me,—here, into the thickest of the fog and mud and foul effluvia. I want you to hear this story. There is a secret down here, in this nightmare fog, that has lain dumb for centuries: I want to make it a real thing to you. You, Egoist, or Pantheist, or Arminian, busy in making straight paths for your feet on the hills, do not see it clearly,—this terrible question which men here have gone mad and died trying to answer. I dare not put this secret into words. I told you it was dumb. These men, going by with drunken faces and brains full of unawakened power, do not ask it of Society or of God. Their lives ask it; their deaths ask it. There is no reply. I will tell you plainly that I have a great hope; and I bring it to you to be tested. It is this: that this terrible dumb question is its own reply; that it is not the sentence of death we think it, but, from the very extremity of its darkness, the most solemn prophecy which the world has known of the Hope to come. I dare make my meaning no clearer, but will only tell my story. It will, perhaps, seem to you as foul and dark as this thick vapor about us, and as pregnant with death; but if your eyes are free as mine are to look deeper, no perfume-tinted dawn will be so fair with promise of the day that shall surely come.

My story is very simple,—Only what I remember of the life of one of these men,—a furnace-tender in one of Kirby & John's rolling-mills,—Hugh Wolfe. You know the mills? They took the great order for the lower Virginia railroads there last winter; run usually with about a thousand men. I cannot tell why I choose the half-forgotten story of this Wolfe more than that of myriads of these furnace-hands. Perhaps because there is a secret, underlying sympathy between that story and this day with its impure fog and thwarted sunshine,—or perhaps simply for the reason that this house is the one where the Wolfes lived. There were the father and son,—both hands, as I said, in one of Kirby & John's mills for making railroad-iron,—and Deborah, their cousin, a picker in some of the cotton-mills. The house was rented then to half a dozen families. The Wolfes had two of the cellar-rooms. The old man, like many of the puddlers and feeders of the mills, was Welsh,—had spent half of his life in the Cornish tin-mines. You may pick the Welsh emigrants, Cornish miners, out of the throng passing the windows, any day. They are a trifle more filthy; their muscles are not so brawny; they stoop more. When they are drunk, they neither yell, nor shout, nor stagger, but skulk along like beaten hounds. A pure, unmixed blood, I fancy: shows itself in the slight angular bodies and sharply-cut facial lines. It is nearly thirty years since the Wolfes lived here. Their lives were like those of their class: incessant labor, sleeping in kennel-like rooms, eating rank pork and molasses, drinking—God and the distillers only know what; with an occasional night in jail, to atone for some drunken excess. Is that all of their lives?—of the portion given to them and these their duplicates swarming the streets to-day?—nothing beneath?—all? So many a political reformer will tell you,—and many a private reformer, too, who has gone among them with a heart tender with Christ's charity, and come out outraged, hardened.

One rainy night, about eleven o'clock, a crowd of half-clothed women stopped outside of the cellar-door. They were going home from the cotton-mill.

“Good-night, Deb,” said one, a mulatto, steadying herself against the gas-post. She needed the post to steady her. So did more than one of them.

“Dah's a ball to Miss Potts' to-night. Ye'd best come.”

“Inteet, Deb, if hur'll come, hur'll hef fun,” said a shrill Welsh voice in the crowd.

Two or three dirty hands were thrust out to catch the gown of the woman, who was groping for the latch of the door.

“No.”

“No? Where's Kit Small, then?”

“Begorra! on the spools. Alleys behint, though we helped her, we dud. An wid ye! Let Deb alone! It's ondacent frettin' a quite body. Be the powers, an we'll have a night of it! there'll be lashin's o' drink,—the Vargent be blessed and praised for't!”

They went on, the mulatto inclining for a moment to show fight, and drag the woman Wolfe off with them; but, being pacified, she staggered away.

Deborah groped her way into the cellar, and, after considerable stumbling, kindled a match, and lighted a tallow dip, that sent a yellow glimmer over the room. It was low, damp,—the earthen floor covered with a green, slimy moss,—a fetid air smothering the breath. Old Wolfe lay asleep on a heap of straw, wrapped in a torn horse-blanket. He was a pale, meek little man, with a white face and red rabbit-eyes. The woman Deborah was like him; only her face was even more ghastly, her lips bluer, her eyes more watery. She wore a faded cotton gown and a slouching bonnet. When she walked, one could see that she was deformed, almost a hunchback. She trod softly, so as not to waken him, and went through into the room beyond. There she found by the half-extinguished fire an iron saucepan filled with cold boiled potatoes, which she put upon a broken chair with a pint-cup of ale. Placing the old candlestick beside this dainty repast, she untied her bonnet, which hung limp and wet over her face, and prepared to eat her supper. It was the first food that had touched her lips since morning. There was enough of it, however: there is not always. She was hungry,—one could see that easily enough,—and not drunk, as most of her companions would have been found at this hour. She did not drink, this woman,—her face told that, too,—nothing stronger than ale. Perhaps the weak, flaccid wretch had some stimulant in her pale life to keep her up,—some love or hope, it might be, or urgent need. When that stimulant was gone, she would take to whiskey. Man cannot live by work alone. While she was skinning the potatoes, and munching them, a noise behind her made her stop.

“Janey!” she called, lifting the candle and peering into the darkness. “Janey, are you there?”

A heap of ragged coats was heaved up, and the face of a young girl emerged, staring sleepily at the woman.

“Deborah,” she said, at last, “I'm here the night.”

“Yes, child. Hur's welcome,” she said, quietly eating on.

The girl's face was haggard and sickly; her eyes were heavy with sleep and hunger: real Milesian eyes they were, dark, delicate blue, glooming out from black shadows with a pitiful fright.

“I was alone,” she said, timidly.

“Where's the father?” asked Deborah, holding out a potato, which the girl greedily seized.

“He's beyant,—wid Haley,—in the stone house.” (Did you ever hear the word tail from an Irish mouth?) “I came here. Hugh told me never to stay me-lone.”

“Hugh?”

“Yes.”

A vexed frown crossed her face. The girl saw it, and added quickly,—

“I have not seen Hugh the day, Deb. The old man says his watch lasts till the mornin'.”

The woman sprang up, and hastily began to arrange some bread and flitch in a tin pail, and to pour her own measure of ale into a bottle. Tying on her bonnet, she blew out the candle.

“Lay ye down, Janey dear,” she said, gently, covering her with the old rags. “Hur can eat the potatoes, if hur's hungry.

“Where are ye goin', Deb? The rain's sharp.”

“To the mill, with Hugh's supper.”

“Let him bide till th' morn. Sit ye down.”

“No, no,”—sharply pushing her off. “The boy'll starve.”

She hurried from the cellar, while the child wearily coiled herself up for sleep. The rain was falling heavily, as the woman, pail in hand, emerged from the mouth of the alley, and turned down the narrow street, that stretched out, long and black, miles before her. Here and there a flicker of gas lighted an uncertain space of muddy footwalk and gutter; the long rows of houses, except an occasional lager-bier shop, were closed; now and then she met a band of millhands skulking to or from their work.

Not many even of the inhabitants of a manufacturing town know the vast machinery of system by which the bodies of workmen are governed, that goes on unceasingly from year to year. The hands of each mill are divided into watches that relieve each other as regularly as the sentinels of an army. By night and day the work goes on, the unsleeping engines groan and shriek, the fiery pools of metal boil and surge. Only for a day in the week, in half-courtesy to public censure, the fires are partially veiled; but as soon as the clock strikes midnight, the great furnaces break forth with renewed fury, the clamor begins with fresh, breathless vigor, the engines sob and shriek like “gods in pain.”

As Deborah hurried down through the heavy rain, the noise of these thousand engines sounded through the sleep and shadow of the city like far-off thunder. The mill to which she was going lay on the river, a mile below the city-limits. It was far, and she was weak, aching from standing twelve hours at the spools. Yet it was her almost nightly walk to take this man his supper, though at every square she sat down to rest, and she knew she should receive small word of thanks.

Perhaps, if she had possessed an artist's eye, the picturesque oddity of the scene might have made her step stagger less, and the path seem shorter; but to her the mills were only “summat deilish to look at by night.”

The road leading to the mills had been quarried from the solid rock, which rose abrupt and bare on one side of the cinder-covered road, while the river, sluggish and black, crept past on the other. The mills for rolling iron are simply immense tent-like roofs, covering acres of ground, open on every side. Beneath these roofs Deborah looked in on a city of fires, that burned hot and fiercely in the night. Fire in every horrible form: pits of flame waving in the wind; liquid metal-flames writhing in tortuous streams through the sand; wide caldrons filled with boiling fire, over which bent ghastly wretches stirring the strange brewing; and through all, crowds of half-clad men, looking like revengeful ghosts in the red light, hurried, throwing masses of glittering fire. It was like a street in Hell. Even Deborah muttered, as she crept through, “looks like t' Devil's place!” It did,—in more ways than one.

She found the man she was looking for, at last, heaping coal on a furnace. He had not time to eat his supper; so she went behind the furnace, and waited. Only a few men were with him, and they noticed her only by a “Hyur comes t'hunchback, Wolfe.”

Deborah was stupid with sleep; her back pained her sharply; and her teeth chattered with cold, with the rain that soaked her clothes and dripped from her at every step. She stood, however, patiently holding the pail, and waiting.

“Hout, woman! ye look like a drowned cat. Come near to the fire,”—said one of the men, approaching to scrape away the ashes.

She shook her head. Wolfe had forgotten her. He turned, hearing the man, and came closer.

“I did no' think; gi' me my supper, woman.”

She watched him eat with a painful eagerness. With a woman's quick instinct, she saw that he was not hungry,—was eating to please her. Her pale, watery eyes began to gather a strange light.

“Is't good, Hugh? T' ale was a bit sour, I feared.”

“No, good enough.” He hesitated a moment. “Ye're tired, poor lass! Bide here till I go. Lay down there on that heap of ash, and go to sleep.”

He threw her an old coat for a pillow, and turned to his work. The heap was the refuse of the burnt iron, and was not a hard bed; the half-smothered warmth, too, penetrated her limbs, dulling their pain and cold shiver.

Miserable enough she looked, lying there on the ashes like a limp, dirty rag,—yet not an unfitting figure to crown the scene of hopeless discomfort and veiled crime: more fitting, if one looked deeper into the heart of things, at her thwarted woman's form, her colorless life, her waking stupor that smothered pain and hunger,—even more fit to be a type of her class. Deeper yet if one could look, was there nothing worth reading in this wet, faded thing, halfcovered with ashes? no story of a soul filled with groping passionate love, heroic unselfishness, fierce jealousy? of years of weary trying to please the one human being whom she loved, to gain one look of real heart-kindness from him? If anything like this were hidden beneath the pale, bleared eyes, and dull, washed-out-looking face, no one had ever taken the trouble to read its faint signs: not the half-clothed furnace-tender, Wolfe, certainly. Yet he was kind to her: it was his nature to be kind, even to the very rats that swarmed in the cellar: kind to her in just the same way. She knew that. And it might be that very knowledge had given to her face its apathy and vacancy more than her low, torpid life. One sees that dead, vacant look steal sometimes over the rarest, finest of women's faces,—in the very midst, it may be, of their warmest summer's day; and then one can guess at the secret of intolerable solitude that lies hid beneath the delicate laces and brilliant smile. There was no warmth, no brilliancy, no summer for this woman; so the stupor and vacancy had time to gnaw into her face perpetually. She was young, too, though no one guessed it; so the gnawing was the fiercer.

She lay quiet in the dark corner, listening, through the monotonous din and uncertain glare of the works, to the dull plash of the rain in the far distance, shrinking back whenever the man Wolfe happened to look towards her. She knew, in spite of all his kindness, that there was that in her face and form which made him loathe the sight of her. She felt by instinct, although she could not comprehend it, the finer nature of the man, which made him among his fellow-workmen something unique, set apart. She knew, that, down under all the vileness and coarseness of his life, there was a groping passion for whatever was beautiful and pure, that his soul sickened with disgust at her deformity, even when his words were kindest. Through this dull consciousness, which never left her, came, like a sting, the recollection of the dark blue eyes and lithe figure of the little Irish girl she had left in the cellar. The recollection struck through even her stupid intellect with a vivid glow of beauty and of grace. Little Janey, timid, helpless, clinging to Hugh as her only friend: that was the sharp thought, the bitter thought, that drove into the glazed eyes a fierce light of pain. You laugh at it? Are pain and jealousy less savage realities down here in this place I am taking you to than in your own house or your own heart,—your heart, which they clutch at sometimes? The note is the same, I fancy, be the octave high or low.

If you could go into this mill where Deborah lay, and drag out from the hearts of these men the terrible tragedy of their lives, taking it as a symptom of the disease of their class, no ghost Horror would terrify you more. A reality of soul-starvation, of living death, that meets you every day under the besotted faces on the street,—I can paint nothing of this, only give you the outside outlines of a night, a crisis in the life of one man: whatever muddy depth of soul-history lies beneath you can read according to the eyes God has given you.

Wolfe, while Deborah watched him as a spaniel its master, bent over the furnace with his iron pole, unconscious of her scrutiny, only stopping to receive orders. Physically, Nature had promised the man but little. He had already lost the strength and instinct vigor of a man, his muscles were thin, his nerves weak, his face (a meek, woman's face) haggard, yellow with consumption. In the mill he was known as one of the girl-men: “Molly Wolfe” was his sobriquet. He was never seen in the cockpit, did not own a terrier, drank but seldom; when he did, desperately. He fought sometimes, but was always thrashed, pommelled to a jelly. The man was game enough, when his blood was up: but he was no favorite in the mill; he had the taint of school-learning on him,—not to a dangerous extent, only a quarter or so in the free-school in fact, but enough to ruin him as a good hand in a fight.

For other reasons, too, he was not popular. Not one of themselves, they felt that, though outwardly as filthy and ash-covered; silent, with foreign thoughts and longings breaking out through his quietness in innumerable curious ways: this one, for instance. In the

neighboring furnace-buildings lay great heaps of the refuse from the ore after the pig-metal is run. Korl we call it here: a light, porous substance, of a delicate, waxen, flesh-colored tinge. Out of the blocks of this korl, Wolfe, in his off-hours from the furnace, had a habit of chipping and moulding figures,—hideous, fantastic enough, but sometimes strangely beautiful: even the mill-men saw that, while they jeered at him. It was a curious fancy in the man, almost a passion. The few hours for rest he spent hewing and hacking with his blunt knife, never speaking, until his watch came again,—working at one figure for months, and, when it was finished, breaking it to pieces perhaps, in a fit of disappointment. A morbid, gloomy man, untaught, unled, left to feed his soul in grossness and crime, and hard, grinding labor.

I want you to come down and look at this Wolfe, standing there among the lowest of his kind, and see him just as he is, that you may judge him justly when you hear the story of this night. I want you to look back, as he does every day, at his birth in vice, his starved infancy; to remember the heavy years he has groped through as boy and man,—the slow, heavy years of constant, hot work. So long ago he began, that he thinks sometimes he has worked there for ages. There is no hope that it will ever end. Think that God put into this man's soul a fierce thirst for beauty,—to know it, to create it; to be—something, he knows not what,—other than he is. There are moments when a passing cloud, the sun glinting on the purple thistles, a kindly smile, a child's face, will rouse him to a passion of pain,—when his nature starts up with a mad cry of rage against God, man, whoever it is that has forced this vile, slimy life upon him. With all this groping, this mad desire, a great blind intellect stumbling through wrong, a loving poet's heart, the man was by habit only a coarse, vulgar laborer, familiar with sights and words you would blush to name. Be just: when I tell you about this night, see him as he is. Be just,—not like man's law, which seizes on one isolated fact, but like God's judging angel, whose clear, sad eye saw all the countless cankering days of this man's life, all the countless nights, when, sick with starving, his soul fainted in him, before it judged him for this night, the saddest of all.

I called this night the crisis of his life. If it was, it stole on him unawares. These great turning-days of life cast no shadow before, slip by unconsciously. Only a trifle, a little turn of the rudder, and the ship goes to heaven or hell.

Wolfe, while Deborah watched him, dug into the furnace of melting iron with his pole, dully thinking only how many rails the lump would yield. It was late,—nearly Sunday morning; another hour, and the heavy work would be done, only the furnaces to replenish and cover for the next day. The workmen were growing more noisy, shouting, as they had to do, to be heard over the deep clamor of the mills. Suddenly they grew less boisterous,—at the far end, entirely silent. Something unusual had happened. After a moment, the silence came nearer; the men stopped their jeers and drunken choruses. Deborah, stupidly lifting up her head, saw the cause of the quiet. A group of five or six men were slowly approaching, stopping to examine each furnace as they came. Visitors often came to see the mills after night: except by growing less noisy, the men took no notice of them. The furnace where Wolfe worked was near the bounds of the works; they halted there hot and tired: a walk over one of these great foundries is no trifling task. The woman, drawing out of sight, turned over to sleep. Wolfe, seeing them stop, suddenly roused from his indifferent stupor, and watched them keenly. He knew some of them: the overseer, Clarke,—a son of Kirby, one of the mill-owners,—and a Doctor May, one of the town-physicians. The other two were strangers. Wolfe came closer. He seized eagerly every chance that brought him into contact with this mysterious class that shone down on him perpetually with the glamour of another order of being. What made the difference between them? That was the mystery of his life. He had a vague notion that perhaps to-night he could find it out. One of the strangers sat down on a pile of bricks, and beckoned young Kirby to his side.

“This is hot, with a vengeance. A match, please?”—lighting his cigar. “But the walk is worth the trouble. If it were not that you must have heard it so often, Kirby, I would tell you that your works look like Dante's Inferno.”

Kirby laughed.

“Yes. Yonder is Farinata himself in the burning tomb,”—pointing to some figure in the shimmering shadows.

“Judging from some of the faces of your men,” said the other, “they bid fair to try the reality of Dante's vision, some day.”

Young Kirby looked curiously around, as if seeing the faces of his hands for the first time.

“They're bad enough, that's true. A desperate set, I fancy. Eh, Clarke?”

The overseer did not hear him. He was talking of net profits just then,—giving, in fact, a schedule of the annual business of the firm to a sharp peering little Yankee, who jotted down notes on a paper laid on the crown of his hat: a reporter for one of the city-papers, getting up a series of reviews of the leading manufactories. The other gentlemen had accompanied them merely for amusement. They were silent until the notes were finished, drying their feet at the furnaces, and sheltering their faces from the intolerable heat. At last the overseer concluded with—

“I believe that is a pretty fair estimate, Captain.”

“Here, some of you men!” said Kirby, “bring up those boards. We may as well sit down, gentlemen, until the rain is over. It cannot last much longer at this rate.”

“Pig-metal,”—mumbled the reporter,—“um! coal facilities,—um! hands employed, twelve hundred,—bitumen,—um!—all right, I believe, Mr. Clarke;—sinking-fund,—what did you say was your sinking-fund?”

“Twelve hundred hands?” said the stranger, the young man who had first spoken. “Do you control their votes, Kirby?”

“Control? No.” The young man smiled complacently. “But my father brought seven hundred votes to the polls for his candidate last November. No force-work, you understand,—only a speech or two, a hint to form themselves into a society, and a bit of red and blue bunting to make them a flag. The Invincible Roughs,—I believe that is their name. I forget the motto: 'Our country's hope,' I think.”

There was a laugh. The young man talking to Kirby sat with an amused light in his cool gray eye, surveying critically the half-clothed figures of the puddlers, and the slow swing of their brawny muscles. He was a stranger in the city,—spending a couple of months in the borders of a Slave State, to study the institutions of the South,—a brother-in-law of Kirby's,—Mitchell. He was an amateur gymnast,—hence his anatomical eye; a patron, in a blase' way, of the prize-ring; a man who sucked the essence out of a science or philosophy in an indifferent, gentlemanly way; who took Kant, Novalis, Humboldt, for what they were worth in his own scales; accepting all, despising nothing, in heaven, earth, or hell, but one-idead men; with a temper yielding and brilliant as summer water, until his Self was touched, when it was ice, though brilliant still. Such men are not rare in the States.

As he knocked the ashes from his cigar, Wolfe caught with a quick pleasure the contour of the white hand, the blood-glow of a red ring he wore. His voice, too, and that of Kirby's, touched him like music,—low, even, with chording cadences. About this man Mitchell hung the impalpable atmosphere belonging to the thoroughbred gentleman, Wolfe, scraping away the ashes beside him, was conscious of it, did obeisance to it with his artist sense, unconscious that he did so.

The rain did not cease. Clarke and the reporter left the mills; the others, comfortably seated near the furnace, lingered, smoking and talking in a desultory way. Greek would not have been more unintelligible to the furnace-tenders, whose presence they soon forgot entirely. Kirby drew out a newspaper from his pocket and read aloud some article, which they discussed eagerly. At every sentence, Wolfe listened more and more like a dumb, hopeless animal, with a duller, more stolid look creeping over his face, glancing now and then at Mitchell, marking acutely every smallest sign of refinement, then back to himself, seeing as in a mirror his filthy body, his more stained soul.

Never! He had no words for such a thought, but he knew now, in all the sharpness of the bitter certainty, that between them there was a great gulf never to be passed. Never!

The bell of the mills rang for midnight. Sunday morning had dawned. Whatever hidden message lay in the tolling bells floated past these men unknown. Yet it was there. Veiled in the solemn music ushering the risen Saviour was a key-note to solve the darkest secrets of a world gone wrong,—even this social riddle which the brain of the grimy puddler grappled with madly to-night.

The men began to withdraw the metal from the caldrons. The mills were deserted on Sundays, except by the hands who fed the fires, and those who had no lodgings and slept usually on the ash-heaps. The three strangers sat still during the next hour, watching the men cover the furnaces, laughing now and then at some jest of Kirby's.

“Do you know,” said Mitchell, “I like this view of the works better than when the glare was fiercest? These heavy shadows and the amphitheatre of smothered fires are ghostly, unreal. One could fancy these red smouldering lights to be the half-shut eyes of wild beasts, and the spectral figures their victims in the den.”

Kirby laughed. “You are fanciful. Come, let us get out of the den. The spectral figures, as you call them, are a little too real for me to fancy a close proximity in the darkness,—unarmed, too.”

The others rose, buttoning their overcoats, and lighting cigars.

“Raining, still,” said Doctor May, “and hard. Where did we leave the coach, Mitchell?”

“At the other side of the works.—Kirby, what's that?”

Mitchell started back, half-frightened, as, suddenly turning a corner, the white figure of a woman faced him in the darkness,—a woman, white, of giant proportions, crouching on the ground, her arms flung out in some wild gesture of warning.

“Stop! Make that fire burn there!” cried Kirby, stopping short.

The flame burst out, flashing the gaunt figure into bold relief.

Mitchell drew a long breath.

“I thought it was alive,” he said, going up curiously.

The others followed.

“Not marble, eh?” asked Kirby, touching it.

One of the lower overseers stopped.

“Korl, Sir.”

“Who did it?”

“Can't say. Some of the hands; chipped it out in off-hours.”

“Chipped to some purpose, I should say. What a flesh-tint the stuff has! Do you see, Mitchell?”

“I see.”

He had stepped aside where the light fell boldest on the figure, looking at it in silence. There was not one line of beauty or grace in it: a nude woman's form, muscular, grown coarse with labor, the powerful limbs instinct with some one poignant longing. One idea: there it was in the tense, rigid muscles, the clutching hands, the wild, eager face, like that of a starving wolf's. Kirby and Doctor May walked around it, critical, curious. Mitchell stood aloof, silent. The figure touched him strangely.

“Not badly done,” said Doctor May, “Where did the fellow learn that sweep of the muscles in the arm and hand? Look at them! They are groping, do you see?—clutching: the peculiar action of a man dying of thirst.”

“They have ample facilities for studying anatomy,” sneered Kirby, glancing at the half-naked figures.

“Look,” continued the Doctor, “at this bony wrist, and the strained sinews of the instep! A working-woman,—the very type of her class.”

“God forbid!” muttered Mitchell.

“Why?” demanded May, “What does the fellow intend by the figure? I cannot catch the meaning.”

“Ask him,” said the other, dryly, “There he stands,”—pointing to Wolfe, who stood with a group of men, leaning on his ash-rake.

The Doctor beckoned him with the affable smile which kind-hearted men put on, when talking to these people.

“Mr. Mitchell has picked you out as the man who did this,—I'm sure I don't know why. But what did you mean by it?”

“She be hungry.”

Wolfe's eyes answered Mitchell, not the Doctor.

“Oh-h! But what a mistake you have made, my fine fellow! You have given no sign of starvation to the body. It is strong,—terribly strong. It has the mad, half-despairing gesture of drowning.”

Wolfe stammered, glanced appealingly at Mitchell, who saw the soul of the thing, he knew. But the cool, probing eyes were turned on himself now,—mocking, cruel, relentless.

“Not hungry for meat,” the furnace-tender said at last.

“What then? Whiskey?” jeered Kirby, with a coarse laugh.

Wolfe was silent a moment, thinking.

“I dunno,” he said, with a bewildered look. “It mebbe. Summat to make her live, I think,—like you. Whiskey ull do it, in a way.”

The young man laughed again. Mitchell flashed a look of disgust somewhere,—not at Wolfe.

“May,” he broke out impatiently, “are you blind? Look at that woman's face! It asks questions of God, and says, 'I have a right to know,' Good God, how hungry it is!”

They looked a moment; then May turned to the mill-owner:—

“Have you many such hands as this? What are you going to do with them? Keep them at puddling iron?”

Kirby shrugged his shoulders. Mitchell's look had irritated him.

“Ce n'est pas mon affaire. I have no fancy for nursing infant geniuses. I suppose there are some stray gleams of mind and soul among these wretches. The Lord will take care of his own; or else they can work out their own salvation. I have heard you call our American system a ladder which any man can scale. Do you doubt it? Or perhaps you want to banish all social ladders, and put us all on a flat table-land,—eh, May?”

The Doctor looked vexed, puzzled. Some terrible problem lay hid in this woman's face, and troubled these men. Kirby waited for an answer, and, receiving none, went on, warming with his subject.

“I tell you, there's something wrong that no talk of 'Liberte' or 'Egalite' will do away. If I had the making of men, these men who do the lowest part of the world's work should be machines,—nothing more,—hands. It would be kindness. God help them! What are taste, reason, to creatures who must live such lives as that?” He pointed to Deborah, sleeping on the ash-heap. “So many nerves to sting them to pain. What if God had put your brain, with all its agony of touch, into your fingers, and bid you work and strike with that?”

“You think you could govern the world better?” laughed the Doctor.

“I do not think at all.”

“That is true philosophy. Drift with the stream, because you cannot dive deep enough to find bottom, eh?”

“Exactly,” rejoined Kirby. “I do not think. I wash my hands of all social problems,—slavery, caste, white or black. My duty to my operatives has a narrow limit,—the pay-hour on Saturday night. Outside of that, if they cut korl, or cut each other's throats, (the more popular amusement of the two,) I am not responsible.”

The Doctor sighed,—a good honest sigh, from the depths of his stomach.

“God help us! Who is responsible?”

“Not I, I tell you,” said Kirby, testily. “What has the man who pays them money to do with their souls' concerns, more than the grocer or butcher who takes it?”

“And yet,” said Mitchell's cynical voice, “look at her! How hungry she is!”

Kirby tapped his boot with his cane. No one spoke. Only the dumb face of the rough image looking into their faces with the awful question, “What shall we do to be saved?” Only Wolfe's face, with its heavy weight of brain, its weak, uncertain mouth, its desperate eyes, out of which looked the soul of his class,—only Wolfe's face turned towards Kirby's. Mitchell laughed,—a cool, musical laugh.

“Money has spoken!” he said, seating himself lightly on a stone with the air of an amused spectator at a play. “Are you answered?”—turning to Wolfe his clear, magnetic face.

Bright and deep and cold as Arctic air, the soul of the man lay tranquil beneath. He looked at the furnace-tender as he had looked at a rare mosaic in the morning; only the man was the more amusing study of the two.

“Are you answered? Why, May, look at him! 'De profundis clamavi.' Or, to quote in English, 'Hungry and thirsty, his soul faints in him.' And so Money sends back its answer into the depths through you, Kirby! Very clear the answer, too!—I think I remember reading the same words somewhere: washing your hands in Eau de Cologne, and saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this man. See ye to it!'”

Kirby flushed angrily.

“You quote Scripture freely.”

“Do I not quote correctly? I think I remember another line, which may amend my meaning? 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me.' Deist? Bless you, man, I was raised on the milk of the Word. Now, Doctor, the pocket of the world having uttered its voice, what has the heart to say? You are a philanthropist, in a small Way,—n'est ce pas? Here, boy, this gentleman can show you how to cut korl better,—or your destiny. Go on, May!”

“I think a mocking devil possesses you to-night,” rejoined the Doctor, seriously.

He went to Wolfe and put his hand kindly on his arm. Something of a vague idea possessed the Doctor's brain that much good was to be done here by a friendly word or two: a latent genius to be warmed into life by a waited-for sunbeam. Here it was: he had brought it. So he went on complacently:

“Do you know, boy, you have it in you to be a great sculptor, a great man? do you understand?” (talking down to the capacity of his hearer: it is a way people have with children, and men like Wolfe,)—“to live a better, stronger life than I, or Mr. Kirby here? A man may make himself anything he chooses. God has given you stronger powers than many men,—me, for instance.”

May stopped, heated, glowing with his own magnanimity. And it was magnanimous. The puddler had drunk in every word, looking through the Doctor's flurry, and generous heat, and self-approval, into his will, with those slow, absorbing eyes of his.

“Make yourself what you will. It is your right.

“I know,” quietly. “Will you help me?”

Mitchell laughed again. The Doctor turned now, in a passion,—

“You know, Mitchell, I have not the means. You know, if I had, it is in my heart to take this boy and educate him for”—

“The glory of God, and the glory of John May.”

May did not speak for a moment; then, controlled, he said,—

“Why should one be raised, when myriads are left?—I have not the money, boy,” to Wolfe, shortly.

“Money?” He said it over slowly, as one repeats the guessed answer to a riddle, doubtfully. “That is it? Money?”

“Yes, money,—that is it,” said Mitchell, rising, and drawing his furred coat about him. “You've found the cure for all the world's diseases.—Come, May, find your good-humor, and come home. This damp wind chills my very bones. Come and preach your Saint-Simonian doctrines' to-morrow to Kirby's hands. Let them have a clear idea of the rights of the soul, and I'll venture next week they'll strike for higher wages. That will be the end of it.”

“Will you send the coach-driver to this side of the mills?” asked Kirby, turning to Wolfe.

He spoke kindly: it was his habit to do so. Deborah, seeing the puddler go, crept after him. The three men waited outside. Doctor May walked up and down, chafed. Suddenly he stopped.

“Go back, Mitchell! You say the pocket and the heart of the world speak without meaning to these people. What has its head to say? Taste, culture, refinement? Go!”

Mitchell was leaning against a brick wall. He turned his head indolently, and looked into the mills. There hung about the place a thick, unclean odor. The slightest motion of his hand marked that he perceived it, and his insufferable disgust. That was all. May said nothing, only quickened his angry tramp.

“Besides,” added Mitchell, giving a corollary to his answer, “it would be of no use. I am not one of them.”

“You do not mean”—said May, facing him.

“Yes, I mean just that. Reform is born of need, not pity. No vital movement of the people's has worked down, for good or evil; fermented, instead, carried up the heaving, cloggy mass. Think back through history, and you will know it. What will this lowest deep—thieves, Magdalens, negroes—do with the light filtered through ponderous Church creeds, Baconian theories, Goethe schemes? Some day, out of their bitter need will be thrown up their own light-bringer,—their Jean Paul, their Cromwell, their Messiah.”

“Bah!” was the Doctor's inward criticism. However, in practice, he adopted the theory; for, when, night and morning, afterwards, he prayed that power might be given these degraded souls to rise, he glowed at heart, recognizing an accomplished duty.

Wolfe and the woman had stood in the shadow of the works as the coach drove off. The Doctor had held out his hand in a frank, generous way, telling him to “take care of himself, and to remember it was his right to rise.” Mitchell had simply touched his hat, as to an equal, with a quiet look of thorough recognition. Kirby had thrown Deborah some money, which she found, and clutched eagerly enough. They were gone now, all of them. The man sat down on the cinder-road, looking up into the murky sky.

“'T be late, Hugh. Wunnot hur come?”

He shook his head doggedly, and the woman crouched out of his sight against the wall. Do you remember rare moments when a sudden light flashed over yourself, your world, God? when you stood on a mountain-peak, seeing your life as it might have been, as it is? one quick instant, when custom lost its force and every-day usage? when your friend, wife, brother, stood in a new light? your soul was bared, and the grave,—a foretaste of the nakedness of the Judgment-Day? So it came before him, his life, that night. The slow tides of pain he had borne gathered themselves up and surged against his soul. His squalid daily life, the brutal coarseness

eating into his brain, as the ashes into his skin: before, these things had been a dull aching into his consciousness; to-night, they were reality. He griped the filthy red shirt that clung, stiff with soot, about him, and tore it savagely from his arm. The flesh beneath was muddy with grease and ashes,—and the heart beneath that! And the soul? God knows.

Then flashed before his vivid poetic sense the man who had left him,—the pure face, the delicate, sinewy limbs, in harmony with all he knew of beauty or truth. In his cloudy fancy he had pictured a Something like this. He had found it in this Mitchell, even when he idly scoffed at his pain: a Man all-knowing, all-seeing, crowned by Nature, reigning,—the keen glance of his eye falling like a sceptre on other men. And yet his instinct taught him that he too—He! He looked at himself with sudden loathing, sick, wrung his hands With a cry, and then was silent. With all the phantoms of his heated, ignorant fancy, Wolfe had not been vague in his ambitions. They were practical, slowly built up before him out of his knowledge of what he could do. Through years he had day by day made this hope a real thing to himself,—a clear, projected figure of himself, as he might become.

Able to speak, to know what was best, to raise these men and women working at his side up with him: sometimes he forgot this defined hope in the frantic anguish to escape, only to escape,—out of the wet, the pain, the ashes, somewhere, anywhere,—only for one moment of free air on a hill-side, to lie down and let his sick soul throb itself out in the sunshine. But to-night he panted for life. The savage strength of his nature was roused; his cry was fierce to God for justice.

“Look at me!” he said to Deborah, with a low, bitter laugh, striking his puny chest savagely. “What am I worth, Deb? Is it my fault that I am no better? My fault? My fault?”

He stopped, stung with a sudden remorse, seeing her hunchback shape writhing with sobs. For Deborah was crying thankless tears, according to the fashion of women.

“God forgi' me, woman! Things go harder Wi' you nor me. It's a worse share.”

He got up and helped her to rise; and they went doggedly down the muddy street, side by side.

“It's all wrong,” he muttered, slowly,—“all wrong! I dunnot understan'. But it'll end some day.”

“Come home, Hugh!” she said, coaxingly; for he had stopped, looking around bewildered.

“Home,—and back to the mill!” He went on saying this over to himself, as if he would mutter down every pain in this dull despair.

She followed him through the fog, her blue lips chattering with cold. They reached the cellar at last. Old Wolfe had been drinking since she went out, and had crept nearer the door. The girl Janey slept heavily in the corner. He went up to her, touching softly the worn white arm with his fingers. Some bitterer thought stung him, as he stood there. He wiped the drops from his forehead, and went into the room beyond, livid, trembling. A hope, trifling, perhaps, but very dear, had died just then out of the poor puddler's life, as he looked at the sleeping, innocent girl,—some plan for the future, in which she had borne a part. He gave it up that moment, then and forever. Only a trifle, perhaps, to us: his face grew a shade paler,—that was all. But, somehow, the man's soul, as God and the angels looked down on it, never was the same afterwards.

Deborah followed him into the inner room. She carried a candle, which she placed on the floor, closing the door after her. She had seen the look on his face, as he turned away: her own grew deadly. Yet, as she came up to him, her eyes glowed. He was seated on an old chest, quiet, holding his face in his hands.

“Hugh!” she said, softly.

He did not speak.

“Hugh, did hur hear what the man said,—him with the clear voice? Did hur hear? Money, money,—that it wud do all?”

He pushed her away,—gently, but he was worn out; her rasping tone fretted him.

“Hugh!”

The candle flared a pale yellow light over the cobwebbed brick walls, and the woman standing there. He looked at her. She was young, in deadly earnest; her faded eyes, and wet, ragged figure caught from their frantic eagerness a power akin to beauty.

“Hugh, it is true! Money ull do it! Oh, Hugh, boy, listen till me! He said it true! It is money!”

“I know. Go back! I do not want you here.”

“Hugh, it is t' last time. I'll never worrit hur again.”

There were tears in her voice now, but she choked them back:

“Hear till me only to-night! If one of t' witch people wud come, them we heard oft' home, and gif hur all hur wants, what then? Say, Hugh!”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean money.”

Her whisper shrilled through his brain.

“If one oft' witch dwarfs wud come from t' lane moors to-night, and gif hur money, to go out,—OUT, I say,—out, lad, where t' sun shines, and t' heath grows, and t' ladies walk in silken gownds, and God stays all t' time,—where t'man lives that talked to us to-night, Hugh knows,—Hugh could walk there like a king!”

He thought the woman mad, tried to check her, but she went on, fierce in her eager haste.

“If I were t' witch dwarf, if I had t' money, wud hur thank me? Wud hur take me out o' this place wid hur and Janey? I wud not come into the gran' house hur wud build, to vex hur wid t' hunch,—only at night, when t' shadows were dark, stand far off to see hur.”

Mad? Yes! Are many of us mad in this way?

“Poor Deb! poor Deb!” he said, soothingly.

“It is here,” she said, suddenly, jerking into his hand a small roll. “I took it! I did it! Me, me!—not hur! I shall be hanged, I shall be burnt in hell, if anybody knows I took it! Out of his pocket, as he leaned against t' bricks. Hur knows?”

She thrust it into his hand, and then, her errand done, began to gather chips together to make a fire, choking down hysteric sobs.

“Has it come to this?”

That was all he said. The Welsh Wolfe blood was honest. The roll was a small green pocket-book containing one or two gold pieces, and a check for an incredible amount, as it seemed to the poor puddler. He laid it down, hiding his face again in his hands.

“Hugh, don't be angry wud me! It's only poor Deb,—hur knows?”

He took the long skinny fingers kindly in his.

“Angry? God help me, no! Let me sleep. I am tired.”

He threw himself heavily down on the wooden bench, stunned with pain and weariness. She brought some old rags to cover him.

It was late on Sunday evening before he awoke. I tell God's truth, when I say he had then no thought of keeping this money. Deborah had hid it in his pocket. He found it there. She watched him eagerly, as he took it out.

“I must gif it to him,” he said, reading her face.

“Hur knows,” she said with a bitter sigh of disappointment. “But it is hur right to keep it.”

His right! The word struck him. Doctor May had used the same. He washed himself, and went out to find this man Mitchell. His right! Why did this chance word cling to him so obstinately? Do you hear the fierce devils whisper in his ear, as he went slowly down the darkening street?

The evening came on, slow and calm. He seated himself at the end of an alley leading into one of the larger streets. His brain was clear to-night, keen, intent, mastering. It would not start back, cowardly, from any hellish temptation, but meet it face to face. Therefore the great temptation of his life came to him veiled by no sophistry, but bold, defiant, owning its own vile name, trusting to one bold blow for victory.

He did not deceive himself. Theft! That was it. At first the word sickened him; then he grappled with it. Sitting there on a broken cart-wheel, the fading day, the noisy groups, the church-bells' tolling passed before him like a panorama, while the sharp struggle went on within. This money! He took it out, and looked at it. If he gave it back, what then? He was going to be cool about it.

People going by to church saw only a sickly mill-boy watching them quietly at the alley's mouth. They did not know that he was mad, or they would not have gone by so quietly: mad with hunger; stretching out his hands to the world, that had given so much to them, for leave to live the life God meant him to live. His soul within him was smothering to death; he wanted so much, thought so much, and knew—nothing. There was nothing of which he was certain, except the mill and things there. Of God and heaven he had heard so little, that they were to him what fairy-land is to a child: something real, but not here; very far off. His brain, greedy, dwarfed, full of thwarted energy and unused powers, questioned these men and women going by, coldly, bitterly, that night. Was it

not his right to live as they,—a pure life, a good, true-hearted life, full of beauty and kind words? He only wanted to know how to use the strength within him. His heart warmed, as he thought of it. He suffered himself to think of it longer. If he took the money?

Then he saw himself as he might be, strong, helpful, kindly. The night crept on, as this one image slowly evolved itself from the crowd of other thoughts and stood triumphant. He looked at it. As he might be! What wonder, if it blinded him to delirium,—the madness that underlies all revolution, all progress, and all fall?

You laugh at the shallow temptation? You see the error underlying its argument so clearly,—that to him a true life was one of full development rather than self-restraint? that he was deaf to the higher tone in a cry of voluntary suffering for truth's sake than in the fullest flow of spontaneous harmony? I do not plead his cause. I only want to show you the mote in my brother's eye: then you can see clearly to take it out.

The money,—there it lay on his knee, a little blotted slip of paper, nothing in itself; used to raise him out of the pit, something straight from God's hand. A thief! Well, what was it to be a thief? He met the question at last, face to face, wiping the clammy drops of sweat from his forehead. God made this money—the fresh air, too—for his children's use. He never made the difference between poor and rich. The Something who looked down on him that moment through the cool gray sky had a kindly face, he knew,—loved his children alike. Oh, he knew that!

There were times when the soft floods of color in the crimson and purple flames, or the clear depth of amber in the water below the bridge, had somehow given him a glimpse of another world than this,—of an infinite depth of beauty and of quiet somewhere,—somewhere, a depth of quiet and rest and love. Looking up now, it became strangely real. The sun had sunk quite below the hills, but his last rays struck upward, touching the zenith. The fog had risen, and the town and river were steeped in its thick, gray damp; but overhead, the sun-touched smoke-clouds opened like a cleft ocean,—shifting, rolling seas of crimson mist, waves of billowy silver veined with blood-scarlet, inner depths unfathomable of glancing light. Wolfe's artist-eye grew drunk with color. The gates of that other world! Fading, flashing before him now! What, in that world of Beauty, Content, and Right, were the petty laws, the mine and thine, of mill-owners and mill hands?

A consciousness of power stirred within him. He stood up. A man,—he thought, stretching out his hands,—free to work, to live, to love! Free! His right! He folded the scrap of paper in his hand. As his nervous fingers took it in, limp and blotted, so his soul took in the mean temptation, lapped it in fancied rights, in dreams of improved existences, drifting and endless as the cloud-seas of color. Clutching it, as if the tightness of his hold would strengthen his sense of possession, he went aimlessly down the street. It was his watch at the mill. He need not go, need never go again, thank God!—shaking off the thought with unspeakable loathing.

Shall I go over the history of the hours of that night? how the man wandered from one to another of his old haunts, with a half-consciousness of bidding them farewell,—lanes and alleys and back-yards where the mill-hands lodged,—noting, with a new eagerness, the filth and drunkenness, the pig-pens, the ash-heaps covered with potato-skins, the bloated, pimpled women at the doors, with a new disgust, a new sense of sudden triumph, and, under all, a new, vague dread, unknown before, smothered down, kept under, but still there? It left him but once during the night, when, for the second time in his life, he entered a church. It was a sombre Gothic pile, where the stained light lost itself in far-retreating arches; built to meet the requirements and sympathies of a far other class than Wolfe's. Yet it touched, moved him uncontrollably. The distances, the shadows, the still, marble figures, the mass of silent kneeling worshippers, the mysterious music, thrilled, lifted his soul with a wonderful pain. Wolfe forgot himself, forgot the new life he was going to live, the mean terror gnawing underneath. The voice of the speaker strengthened the charm; it was clear, feeling, full, strong. An old man, who had lived much, suffered much; whose brain was keenly alive, dominant; whose heart was summer-warm with charity. He taught it to-night. He held up Humanity in its grand total; showed the great world-cancer to his people. Who could show it better? He was a Christian reformer; he had studied the age thoroughly; his outlook at man had been free, world-wide, over all time. His faith stood sublime upon the Rock of Ages; his fiery zeal guided vast schemes by which the Gospel was to be preached to all nations. How did he preach it to-night? In burning, light-laden words he painted Jesus, the incarnate Life, Love, the universal Man: words that became reality in the lives of these people,—that lived again in beautiful words and actions, trifling, but heroic. Sin, as he defined it, was a real foe to them; their trials, temptations, were his. His words passed far over the furnace-tender's grasp, toned to suit another class of culture; they sounded in his ears a very pleasant song in an unknown tongue. He meant to cure this world-cancer with a steady eye that had never glared with hunger, and a hand that neither poverty nor strychnine-whiskey had taught to shake. In this morbid, distorted heart of the Welsh puddler he had failed.

Eighteen centuries ago, the Master of this man tried reform in the streets of a city as crowded and vile as this, and did not fail. His disciple, showing Him to-night to cultured hearers, showing the clearness of the God-power acting through Him, shrank back from one coarse fact; that in birth and habit the man Christ was thrown up from the lowest of the people: his flesh, their flesh; their

blood, his blood; tempted like them, to brutalize day by day; to lie, to steal: the actual slime and want of their hourly life, and the wine-press he trod alone.

Yet, is there no meaning in this perpetually covered truth? If the son of the carpenter had stood in the church that night, as he stood with the fishermen and harlots by the sea of Galilee, before His Father and their Father, despised and rejected of men, without a place to lay His head, wounded for their iniquities, bruised for their transgressions, would not that hungry mill-boy at least, in the back seat, have “known the man”? That Jesus did not stand there.

Wolfe rose at last, and turned from the church down the street. He looked up; the night had come on foggy, damp; the golden mists had vanished, and the sky lay dull and ash-colored. He wandered again aimlessly down the street, idly wondering what had become of the cloud-sea of crimson and scarlet. The trial-day of this man's life was over, and he had lost the victory. What followed was mere drifting circumstance,—a quicker walking over the path,—that was all. Do you want to hear the end of it? You wish me to make a tragic story out of it? Why, in the police-reports of the morning paper you can find a dozen such tragedies: hints of shipwrecks unlike any that ever befell on the high seas; hints that here a power was lost to heaven,—that there a soul went down where no tide can ebb or flow. Commonplace enough the hints are,—jocose sometimes, done up in rhyme.

Doctor May a month after the night I have told you of, was reading to his wife at breakfast from this fourth column of the morning-paper: an unusual thing,—these police-reports not being, in general, choice reading for ladies; but it was only one item he read.

“Oh, my dear! You remember that man I told you of, that we saw at Kirby's mill?—that was arrested for robbing Mitchell? Here he is; just listen:—'Circuit Court. Judge Day. Hugh Wolfe, operative in Kirby & John's Loudon Mills. Charge, grand larceny. Sentence, nineteen years hard labor in penitentiary. Scoundrel! Serves him right! After all our kindness that night! Picking Mitchell's pocket at the very time!”

His wife said something about the ingratitude of that kind of people, and then they began to talk of something else.

Nineteen years! How easy that was to read! What a simple word for Judge Day to utter! Nineteen years! Half a lifetime!

Hugh Wolfe sat on the window-ledge of his cell, looking out. His ankles Were ironed. Not usual in such cases; but he had made two desperate efforts to escape. “Well,” as Haley, the jailer, said, “small blame to him! Nineteen years' imprisonment was not a pleasant thing to look forward to.” Haley was very good-natured about it, though Wolfe had fought him savagely.

“When he was first caught,” the jailer said afterwards, in telling the story, “before the trial, the fellow was cut down at once,—laid there on that pallet like a dead man, with his hands over his eyes. Never saw a man so cut down in my life. Time of the trial, too, came the queerest dodge of any customer I ever had. Would choose no lawyer. Judge gave him one, of course. Gibson it Was. He tried to prove the fellow crazy; but it wouldn't go. Thing was plain as daylight: money found on him. 'T was a hard sentence,—all the law allows; but it was for 'xample's sake. These mill-hands are gettin' onbearable. When the sentence was read, he just looked up, and said the money was his by rights, and that all the world had gone wrong. That night, after the trial, a gentleman came to see him here, name of Mitchell,—him as he stole from. Talked to him for an hour. Thought he came for curiosity, like. After he was gone, thought Wolfe was remarkable quiet, and went into his cell. Found him very low; bed all bloody. Doctor said he had been bleeding at the lungs. He was as weak as a cat; yet if ye'll b'lieve me, he tried to get a-past me and get out. I just carried him like a baby, and threw him on the pallet. Three days after, he tried it again: that time reached the wall. Lord help you! he fought like a tiger,—giv' some terrible blows. Fightin' for life, you see; for he can't live long, shut up in the stone crib down yonder. Got a death-cough now. 'T took two of us to bring him down that day; so I just put the irons on his feet. There he sits, in there. Goin' to-morrow, with a batch more of 'em. That woman, hunchback, tried with him,—you remember?—she's only got three years. 'Complice. But she's a woman, you know. He's been quiet ever since I put on irons: giv' up, I suppose. Looks white, sick-lookin'. It acts different on 'em, bein' sentenced. Most of 'em gets reckless, devilish-like. Some prays awful, and sings them vile songs of the mills, all in a breath. That woman, now, she's desper't'. Been beggin' to see Hugh, as she calls him, for three days. I'm a-goin' to let her in. She don't go with him. Here she is in this next cell. I'm a-goin' now to let her in.”

He let her in. Wolfe did not see her. She crept into a corner of the cell, and stood watching him. He was scratching the iron bars of the window with a piece of tin which he had picked up, with an idle, uncertain, vacant stare, just as a child or idiot would do.

“Tryin' to get out, old boy?” laughed Haley. “Them irons will need a crow-bar beside your tin, before you can open 'em.”

Wolfe laughed, too, in a senseless way.

“I think I'll get out,” he said.

“I believe his brain's touched,” said Haley, when he came out.

The puddler scraped away with the tin for half an hour. Still Deborah did not speak. At last she ventured nearer, and touched his arm.

“Blood?” she said, looking at some spots on his coat with a shudder.

He looked up at her, “Why, Deb!” he said, smiling,—such a bright, boyish smile, that it Went to poor Deborah's heart directly, and she sobbed and cried out loud.

“Oh, Hugh, lad! Hugh! dunnot look at me, when it wur my fault! To think I brought hur to it! And I loved hur so! Oh lad, I dud!”

The confession, even In this wretch, came with the woman's blush through the sharp cry.

He did not seem to hear her,—scraping away diligently at the bars with the bit of tin.

Was he going mad? She peered closely into his face. Something she saw there made her draw suddenly back,—something which Haley had not seen, that lay beneath the pinched, vacant look it had caught since the trial, or the curious gray shadow that rested on it. That gray shadow,—yes, she knew what that meant. She had often seen it creeping over women's faces for months, who died at last of slow hunger or consumption. That meant death, distant, lingering: but this—Whatever it was the woman saw, or thought she saw, used as she was to crime and misery, seemed to make her sick with a new horror. Forgetting her fear of him, she caught his shoulders, and looked keenly, steadily, into his eyes.

“Hugh!” she cried, in a desperate whisper,—“oh, boy, not that! for God's sake, not that!”

The vacant laugh went off his face, and he answered her in a muttered word or two that drove her away. Yet the words were kindly enough. Sitting there on his pallet, she cried silently a hopeless sort of tears, but did not speak again. The man looked up furtively at her now and then. Whatever his own trouble was, her distress vexed him with a momentary sting.

It was market-day. The narrow window of the jail looked down directly on the carts and wagons drawn up in a long line, where they had unloaded. He could see, too, and hear distinctly the clink of money as it changed hands, the busy crowd of whites and blacks shoving, pushing one another, and the chaffering and swearing at the stalls. Somehow, the sound, more than anything else had done, wakened him up,—made the whole real to him. He was done with the world and the business of it. He let the tin fall, and looked out, pressing his face close to the rusty bars. How they crowded and pushed! And he,—he should never walk that pavement again! There came Neff Sanders, one of the feeders at the mill, with a basket on his arm. Sure enough, Nyeff was married the other week. He whistled, hoping he would look up; but he did not. He wondered if Neff remembered he was there,—if any of the boys thought of him up there, and thought that he never was to go down that old cinder-road again. Never again! He had not quite understood it before; but now he did. Not for days or years, but never!—that was it.

How clear the light fell on that stall in front of the market! and how like a picture it was, the dark-green heaps of corn, and the crimson beets, and golden melons! There was another with game: how the light flickered on that pheasant's breast, with the purplish blood dripping over the brown feathers! He could see the red shining of the drops, it was so near. In one minute he could be down there. It was just a step. So easy, as it seemed, so natural to go! Yet it could never be—not in all the thousands of years to come—that he should put his foot on that street again! He thought of himself with a sorrowful pity, as of some one else. There was a dog down in the market, walking after his master with such a stately, grave look!—only a dog, yet he could go backwards and forwards just as he pleased: he had good luck! Why, the very vilest cur, yelping there in the gutter, had not lived his life, had been free to act out whatever thought God had put into his brain; while he—No, he would not think of that! He tried to put the thought away, and to listen to a dispute between a countryman and a woman about some meat; but it would come back. He, what had he done to bear this?

Then came the sudden picture of what might have been, and now. He knew what it was to be in the penitentiary, how it went with men there. He knew how in these long years he should slowly die, but not until soul and body had become corrupt and rotten,—how, when he came out, if he lived to come, even the lowest of the mill-hands would jeer him,—how his hands would be weak, and his brain senseless and stupid. He believed he was almost that now. He put his hand to his head, with a puzzled, weary look. It ached, his head, with thinking. He tried to quiet himself. It was only right, perhaps; he had done wrong. But was there right or wrong for such as he? What was right? And who had ever taught him? He thrust the whole matter away. A dark, cold quiet crept through his brain. It was all wrong; but let it be! It was nothing to him more than the others. Let it be!

The door grated, as Haley opened it.

“Come, my woman! Must lock up for t' night. Come, stir yerself!”

She went up and took Hugh's hand.

“Good-night, Deb,” he said, carelessly.

She had not hoped he would say more; but the tired pain on her mouth just then was bitterer than death. She took his passive hand and kissed it.

“Hur'll never see Deb again!” she ventured, her lips growing colder and more bloodless.

What did she say that for? Did he not know it? Yet he would not be impatient with poor old Deb. She had trouble of her own, as well as he.

“No, never again,” he said, trying to be cheerful.

She stood just a moment, looking at him. Do you laugh at her, standing there, with her hunchback, her rags, her bleared, withered face, and the great despised love tugging at her heart?

“Come, you!” called Haley, impatiently.

She did not move.

“Hugh!” she whispered.

It was to be her last word. What was it?

“Hugh, boy, not THAT!”

He did not answer. She wrung her hands, trying to be silent, looking in his face in an agony of entreaty. He smiled again, kindly.

“It is best, Deb. I cannot bear to be hurted any more.

“Hur knows,” she said, humbly.

“Tell my father good-bye; and—and kiss little Janey.”

She nodded, saying nothing, looked in his face again, and went out of the door. As she went, she staggered.

“Drinkin' to-day?” broke out Haley, pushing her before him. “Where the Devil did you get it? Here, in with ye!” and he shoved her into her cell, next to Wolfe's, and shut the door.

Along the wall of her cell there was a crack low down by the floor, through which she could see the light from Wolfe's. She had discovered it days before. She hurried in now, and, kneeling down by it, listened, hoping to hear some sound. Nothing but the rasping of the tin on the bars. He was at his old amusement again. Something in the noise jarred on her ear, for she shivered as she heard it. Hugh rasped away at the bars. A dull old bit of tin, not fit to cut korl with.

He looked out of the window again. People were leaving the market now. A tall mulatto girl, following her mistress, her basket on her head, crossed the street just below, and looked up. She was laughing; but, when she caught sight of the haggard face peering out through the bars, suddenly grew grave, and hurried by. A free, firm step, a clear-cut olive face, with a scarlet turban tied on one side, dark, shining eyes, and on the head the basket poised, filled with fruit and flowers, under which the scarlet turban and bright eyes looked out half-shadowed. The picture caught his eye. It was good to see a face like that. He would try to-morrow, and cut one like it. To-morrow! He threw down the tin, trembling, and covered his face with his hands. When he looked up again, the daylight was gone.

Deborah, crouching near by on the other side of the wall, heard no noise. He sat on the side of the low pallet, thinking. Whatever was the mystery which the woman had seen on his face, it came out now slowly, in the dark there, and became fixed,—a something never seen on his face before. The evening was darkening fast. The market had been over for an hour; the rumbling of the carts over the pavement grew more infrequent: he listened to each, as it passed, because he thought it was to be for the last time. For the same reason, it was, I suppose, that he strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of each passer-by, wondering who they were, what kind of homes they were going to, if they had children,—listening eagerly to every chance word in the street, as if—(God be merciful to the man! what strange fancy was this?)—as if he never should hear human voices again.

It was quite dark at last. The street was a lonely one. The last passenger, he thought, was gone. No,—there was a quick step: Joe Hill, lighting the lamps. Joe was a good old chap; never passed a fellow without some joke or other. He remembered once seeing the place where he lived with his wife. “Granny Hill” the boys called her. Bedridden she Was; but so kind as Joe was to her! kept the room so clean!—and the old woman, when he was there, was laughing at some of “t' lad's foolishness.” The step was far down the street; but he could see him place the ladder, run up, and light the gas. A longing seized him to be spoken to once more.

“Joe!” he called, out of the grating. “Good-bye, Joe!”

The old man stopped a moment, listening uncertainly; then hurried on. The prisoner thrust his hand out of the window, and called again, louder; but Joe was too far down the street. It was a little thing; but it hurt him,—this disappointment.

“Good-bye, Joe!” he called, sorrowfully enough.

“Be quiet!” said one of the jailers, passing the door, striking on it with his club.

Oh, that was the last, was it?

There was an inexpressible bitterness on his face, as he lay down on the bed, taking the bit of tin, which he had rasped to a tolerable degree of sharpness, in his hand,—to play with, it may be. He bared his arms, looking intently at their corded veins and sinews. Deborah, listening in the next cell, heard a slight clicking sound, often repeated. She shut her lips tightly, that she might not scream; the cold drops of sweat broke over her, in her dumb agony.

“Hur knows best,” she muttered at last, fiercely clutching the boards where she lay.

If she could have seen Wolfe, there was nothing about him to frighten her. He lay quite still, his arms outstretched, looking at the pearly stream of moonlight coming into the window. I think in that one hour that came then he lived back over all the years that had gone before. I think that all the low, vile life, all his wrongs, all his starved hopes, came then, and stung him with a farewell poison that made him sick unto death. He made neither moan nor cry, only turned his worn face now and then to the pure light, that seemed so far off, as one that said, “How long, O Lord? how long?”

The hour was over at last. The moon, passing over her nightly path, slowly came nearer, and threw the light across his bed on his feet. He watched it steadily, as it crept up, inch by inch, slowly. It seemed to him to carry with it a great silence. He had been so hot and tired there always in the mills! The years had been so fierce and cruel! There was coming now quiet and coolness and sleep. His tense limbs relaxed, and settled in a calm languor. The blood ran fainter and slow from his heart. He did not think now with a savage anger of what might be and was not; he was conscious only of deep stillness creeping over him. At first he saw a sea of faces: the mill-men,—women he had known, drunken and bloated,—Janey's timid and pitiful-poor old Debs: then they floated together like a mist, and faded away, leaving only the clear, pearly moonlight.

Whether, as the pure light crept up the stretched-out figure, it brought with It calm and peace, who shall say? His dumb soul was alone with God in judgment. A Voice may have spoken for it from far-off Calvary, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” Who dare say? Fainter and fainter the heart rose and fell, slower and slower the moon floated from behind a cloud, until, when at last its full tide of white splendor swept over the cell, it seemed to wrap and fold into a deeper stillness the dead figure that never should move again. Silence deeper than the Night! Nothing that moved, save the black, nauseous stream of blood dripping slowly from the pallet to the floor!

There was outcry and crowd enough in the cell the next day. The coroner and his jury, the local editors, Kirby himself, and boys with their hands thrust knowingly into their pockets and heads on one side, jammed into the corners. Coming and going all day. Only one woman. She came late, and outstayed them all. A Quaker, or Friend, as they call themselves. I think this woman Was known by that name in heaven. A homely body, coarsely dressed in gray and white. Deborah (for Haley had let her in) took notice of her. She watched them all—sitting on the end of the pallet, holding his head in her arms with the ferocity of a watch-dog, if any of them touched the body. There was no meekness, no sorrow, in her face; the stuff out of which murderers are made, instead. All the time Haley and the woman were laying straight the limbs and cleaning the cell, Deborah sat still, keenly watching the Quaker's face. Of all the crowd there that day, this woman alone had not spoken to her,—only once or twice had put some cordial to her lips. After they all were gone, the woman, in the same still, gentle way, brought a vase of wood-leaves and berries, and placed it by the pallet, then opened the narrow window. The fresh air blew in, and swept the woody fragrance over the dead face, Deborah looked up with a quick wonder.

“Did hur know my boy wud like it? Did hur know Hugh?”

“I know Hugh now.”

The white fingers passed in a slow, pitiful way over the dead, worn face. There was a heavy shadow in the quiet eyes.

“Did hur know where they'll bury Hugh?” said Deborah in a shrill tone, catching her arm.

This had been the question hanging on her lips all day.

“In t' town-yard? Under t' mud and ash? T' lad'll smother, woman! He wur born in t' lane moor, where t' air is frick and strong. Take hur out, for God's sake, take hur out where t' air blows!”

The Quaker hesitated, but only for a moment. She put her strong arm around Deborah and led her to the window.

“Thee sees the hills, friend, over the river? Thee sees how the light lies warm there, and the winds of God blow all the day? I live there,—where the blue smoke is, by the trees. Look at me,” She turned Deborah's face to her own, clear and earnest, “Thee will believe me? I will take Hugh and bury him there to-morrow.”

Deborah did not doubt her. As the evening wore on, she leaned against the iron bars, looking at the hills that rose far off, through the thick sodden clouds, like a bright, unattainable calm. As she looked, a shadow of their solemn repose fell on her face; its fierce discontent faded into a pitiful, humble quiet. Slow, solemn tears gathered in her eyes: the poor weak eyes turned so hopelessly to the place where Hugh was to rest, the grave heights looking higher and brighter and more solemn than ever before. The Quaker watched her keenly. She came to her at last, and touched her arm.

“When thee comes back,” she said, in a low, sorrowful tone, like one who speaks from a strong heart deeply moved with remorse or pity, “thee shall begin thy life again,—there on the hills. I came too late; but not for thee,—by God's help, it may be.”

Not too late. Three years after, the Quaker began her work. I end my story here. At evening-time it was light. There is no need to tire you with the long years of sunshine, and fresh air, and slow, patient Christ-love, needed to make healthy and hopeful this impure body and soul. There is a homely pine house, on one of these hills, whose windows overlook broad, wooded slopes and clover-crimsoned meadows,—niched into the very place where the light is warmest, the air freest. It is the Friends' meeting-house. Once a week they sit there, in their grave, earnest way, waiting for the Spirit of Love to speak, opening their simple hearts to receive His words. There is a woman, old, deformed, who takes a humble place among them: waiting like them: in her gray dress, her worn face, pure and meek, turned now and then to the sky. A woman much loved by these silent, restful people; more silent than they, more humble, more loving. Waiting: with her eyes turned to hills higher and purer than these on which she lives, dim and far off now, but to be reached some day. There may be in her heart some latent hope to meet there the love denied her here,—that she shall find him whom she lost, and that then she will not be all-unworthy. Who blames her? Something is lost in the passage of every soul from one eternity to the other,—something pure and beautiful, which might have been and was not: a hope, a talent, a love, over which the soul mourns, like Esau deprived of his birthright. What blame to the meek Quaker, if she took her lost hope to make the hills of heaven more fair?

Nothing remains to tell that the poor Welsh puddler once lived, but this figure of the mill-woman cut in korl. I have it here in a corner of my library. I keep it hid behind a curtain,—it is such a rough, ungainly thing. Yet there are about it touches, grand sweeps of outline, that show a master's hand. Sometimes,—to-night, for instance,—the curtain is accidentally drawn back, and I see a bare arm stretched out imploringly in the darkness, and an eager, wolfish face watching mine: a wan, woful face, through which the spirit of the dead korl-cutter looks out, with its thwarted life, its mighty hunger, its unfinished work. Its pale, vague lips seem to tremble with a terrible question. “Is this the End?” they say,—“nothing beyond? no more?” Why, you tell me you have seen that look in the eyes of dumb brutes,—horses dying under the lash. I know.

The deep of the night is passing while I write. The gas-light wakens from the shadows here and there the objects which lie scattered through the room: only faintly, though; for they belong to the open sunlight. As I glance at them, they each recall some task or pleasure of the coming day. A half-moulded child's head; Aphrodite; a bough of forest-leaves; music; work; homely fragments, in which lie the secrets of all eternal truth and beauty. Prophetic all! Only this dumb, woful face seems to belong to and end with the night. I turn to look at it. Has the power of its desperate need commanded the darkness away? While the room is yet steeped in heavy shadow, a cool, gray light suddenly touches its head like a blessing hand, and its groping arm points through the broken cloud to the far East, where, in the flickering, nebulous crimson, God has set the promise of the Dawn.

This page titled 3.11.4: Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron-Mills" (1861) is shared under a Public Domain license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.12: Davis, Rebecca Harding. "Life in the Iron-Mills" (1861)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed Public Domain.

3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)

“She said that she would dance with me if I brought her red roses,” cried the young Student; “but in all my garden there is no red rose.”

From her nest in the holm-oak tree the Nightingale heard him, and she looked out through the leaves, and wondered.

“No red rose in all my garden!” he cried, and his beautiful eyes filled with tears. “Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched.”

“Here at last is a true lover,” said the Nightingale. “Night after night have I sung of him, though I knew him not: night after night have I told his story to the stars, and now I see him. His hair is dark as the hyacinth-blossom, and his lips are red as the rose of his desire; but passion has made his face like pale ivory, and sorrow has set her seal upon his brow.”

“The Prince gives a ball to-morrow night,” murmured the young Student, “and my love will be of the company. If I bring her a red rose she will dance with me till dawn. If I bring her a red rose, I shall hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there is no red rose in my garden, so I shall sit lonely, and she will pass me by. She will have no heed of me, and my heart will break.”

“Here indeed is the true lover,” said the Nightingale. “What I sing of, he suffers—what is joy to me, to him is pain. Surely Love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the marketplace. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold.”

“The musicians will sit in their gallery,” said the young Student, “and play upon their stringed instruments, and my love will dance to the sound of the harp and the violin. She will dance so lightly that her feet will not touch the floor, and the courtiers in their gay dresses will throng round her. But with me she will not dance, for I have no red rose to give her”; and he flung himself down on the grass, and buried his face in his hands, and wept.

“Why is he weeping?” asked a little Green Lizard, as he ran past him with his tail in the air.

“Why, indeed?” said a Butterfly, who was fluttering about after a sunbeam.

“Why, indeed?” whispered a Daisy to his neighbour, in a soft, low voice.

“He is weeping for a red rose,” said the Nightingale.

“For a red rose?” they cried; “how very ridiculous!” and the little Lizard, who was something of a cynic, laughed outright.

But the Nightingale understood the secret of the Student’s sorrow, and she sat silent in the oak-tree, and thought about the mystery of Love.

Suddenly she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She passed through the grove like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed across the garden.

In the centre of the grass-plot was standing a beautiful Rose-tree, and when she saw it she flew over to it, and lit upon a spray.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.”

But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are white,” it answered; “as white as the foam of the sea, and whiter than the snow upon the mountain. But go to my brother who grows round the old sun-dial, and perhaps he will give you what you want.”

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing round the old sun-dial.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.”

But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are yellow,” it answered; “as yellow as the hair of the mermaiden who sits upon an amber throne, and yellower than the daffodil that blooms in the meadow before the mower comes with his scythe. But go to my brother who grows beneath the Student’s window, and perhaps he will give you what you want.”

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing beneath the Student’s window.

“Give me a red rose,” she cried, “and I will sing you my sweetest song.”

But the Tree shook its head.

“My roses are red,” it answered, “as red as the feet of the dove, and redder than the great fans of coral that wave and wave in the ocean-cavern. But the winter has chilled my veins, and the frost has nipped my buds, and the storm has broken my branches, and I shall have no roses at all this year.”

“One red rose is all I want,” cried the Nightingale, “only one red rose! Is there no way by which I can get it?”

“There is a way,” answered the Tree; “but it is so terrible that I dare not tell it to you.”

“Tell it to me,” said the Nightingale, “I am not afraid.”

"If you want a red rose," said the Tree, "you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's-blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine."

"Death is a great price to pay for a red rose," cried the Nightingale, "and Life is very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood, and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?"

So she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She swept over the garden like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed through the grove.

The young Student was still lying on the grass, where she had left him, and the tears were not yet dry in his beautiful eyes.

"Be happy," cried the Nightingale, "be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart's-blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame-coloured are his wings, and coloured like flame is his body. His lips are sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense."

The Student looked up from the grass, and listened, but he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books.

But the Oak-tree understood, and felt sad, for he was very fond of the little Nightingale who had built her nest in his branches.

"Sing me one last song," he whispered; "I shall feel very lonely when you are gone."

So the Nightingale sang to the Oak-tree, and her voice was like water bubbling from a silver jar.

When she had finished her song the Student got up, and pulled a note-book and a lead-pencil out of his pocket.

"She has form," he said to himself, as he walked away through the grove—"that cannot be denied to her; but has she got feeling? I am afraid not. In fact, she is like most artists; she is all style, without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others. She thinks merely of music, and everybody knows that the arts are selfish. Still, it must be admitted that she has some beautiful notes in her voice. What a pity it is that they do not mean anything, or do any practical good." And he went into his room, and lay down on his little pallet-bed, and began to think of his love; and, after a time, he fell asleep.

And when the Moon shone in the heavens the Nightingale flew to the Rose-tree, and set her breast against the thorn. All night long she sang with her breast against the thorn, and the cold crystal Moon leaned down and listened. All night long she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her life-blood ebbed away from her.

She sang first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl. And on the top-most spray of the Rose-tree there blossomed a marvellous rose, petal following petal, as song followed song. Pale was it, at first, as the mist that hangs over the river—pale as the feet of the morning, and silver as the wings of the dawn. As the shadow of a rose in a mirror of silver, as the shadow of a rose in a water-pool, so was the rose that blossomed on the topmost spray of the Tree.

But the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. "Press closer, little Nightingale," cried the Tree, "or the Day will come before the rose is finished."

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and louder and louder grew her song, for she sang of the birth of passion in the soul of a man and a maid.

And a delicate flush of pink came into the leaves of the rose, like the flush in the face of the bridegroom when he kisses the lips of the bride. But the thorn had not yet reached her heart, so the rose's heart remained white, for only a Nightingale's heart's-blood can crimson the heart of a rose.

And the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. "Press closer, little Nightingale," cried the Tree, "or the Day will come before the rose is finished."

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and the thorn touched her heart, and a fierce pang of pain shot through her. Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb.

And the marvellous rose became crimson, like the rose of the eastern sky. Crimson was the girdle of petals, and crimson as a ruby was the heart.

But the Nightingale's voice grew fainter, and her little wings began to beat, and a film came over her eyes. Fainter and fainter grew her song, and she felt something choking her in her throat.

Then she gave one last burst of music. The white Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it, and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air. Echo bore it to her purple cavern in the hills, and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams. It floated through the reeds of the river, and they carried its message to the sea.

"Look, look!" cried the Tree, "the rose is finished now"; but the Nightingale made no answer, for she was lying dead in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart.

And at noon the Student opened his window and looked out.

“Why, what a wonderful piece of luck!” he cried; “here is a red rose! I have never seen any rose like it in all my life. It is so beautiful that I am sure it has a long Latin name”; and he leaned down and plucked it.

Then he put on his hat, and ran up to the Professor’s house with the rose in his hand.

The daughter of the Professor was sitting in the doorway winding blue silk on a reel, and her little dog was lying at her feet.

“You said that you would dance with me if I brought you a red rose,” cried the Student. “Here is the reddest rose in all the world. You will wear it to-night next your heart, and as we dance together it will tell you how I love you.”

But the girl frowned.

“I am afraid it will not go with my dress,” she answered; “and, besides, the Chamberlain’s nephew has sent me some real jewels, and everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers.”

“Well, upon my word, you are very ungrateful,” said the Student angrily; and he threw the rose into the street, where it fell into the gutter, and a cart-wheel went over it.

“Ungrateful!” said the girl. “I tell you what, you are very rude; and, after all, who are you? Only a Student. Why, I don’t believe you have even got silver buckles to your shoes as the Chamberlain’s nephew has”; and she got up from her chair and went into the house.

“What a silly thing Love is,” said the Student as he walked away. “It is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical, and, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysics.”

So he returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read.

This page titled 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.9: Wilde, Oscar "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

3.11.6: Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890)

I

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as "support," that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest—a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the centre of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground—a gentle acclivity topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loop-holed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Mid-way of the slope between bridge and fort were the spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at "parade rest," the butts of the rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the centre of the bridge, not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates, but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his habit, which was that of a planter. His features were good—a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock-coat. He wore a mustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgment as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his "unsteadfast footing," then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was a sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each stroke with impatience and he knew not why—apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the thrust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. "If I could free my hands," he thought, "I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their

lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance."

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

II

Peyton Farquhar was a well-to-do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner and like other slave owners a politician he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of an imperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with the gallant army that had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in war time. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in aid of the South, no adventure too perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was fetching the water her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

"The Yanks are repairing the railroads," said the man, "and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order and built a stockade on the north bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels or trains will be summarily hanged. I saw the order."

"How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?" Farquhar asked.

"About thirty miles."

"Is there no force on this side the creek?"

"Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge."

"Suppose a man —a civilian and student of hanging— should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel," said Farquhar, smiling, "what could he accomplish?"

The soldier reflected. "I was there a month ago," he replied. "I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tow."

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

III

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened—ages later, it seemed to him—by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fibre of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well-defined lines of ramification and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fulness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud plash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river!—the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the darkness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface —knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. "To be hanged and drowned," he thought, "that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair."

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrist apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort!—what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavor! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations

resembling those of a water-snake. "Put it back, put it back!" He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang that he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire; his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon-flies' wings, the strokes of the water-spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him. The captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a gray eye and remembered having read that gray eyes were keenest, and that all famous markmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter-swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking into the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, presaging, and enforcing tranquillity in the men—with what accurately measured intervals fell those cruel words:

"Attention, company! . . . Shoulder arms! . . . Ready! . . . Aim! . . . Fire!"

Farquhar dived—dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dulled thunder of the volley and, rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther down stream—nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning.

"The officer," he reasoned, "will not make that martinet's error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!"

An appalling plash within two yards of him was followed by a loud, rushing sound, *diminuendo*, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps! A rising sheet of water curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken a hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

"They will not do that again," he thought; "the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. That is a good gun."

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men—all were commingled and blurred.

Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color—that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration that made him giddy and sick. In a few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange, roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of aeolian harps. He had no wish to perfect his escape—was content to remain in that enchanting spot until re-taken.

A whiz and rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he traveled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman's road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famishing. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which—once, twice, and again—he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain and lifting his hand to it he found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue—he could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he had fallen asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene—perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forward with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him with a sound like the shock of a cannon—then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

This page titled 3.11.6: Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.1: Bierce, Ambrose "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

3.11.7: Alice Ruth Moore's "Violets" (1895)

I.

"And she tied a bunch of violets with a tress of her pretty brown hair."

She sat in the yellow glow of the lamplight softly humming these words. It was Easter evening, and the newly risen spring world was slowly sinking to a gentle, rosy, opalescent slumber, sweetly tired of the joy which had pervaded it all day. For in the dawn of the perfect morn, it had arisen, stretched out its arms in glorious happiness to greet the Saviour and said its hallelujahs, merrily trilling out carols of bird, and organ and flower-song. But the evening had come, and rest.

There was a letter lying on the table, it read:

"Dear, I send you this little bunch of flowers as my Easter token. Perhaps you may not be able to read their meaning, so I'll tell you. Violets, you know, are my favorite flowers. Dear, little, human-faced things! They seem always as if about to whisper a love-word; and then they signify that thought which passes always between you and me. The orange blossoms—you know their meaning; the little pinks are the flowers you love; the evergreen leaf is the symbol of the endurance of our affection; the tube-roses I put in, because once when you kissed and pressed me close in your arms, I had a bunch of tube-roses on my bosom, and the heavy fragrance of their crushed loveliness has always lived in my memory. The violets and pinks are from a bunch I wore to-day, and when kneeling at the altar, during communion, did I sin, dear, when I thought of you? The tube-roses and orange-blossoms I wore Friday night; you always wished for a lock of my hair, so I'll tie these flowers with them —but there, it is not stable enough; let me wrap them with a bit of ribbon, pale blue, from that little dress I wore last winter to the dance, when we had such a long, sweet talk in that forgotten nook. You always loved that dress, it fell in such soft ruffles away from the throat and bosom,—you called me your little forget-me-not, that night. I laid the flowers away for awhile in our favorite book,—Byron—just at the poem we loved best, and now I send them to you. Keep them always in remembrance of me, and if aught should occur to separate us, press these flowers to your lips, and I will be with you in spirit, permeating your heart with unutterable love and happiness."

II.

It is Easter again. As of old, the joyous bells clang out the glad news of the resurrection. The giddy, dancing sunbeams laugh riotously in field and street; birds carol their sweet twitterings everywhere, and the heavy perfume of flowers scents the golden atmosphere with inspiring fragrance. One long, golden sunbeam steals silently into the white-curtained window of a quiet room, and lay athwart a sleeping face. Cold, pale, still, its fair, young face pressed against the satin-lined casket. Slender, white fingers, idle now, they that had never known rest; locked softly over a bunch of violets; violets and tube-roses in her soft, brown hair, violets in the bosom of her long, white gown; violets and tube-roses and orange-blossoms banked everywhere, until the air was filled with the ascending souls of the human flowers. Some whispered that a broken heart had ceased to flutter in that still, young form, and that it was a mercy for the soul to ascend on the slender sunbeam. To-day she kneels at the throne of heaven, where one year ago she had communed at an earthly altar.

III.

Far away in a distant city, a man, carelessly looking among some papers, turned over a faded bunch of flowers tied with a blue ribbon and a lock of hair. He paused meditatively awhile, then turning to the regal-looking woman lounging before the fire, he asked:

"Wife, did you ever send me these?"

She raised her great, black eyes to his with a gesture of ineffable disdain, and replied languidly:

"You know very well I can't bear flowers. How could I ever send such sentimental trash to any one? Throw them into the fire."

And the Easter bells chimed a solemn requiem as the flames slowly licked up the faded violets. Was it merely fancy on the wife's part, or did the husband really sigh,—a long, quivering breath of remembrance?

This page titled 3.11.7: Alice Ruth Moore's "Violets" (1895) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.7: Moore, Alice Ruth "Violets" (1895)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

3.11.8: Willa Cather's "On the Gull's Road" (1908)

I

It often happens that one or another of my friends stops before a red chalk drawing in my study and asks me where I ever found so lovely a creature. I have never told the story of that picture to any one, and the beautiful woman on the wall, until yesterday, in all these twenty years has spoken to no one but me. Yesterday a young painter, a countryman of mine, came to consult me on a matter of business, and upon seeing my drawing of Alexandra Ebbling, straightway forgot his errand. He examined the date upon the sketch and asked me, very earnestly, if I could tell him whether the lady were still living. When I answered him, he stepped back from the picture and said slowly:

“So long ago? She must have been very young. She was happy?”

“As to that, who can say — about any one of us?” I replied. “Out of all that is supposed to make for happiness, she had very little.”

We returned to the object of his visit, but when he bade me goodbye at the door his troubled gaze again went back to the drawing, and it was only by turning sharply about that he took his eyes away from her.

I went back to my study fire, and as the rain kept away less impetuous visitors, I had a long time in which to think of Mrs. Ebbling. I even got out the little box she gave me, which I had not opened for years, and when Mrs. Hemway brought my tea I had barely time to close the lid and defeat her disapproving gaze.

My young countryman’s perplexity, as he looked at Mrs. Ebbling, had recalled to me the delight and pain she gave me when I was of his years. I sat looking at her face and trying to see it through his eyes — freshly, as I saw it first upon the deck of the Germania, twenty years ago. Was it her loveliness, I often ask myself, or her loneliness, or her simplicity, or was it merely my own youth? Was her mystery only that of the mysterious North out of which she came? I still feel that she was very different from all the beautiful and brilliant women I have known; as the night is different from the day, or as the sea is different from the land. But this is our story, as it comes back to me.

For two years I had been studying Italian and working in the capacity of clerk to the American legation at Rome, and I was going home to secure my first consular appointment. Upon boarding my steamer at Genoa, I saw my luggage into my cabin and then started for a rapid circuit of the deck. Everything promised well. The boat was thinly peopled, even for a July crossing; the decks were roomy; the day was fine; the sea was blue; I was sure of my appointment, and, best of all, I was coming back to Italy. All these things were in my mind when I stopped sharply before a chaise longue placed sidewise near the stern. Its occupant was a woman, apparently ill, who lay with her eyes closed, and in her open arm was a chubby little red-haired girl, asleep. I can still remember that first glance at Mrs. Ebbling, and how I stopped as a wheel does when the band slips. Her splendid, vigorous body lay still and relaxed under the loose folds of her clothing, her white throat and arms and red-gold hair were drenched with sunlight. Such hair as it was: wayward as some kind of gleaming seaweed that curls and undulates with the tide. A moment gave me her face; the high cheek-bones, the thin cheeks, the gentle chin, arching back to a girlish throat, and the singular loveliness of the mouth. Even then it flashed through me that the mouth gave the whole face its peculiar beauty and distinction. It was proud and sad and tender, and strangely calm. The curve of the lips could not have been cut more cleanly with the most delicate instrument, and whatever shade of feeling passed over them seemed to partake of their exquisiteness.

But I am anticipating. While I stood stupidly staring (as if, at twenty-five, I had never before beheld a beautiful woman) the whistles broke into a hoarse scream, and the deck under us began to vibrate. The woman opened her eyes, and the little girl struggled into a sitting position, rolled out of her mother’s arm, and ran to the deck rail. After putting my chair near the stern, I went forward to see the gang-plank up and did not return until we were dragging out to sea at the end of a long tow-line.

The woman in the chaise longue was still alone. She lay there all day, looking at the sea. The little girl, Carin, played noisily about the deck. Occasionally she returned and struggled up into the chair, plunged her head, round and red as a little pumpkin, against her mother’s shoulder in an impetuous embrace, and then struggled down again with a lively flourishing of arms and legs. Her mother took such opportunities to pull up the child’s socks or to smooth the fiery little braids; her beautiful hands, rather large and very white, played about the riotous little girl with a quieting tenderness. Carin chattered away in Italian and kept asking for her father, only to be told that he was busy.

When any of the ship’s officers passed, they stopped for a word with my neighbor, and I heard the first mate address her as Mrs. Ebbling. When they spoke to her, she smiled appreciatively and answered in low, faltering Italian, but I fancied that she was glad when they passed on and left her to her fixed contemplation of the sea. Her eyes seemed to drink the color of it all day long, and after every interruption they went back to it. There was a kind of pleasure in watching her satisfaction, a kind of excitement in wondering what the water made her remember or forget. She seemed not to wish to talk to any one, but I knew I should like to hear whatever she might be thinking. One could

catch some hint of her thoughts, I imagined, from the shadows that came and went across her lips, like the reflection of light clouds. She had a pile of books beside her, but she did not read, and neither could I. I gave up trying at last, and watched the sea, very conscious of her presence, almost of her thoughts. When the sun dropped low and shone in her face, I rose and asked if she would like me to move her chair. She smiled and thanked me, but said the sun was good for her. Her yellow-hazel eyes followed me for a moment and then went back to the sea.

After the first bugle sounded for dinner, a heavy man in uniform came up the deck and stood beside the chaise longue, looking down at its two occupants with a smile of satisfied possession. The breast of his trim coat was hidden by waves of soft blond beard, as long and heavy as a woman's hair, which blew about his face in glittering profusion. He wore a large turquoise ring upon the thick hand that he rubbed good-humoredly over the little girl's head. To her he spoke Italian, but he and his wife conversed in some Scandinavian tongue. He stood stroking his fine beard until the second bugle blew, then bent stiffly from his hips, like a soldier, and patted his wife's hand as it lay on the arm of her chair. He hurried down the deck, taking stock of the passengers as he went, and stopped before a thin girl with frizzed hair and a lace coat, asking her a facetious question in thick English. They began to talk about Chicago and went below. Later I saw him at the head of his table in the dining room, the befrizzed Chicago lady on his left. They must have got a famous start at luncheon, for by the end of the dinner Ebbling was peeling figs for her and presenting them on the end of a fork.

The Doctor confided to me that Ebbling was the chief engineer and the dandy of the boat; but this time he would have to behave himself, for he had brought his sick wife along for the voyage. She had a bad heart valve, he added, and was in a serious way.

After dinner Ebbling disappeared, presumably to his engines, and at ten o'clock, when the stewardess came to put Mrs. Ebbling to bed, I helped her to rise from her chair, and the second mate ran up and supported her down to her cabin. About midnight I found the engineer in the card room, playing with the Doctor, an Italian naval officer, and the commodore of a Long Island yacht club. His face was even pinker than it had been at dinner, and his fine beard was full of smoke. I thought a long while about Ebbling and his wife before I went to sleep.

The next morning we tied up at Naples to take on our cargo, and I went on shore for the day. I did not, however, entirely escape the ubiquitous engineer, whom I saw lunching with the Long Island commodore at a hotel in the Santa Lucia. When I returned to the boat in the early evening, the passengers had gone down to dinner, and I found Mrs. Ebbling quite alone upon the deserted deck. I approached her and asked whether she had had a dull day. She looked up smiling and shook her head, as if her Italian had quite failed her. I saw that she was flushed with excitement, and her yellow eyes were shining like two clear topazes.

"Dull? Oh, no! I love to watch Naples from the sea, in this white heat. She has just lain there on her hillside among the vines and laughed for me all day long. I have been able to pick out many of the places I like best."

I felt that she was really going to talk to me at last. She had turned to me frankly, as to an old acquaintance, and seemed not to be hiding from me anything of what she felt. I sat down in a glow of pleasure and excitement and asked her if she knew Naples well.

"Oh, yes! I lived there for a year after I was first married. My husband has a great many friends in Naples. But he was at sea most of the time, so I went about alone. Nothing helps one to know a city like that. I came first by sea, like this. Directly to Naples from Finmark, and I had never been South before." Mrs. Ebbling stopped and looked over my shoulder. Then, with a quick, eager glance at me, she said abruptly: "It was like a baptism of fire. Nothing has ever been quite the same since. Imagine how this bay looked to a Finmark girl. It seemed like the overture to Italy."

I laughed. "And then one goes up the country — song by song and wine by wine."

Mrs. Ebbling sighed. "Ah, yes. It must be fine to follow it. I have never been away from the seaports myself. We live now in Genoa."

The deck steward brought her tray, and I moved forward a little and stood by the rail. When I looked back, she smiled and nodded to let me know that she was not missing anything. I could feel her intentness as keenly as if she were standing beside me.

The sun had disappeared over the high ridge behind the city, and the stone pines stood black and flat against the fires of the afterglow. The lilac haze that hung over the long, lazy slopes of Vesuvius warmed with golden light, and films of blue vapor began to float down toward Baiae. The sky, the sea, and the city between them turned a shimmering violet, fading grayer as the lights began to glow like luminous pearls along the water-front, — the necklace of an irreclaimable queen. Behind me I heard a low exclamation; a slight, stifled sound, but it seemed the perfect vocalization of that weariness with which we at last let go of beauty, after we have held it until the senses are darkened. When I turned to her again, she seemed to have fallen asleep.

That night, as we were moving out to sea and the tail lights of Naples were winking across the widening stretch of black water, I helped Mrs. Ebbling to the foot of the stairway. She drew herself up from her chair with effort and leaned on me wearily. I could have carried her all night without fatigue.

"May I come and talk to you to-morrow?" I asked. She did not reply at once. "Like an old friend?" I added. She gave me her languid hand, and her mouth, set with the exertion of walking, softened altogether. "Grazia," she murmured.

I returned to the deck and joined a group of my countrywomen, who, primed with inexhaustible information, were discussing the baseness of Renaissance art. They were intelligent and alert, and as they leaned forward in their deck chairs under the circle of light, their faces recalled to me Rembrandt's picture of a clinical lecture. I heard them through, against my will, and then went to the stern to smoke and to see the last of the island lights. The sky had clouded over, and a soft, melancholy wind was rushing over the sea. I could not help thinking how disappointed I would be if rain should keep Mrs. Ebbling in her cabin to-morrow. My mind played constantly with her image. At one moment she was very clear and directly in front of me; the next she was far away. Whatever else I thought about, some part of my consciousness was busy with Mrs. Ebbling; hunting for her, finding her, losing her, then groping again. How was it that I was so conscious of whatever she might be feeling? that when she sat still behind me and watched the evening sky, I had had a sense of speed and change, almost of danger; and when she was tired and sighed, I had wished for night and loneliness.

II

Though when we are young we seldom think much about it, there is now and again a golden day when we feel a sudden, arrogant pride in our youth; in the lightness of our feet and the strength of our arms, in the warm fluid that courses so surely within us; when we are conscious of something powerful and mercurial in our breasts, which comes up wave after wave and leaves us irresponsible and free. All the next morning I felt this flow of life, which continually impelled me toward Mrs. Ebbling. After the merest greeting, however, I kept away. I found it pleasant to thwart myself, to measure myself against a current that was sure to carry me with it in the end. I was content to let her watch the sea — the sea that seemed now to have come into me, warm and soft, still and strong. I played shuffleboard with the Commodore, who was anxious to keep down his figure, and ran about the deck with the stout legs of the little pumpkin-colored Carin about my neck. It was not until the child was having her afternoon nap below that I at last came up and stood beside her mother.

"You are better to-day," I exclaimed, looking down at her white gown. She colored unreasonably, and I laughed with a familiarity which she must have accepted as the mere foolish noise of happiness, or it would have seemed impertinent.

We talked at first of a hundred trivial things, and we watched the sea. The coast of Sardinia had lain to our port for some hours and would lie there for hours to come, now advancing in rocky promontories, now retreating behind blue bays. It was the naked south coast of the island, and though our course held very near the shore, not a village or habitation was visible; there was not even a goat-herd's hut hidden away among the low pinkish sand hills. Pinkish sand hills and yellow head-lands; with dull-colored scrubby bushes massed about their bases and following the dried water-courses. A narrow strip of beach glistened like white paint between the purple sea and the umber rocks, and the whole island lay gleaming in the yellow sunshine and translucent air. Not a wave broke on that fringe of white sand, not the shadow of a cloud played across the bare hills. In the air about us, there was no sound but that of a vessel moving rapidly through absolutely still water. She seemed like some great sea-animal, swimming silently, her head well up. The sea before us was so rich and heavy and opaque that it might have been lapis lazuli. It was the blue of legend, simply; the color that satisfies the soul like sleep.

And it was of the sea we talked, for it was the substance of Mrs. Ebbling's story. She seemed always to have been swept along by ocean streams, warm or cold, and to have hovered about the edge of great waters. She was born and had grown up in a little fishing town on the Arctic ocean. Her father was a doctor, a widower, who lived with his daughter and who divided his time between his books and his fishing rod. Her uncle was skipper on a coasting vessel, and with him she had made many trips along the Norwegian coast. But she was always reading and thinking about the blue seas of the South.

"There was a curious old woman in our village, Dame Ericson, who had been in Italy in her youth. She had gone to Rome to study art, and had copied a great many pictures there. She was well connected, but had little money, and as she grew older and poorer she sold her pictures one by one, until there was scarcely a well-to-do family in our district that did not own one of Dame Ericson's paintings. But she brought home many other strange things; a little orange-tree which she cherished until the day of her death, and bits of colored marble, and sea shells and pieces of coral, and a thin flask full of water from the Mediterranean. When I was a little girl she used to show me her things and tell me about the South; about the coral fishers, and the pink islands, and the smoking mountains, and the old, underground Naples. I suppose the water in her flask was like any other, but it never seemed so to me. It looked so elastic and alive, that I used to think if one unsealed the bottle something penetrating and fruitful might leap out and work an enchantment over Finmark."

Lars Ebbling, I learned, was one of her father's friends. She could remember him from the time when she was a little girl and he a dashing young man who used to come home from the sea and make a stir in the village. After he got his promotion to an Atlantic liner and went South, she did not see him until the summer she was twenty, when he came home to marry her. That was five years ago. The little girl, Carin, was three. From her talk, one might have supposed that Ebbling was proprietor of

the Mediterranean and its adjacent lands, and could have kept her away at his pleasure. Her own rights in him she seemed not to consider.

But we wasted very little time on Lars Ebbling. We talked, like two very young persons, of arms and men, of the sea beneath us and the shores it washed. We were carried a little beyond ourselves, for we were in the presence of the things of youth that never change; fleeing past them. To-morrow they would be gone, and no effort of will or memory could bring them back again. All about us was the sea of great adventure, and below us, caught somewhere in its gleaming meshes, were the bones of nations and navies . . . . . nations and navies that gave youth its hope and made life something more than a hunger of the bowels. The unpeopled Sardinian coast unfolded gently before us, like something left over out of a world that was gone; a place that might well have had no later news since the corn ships brought the tidings of Actium.

“I shall never go to Sardinia,” said Mrs. Ebbling. “It could not possibly be as beautiful as this.”

“Neither shall I,” I replied.

As I was going down to dinner that evening, I was stopped by Lars Ebbling, freshly brushed and scented, wearing a white uniform, and polished and glistening as one of his own engines. He smiled at me with his own kind of geniality. “You have been very kind to talk to my wife,” he explained. “It is very bad for her this trip that she speaks no English. I am indebted to you.”

I told him curtly that he was mistaken, but my acrimony made no impression upon his blandness. I felt that I should certainly strike the fellow if he stood there much longer, running his blue ring up and down his beard. I should probably have hated any man who was Mrs. Ebbling’s husband, but Ebbling made me sick.

III

The next day I began my drawing of Mrs. Ebbling. She seemed pleased and a little puzzled when I asked her to sit for me. It occurred to me that she had always been among dull people who took her looks as a matter of course, and that she was not at all sure that she was really beautiful. I can see now her quick, confused look of pleasure. I thought very little about the drawing then, except that the making of it gave me an opportunity to study her face; to look as long as I pleased into her yellow eyes, at the noble lines of her mouth, at her splendid, vigorous hair.

“We have a yellow vine at home,” I told her, “that is very like your hair. It seems to be growing while one looks at it, and it twines and tangles about itself and throws out little tendrils in the wind.”

“Has it any name?”

“We call it love vine.”

How little a thing could disconcert her!

As for me, nothing disconcerted me. I awoke every morning with a sense of speed and joy. At night I loved to hear the swish of the water rushing by. As fast as the pistons could carry us, as fast as the water could bear us, we were going forward to something delightful; to something together. When Mrs. Ebbling told me that she and her husband would be five days in the docks in New York and then return to Genoa, I was not disturbed, for I did not believe her. I came and went, and she sat still all day, watching the water. I heard an American lady say that she watched it like one who is going to die, but even that did not frighten me: I somehow felt that she had promised me to live.

All those long blue days when I sat beside her talking about Finmark and the sea, she must have known that I loved her. I sat with my hands idle on my knees and let the tide come up in me. It carried me so swiftly that, across the narrow space of deck between us, it must have swayed her, too, a little. I had no wish to disturb or distress her. If a little, a very little of it reached her, I was satisfied. If it drew her softly, but drew her, I wanted no more. Sometimes I could see that even the light pressure of my thoughts made her paler. One still evening, after a long talk, she whispered to me, “You must go and walk now, and — don’t think about me.” She had been held too long and too closely in my thoughts, and she begged me to release her for a little while. I went out into the bow and put her far away, at the sky line, with the faintest star, and thought of her gently across the water. When I went back to her, she was asleep.

But even in those first days I had my hours of misery. Why, for instance, should she have been born in Finmark, and why should Lars Ebbling have been her only door of escape? Why should she be silently taking leave of the world at the age when I was just beginning it, having had nothing, nothing of whatever is worth while?

She never talked about taking leave of things, and yet I sometimes felt that she was counting the sunsets. One yellow afternoon, when we were gliding between the shores of Spain and Africa, she spoke of her illness for the first time. I had got some magnolias at Gibraltar, and she wore a bunch of them in her girdle and the rest lay on her lap. She held the cool leaves against her cheek and fingered the white petals. “I can never,” she remarked, “get enough of the flowers of the South. They make me breathless, just as they did at first. Because of them I should like to live a long while — almost forever.”

I leaned forward and looked at her. “We could live almost forever if we had enough courage. It’s of our lives that we die. If we had the courage to change it all, to run away to some blue coast like that over there, we could live on and on, until we were tired.”

She smiled tolerantly and looked southward through half shut eyes. “I am afraid I should never have courage enough to go behind that mountain, at least. Look at it, it looks as if it hid horrible things.”

A sea mist, blown in from the Atlantic, began to mask the impassive African coast, and above the fog, the grey mountain peak took on the angry red of the sunset. It burned sullen and threatening until the dark land drew the night about her and settled back into the sea. We watched it sink, while under us, slowly but ever increasing, we felt the throb of the Atlantic come and go, the thrill of the vast, untamed waters of that lugubrious and passionate sea. I drew Mrs. Ebbling’s wraps about her and shut the magnolias under her cloak. When I left her, she slipped me one warm, white flower.

IV

From the Straits of Gibraltar we dropped into the abyss, and by morning we were rolling in the trough of a sea that drew us down and held us deep, shaking us gently back and forth until the timbers creaked, and then shooting us out on the crest of a swelling mountain. The water was bright and blue, but so cold that the breath of it penetrated one’s bones, as if the chill of the deep under-fathoms of the sea were being loosed upon us. There were not more than a dozen people upon the deck that morning, and Mrs. Ebbling was sheltered behind the stern, muffled in a sea jacket, with drops of moisture upon her long lashes and on her hair. When a shower of icy spray beat back over the deck rail, she took it gleefully.

“After all,” she insisted, “this is my own kind of water; the kind I was born in. This is first cousin to the Pole waters, and the sea we have left is only a kind of fairy tale. It’s like the burnt out volcanoes; its day is over. This is the real sea now, where the doings of the world go on.”

“It is not our reality, at any rate,” I answered.

“Oh, yes, it is! These are the waters that carry men to their work, and they will carry you to yours.”

I sat down and watched her hair grow more alive and iridescent in the moisture. “You are pleased to take an attitude,” I complained.

“No, I don’t love realities any more than another, but I admit them, all the same.”

“And who are you and I to define the realities?”

“Our minds define them clearly enough, yours and mine, everybody’s. Those are the lines we never cross, though we flee from the equator to the Pole. I have never really got out of Finmark, of course. I shall live and die in a fishing town on the Arctic ocean, and the blue seas and the pink islands are as much a dream as they ever were. All the same, I shall continue to dream them.”

The Gulf Stream gave us warm blue days again, but pale, like sad memories. The water had faded, and the thin, tepid sunshine made something tighten about one’s heart. The stars watched us coldly, and seemed always to be asking me what I was going to do. The advancing line on the chart, which at first had been mere foolishness, began to mean something, and the wind from the west brought disturbing fears and forebodings. I slept lightly, and all day I was restless and uncertain except when I was with Mrs. Ebbling. She quieted me as she did little Carin, and soothed me without saying anything, as she had done that evening at Naples when we watched the sunset. It seemed to me that every day her eyes grew more tender and her lips more calm. A kind of fortitude seemed to be gathering about her mouth, and I dreaded it. Yet when, in an involuntary glance, I put to her the question that tortured me, her eyes always met mine steadily, deep and gentle and full of reassurance. That I had my word at last, happened almost by accident.

On the second night out from shore there was the concert for the Sailors’ Orphanage, and Mrs. Ebbling dressed and went down to dinner for the first time, and sat on her husband’s right. I was not the only one who was glad to see her. Even the women were pleased. She wore a pale green gown, and she came up out of it regally white and gold. I was so proud that I blushed when any one spoke of her. After dinner she was standing by her deck-chair talking to her husband when people began to go below for the concert. She took up a long cloak and attempted to put it on. The wind blew the light thing about, and Ebbling chatted and smiled his public smile while she struggled with it. Suddenly his roving eye caught sight of the Chicago girl, who was having a similar difficulty with her draperies, and he pranced half the length of the deck to assist her. I had been watching from the rail, and when she was left alone I threw my cigar away and wrapped Mrs. Ebbling up roughly.

“Don’t go down,” I begged. “Stay up here. I want to talk to you.”

She hesitated a moment and looked at me thoughtfully. Then, with a sigh, she sat down. Every one hurried down to the saloon, and we were absolutely alone at last, behind the shelter of the stern, with the thick darkness all about us and a warm east wind rushing over the sea. I was too sore and angry to think. I leaned toward her, holding the arm of her chair with both hands, and began anywhere.

“You remember those two blue coasts out of Gibraltar? It shall be either one you choose, if you will come with me. I have not much money, but we shall get on somehow. There has got to be an end of this. We are neither one of us cowards, and this is humiliating, intolerable.”

She sat looking down at her hands, and I pulled her chair impatiently toward me.

"I felt," she said at last, "that you were going to say something like this. You are sorry for me, and I don't wish to be pitied. You think Ebbling neglects me, but you are mistaken. He has had his disappointments, too. He wants children and a gay, hospitable house, and he is tied to a sick woman who can not get on with people. He has more to complain of than I have, and yet he bears with me. I am grateful to him, and there is no more to be said."

"Oh, isn't there?" I cried, "and I?"

She laid her hand entreatingly upon my arm. "Ah, you! you! Don't ask me to talk about that. You — " Her fingers slipped down my coat sleeve to my hand and pressed it. I caught her two hands and held them, telling her I would never let them go.

"And you meant to leave me day after tomorrow, to say goodbye to me as you will to the other people on this boat? You meant to cut me adrift like this, with my heart on fire and all my life unspent in me?"

She sighed despondently. "I am willing to suffer — whatever I must suffer — to have had you," she answered simply. "I was ill — and so lonely — and it came so quickly and quietly. Ah, don't begrudge it to me! Do not leave me in bitterness. If I have been wrong, forgive me." She bowed her head and pressed my fingers entreatingly. A warm tear splashed on my hand. It occurred to me that she bore my anger as she bore little Carin's importunities, as she bore Ebbling. What a circle of pettiness she had about her! I fell back in my chair and my hands dropped at my side. I felt like a creature with its back broken. I asked her what she wished me to do.

"Don't ask me," she whispered. "There is nothing that we can do. I thought you knew that. You forget that — that I am too ill to begin my life over. Even if there were nothing else in the way, that would be enough. And that is what has made it all possible, our loving each other, I mean. If I were well, we couldn't have had even this much. Don't reproach me. Hasn't it been at all pleasant to you to find me waiting for you every morning, to feel me thinking of you when you went to sleep? Every night I have watched the sea for you, as if it were mine and I had made it, and I have listened to the water rushing by you, full of sleep and youth and hope. And everything you had done or said during the day came back to me, and when I went to sleep it was only to feel you more. You see there was never any one else; I have never thought of any one in the dark but you." She spoke pleadingly, and her voice had sunk so low that I could scarcely hear her.

"And yet you will do nothing," I groaned. "You will dare nothing. You will give me nothing."

"Don't say that. When I leave you day after tomorrow, I shall have given you all my life. I can't tell you how, but it is true. There is something in each of us that does not belong to the family or to society, not even to ourselves. Sometimes it is given in marriage, and sometimes it is given in love, but oftener it is never given at all. We have nothing to do with giving or withholding it. It is a wild thing that sings in us once and flies away and never comes back, and mine has flown to you. When one loves like that, it is enough, somehow. The other things can go if they must. That is why I can live without you, and die without you."

I caught her hands and looked into her eyes that shone warm in the darkness. She shivered and whispered in a tone so different from any I ever heard from her before or afterward: "Do you grudge it to me? You are so young and strong, and you have everything before you. I shall have only a little while to want you in — and I could want you forever and not weary." I kissed her hair, her cheeks, her lips, until her head fell forward on my shoulder and she put my face away with her soft, trembling fingers. She took my hand and held it close to her, in both her own. We sat silent, and the moments came and went, bringing us closer and closer, and the wind and water rushed by us, obliterating our tomorrows and all our yesterdays.

The next day Mrs. Ebbling kept her cabin, and I sat stupidly by her chair until dark, with the rugged little girl to keep me company, and an occasional nod from the engineer.

I saw Mrs. Ebbling again only for a few moments, when we were coming into the New York harbor. She wore a street dress and a hat, and these alone would have made her seem far away from me. She was very pale, and looked down when she spoke to me, as if she had been guilty of a wrong toward me. I have never been able to remember that interview without heartache and shame, but then I was too desperate to care about anything. I stood like a wooden post and let her approach me, let her speak to me, let her leave me. She came up to me as if it were a hard thing to do, and held out a little package, timidly, and her gloved hand shook as if she were afraid of me.

"I want to give you something," she said. "You will not want it now, so I shall ask you to keep it until you hear from me. You gave me your address a long time ago, when you were making that drawing. Some day I shall write to you and ask you to open this. You must not come to tell me goodbye this morning, but I shall be watching you when you go ashore. Please don't forget that."

I took the little box mechanically and thanked her. I think my eyes must have filled, for she uttered an exclamation of pity, touched my sleeve quickly, and left me. It was one of those strange, low, musical exclamations which meant everything and nothing, like the one that had thrilled me that night at Naples, and it was the last sound I ever heard from her lips.

An hour later I went on shore, one of those who crowded over the gang-plank the moment it was lowered. But the next afternoon I wandered back to the docks and went on board the Germania. I asked for the engineer, and he came up in his shirt

sleeves from the engine room. He was red and dishevelled, angry and voluble; his bright eye had a hard glint, and I did not once see his masterful smile. When he heard my inquiry he became profane. Mrs. Ebbling had sailed for Bremen on the Hobenstauffen that morning at eleven o'clock. She had decided to return by the northern route and pay a visit to her father in Finmark. She was in no condition to travel alone, he said. He evidently smarted under her extravagance. But who, he asked, with a blow of his fist on the rail, could stand between a woman and her whim? She had always been a wilful girl, and she had a doting father behind her. When she set her head with the wind, there was no holding her; she ought to have married the Arctic Ocean. I think Ebbling was still talking when I walked away.

I spent that winter in New York. My consular appointment hung fire (indeed, I did not pursue it with much enthusiasm), and I had a good many idle hours in which to think of Mrs. Ebbling. She had never mentioned the name of her father's village, and somehow I could never quite bring myself to go to the docks when Ebbling's boat was in and ask for news of her. More than once I made up my mind definitely to go to Finmark and take my chance at finding her; the shipping people would know where Ebbling came from. But I never went. I have often wondered why. When my resolve was made and my courage high, when I could almost feel myself approaching her, suddenly everything crumbled under me, and I fell back as I had done that night when I dropped her hands, after telling her, only a moment before, that I would never let them go.

In the twilight of a wet March day, when the gutters were running black outside and the Square was liquefying under crusts of dirty snow, the housekeeper brought me a damp letter which bore a blurred foreign postmark. It was from Niels Nannestad, who wrote that it was his sad duty to inform me that his daughter, Alexandra Ebbling, had died on the second day of February, in the twenty-sixth year of her age. Complying with her request, he inclosed a letter which she had written some days before her death.

I at last brought myself to break the seal of the second letter. It read thus:

"My Friend: —

You may open now the little package I gave you. May I ask you to keep it? I gave it to you because there is no one else who would care about it in just that way. Ever since I left you I have been thinking what it would be like to live a lifetime caring and being cared for like that. It was not the life I was meant to live, and yet, in a way, I have been living it ever since I first knew you.

"Of course you understand now why I could not go with you. I would have spoiled your life for you. Besides that, I was ill — and I was too proud to give you the shadow of myself. I had much to give you, if you had come earlier. As it was, I was ashamed. Vanity sometimes saves us when nothing else will, and mine saved you. Thank you for everything. I hold this to my heart, where I once held your hand. Alexandra."

The dusk had thickened into night long before I got up from my chair and took the little box from its place in my desk drawer. I opened it and lifted out a thick coil, cut from where her hair grew thickest and brightest. It was tied firmly at one end, and when it fell over my arm it curled and clung about my sleeve like a living thing set free. How it gleamed, how it still gleams in the firelight! It was warm and softly scented under my lips, and stirred under my breath like seaweed in the tide. This, and a withered magnolia flower, and two pink sea shells; nothing more. And it was all twenty years ago!

Contributors and Attributions

- On the Gull's Road. **Authored by**: Willa Cather. **License**: Public Domain: No Known Copyright

---

This page titled 3.11.8: Willa Cather's "On the Gull's Road" (1908) is shared under a Public Domain license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.11: Cather, Willa. "On the Gull's Road" (1908)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed Public Domain.

3.11.9: Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens" (1921)

FROM THE OVAL-SHAPED flower-bed there rose perhaps a hundred stalks spreading into heart-shaped or tongue-shaped leaves half way up and unfurling at the tip red or blue or yellow petals marked with spots of colour raised upon the surface; and from the red, blue or yellow gloom of the throat emerged a straight bar, rough with gold dust and slightly clubbed at the end. The petals were voluminous enough to be stirred by the summer breeze, and when they moved, the red, blue and yellow lights passed one over the other, staining an inch of the brown earth beneath with a spot of the most intricate colour. The light fell either upon the smooth, grey back of a pebble, or, the shell of a snail with its brown, circular veins, or falling into a raindrop, it expanded with such intensity of red, blue and yellow the thin walls of water that one expected them to burst and disappear. Instead, the drop was left in a second silver grey once more, and the light now settled upon the flesh of a leaf, revealing the branching thread of fibre beneath the surface, and again it moved on and spread its illumination in the vast green spaces beneath the dome of the heart-shaped and tongue-shaped leaves. Then the breeze stirred rather more briskly overhead and the colour was flashed into the air above, into the eyes of the men and women who walk in Kew Gardens in July.

The figures of these men and women straggled past the flower-bed with a curiously irregular movement not unlike that of the white and blue butterflies who crossed the turf in zig-zag flights from bed to bed. The man was about six inches in front of the woman, strolling carelessly, while she bore on with greater purpose, only turning her head now and then to see that the children were not too far behind. The man kept this distance in front of the woman purposely, though perhaps unconsciously, for he wished to go on with his thoughts.

"Fifteen years ago I came here with Lily," he thought. "We sat somewhere over there by a lake and I begged her to marry me all through the hot afternoon. How the dragonfly kept circling round us: how clearly I see the dragonfly and her shoe with the square silver buckle at the toe. All the time I spoke I saw her shoe and when it moved impatiently I knew without looking up what she was going to say: the whole of her seemed to be in her shoe. And my love, my desire, were in the dragonfly; for some reason I thought that if it settled there, on that leaf, the broad one with the red flower in the middle of it, if the dragonfly settled on the leaf she would say 'Yes' at once. But the dragonfly went round and round: it never settled anywhere–of course not, happily not, or I shouldn't be walking here with Eleanor and the children–Tell me, Eleanor. D'you ever think of the past?"

"Why do you ask, Simon?"

"Because I've been thinking of the past. I've been thinking of Lily, the woman I might have married.... Well, why are you silent? Do you mind my thinking of the past?"

"Why should I mind, Simon? Doesn't one always think of the past, in a garden with men and women lying under the trees? Aren't they one's past, all that remains of it, those men and women, those ghosts lying under the trees,... one's happiness, one's reality?"

"For me, a square silver shoe buckle and a dragonfly–"

"For me, a kiss. Imagine six little girls sitting before their easels twenty years ago, down by the side of a lake, painting the water-lilies, the first red water-lilies I'd ever seen. And suddenly a kiss, there on the back of my neck. And my hand shook all the afternoon so that I couldn't paint. I took out my watch and marked the hour when I would allow myself to think of the kiss for five minutes only–it was so precious–the kiss of an old grey-haired woman with a wart on her nose, the mother of all my kisses all my life. Come, Caroline, come, Hubert."

They walked on the past the flower-bed, now walking four abreast, and soon diminished in size among the trees and looked half transparent as the sunlight and shade swam over their backs in large trembling irregular patches.

In the oval flower bed the snail, whose shell had been stained red, blue, and yellow for the space of two minutes or so, now appeared to be moving very slightly in its shell, and next began to labour over the crumbs of loose earth which broke away and rolled down as it passed over them. It appeared to have a definite goal in front of it, differing in this respect from the singular high stepping angular green insect who attempted to cross in front of it, and waited for a second with its antennæ trembling as if in deliberation, and then stepped off as rapidly and strangely in the opposite direction. Brown cliffs with deep green lakes in the hollows, flat, blade-like trees that waved from root to tip, round boulders of grey stone, vast crumpled surfaces of a thin crackling texture–all these objects lay across the snail's progress between one stalk and another to his goal. Before he had decided whether to circumvent the arched tent of a dead leaf or to breast it there came past the bed the feet of other human beings.

This time they were both men. The younger of the two wore an expression of perhaps unnatural calm; he raised his eyes and fixed them very steadily in front of him while his companion spoke, and directly his companion had done speaking he looked on the ground again and sometimes opened his lips only after a long pause and sometimes did not open them at all. The elder man had a curiously uneven and shaky method of walking, jerking his hand forward and throwing up his head abruptly, rather in the manner of an impatient carriage horse tired of waiting outside a house; but in the man these gestures were irresolute and pointless. He talked almost incessantly; he smiled to himself and again began to talk, as if the smile had been an answer. He was talking about spirits–the spirits of the dead,

who, according to him, were even now telling him all sorts of odd things about their experiences in Heaven.

"Heaven was known to the ancients as Thessaly, William, and now, with this war, the spirit matter is rolling between the hills like thunder." He paused, seemed to listen, smiled, jerked his head and continued:–

"You have a small electric battery and a piece of rubber to insulate the wire–isolate?–insulate?–well, we'll skip the details, no good going into details that wouldn't be understood–and in short the little machine stands in any convenient position by the head of the bed, we will say, on a neat mahogany stand. All arrangements being properly fixed by workmen under my direction, the widow applies her ear and summons the spirit by sign as agreed. Women! Widows! Women in black–"

Here he seemed to have caught sight of a woman's dress in the distance, which in the shade looked a purple black. He took off his hat, placed his hand upon his heart, and hurried towards her muttering and gesticulating feverishly. But William caught him by the sleeve and touched a flower with the tip of his walking-stick in order to divert the old man's attention. After looking at it for a moment in some confusion the old man bent his ear to it and seemed to answer a voice speaking from it, for he began talking about the forests of Uruguay which he had visited hundreds of years ago in company with the most beautiful young woman in Europe. He could be heard murmuring about forests of Uruguay blanketed with the wax petals of tropical roses, nightingales, sea beaches, mermaids, and women drowned at sea, as he suffered himself to be moved on by William, upon whose face the look of stoical patience grew slowly deeper and deeper.

Following his steps so closely as to be slightly puzzled by his gestures came two elderly women of the lower middle class, one stout and ponderous, the other rosy cheeked and nimble. Like most people of their station they were frankly fascinated by any signs of eccentricity betokening a disordered brain, especially in the well-to-do; but they were too far off to be certain whether the gestures were merely eccentric or genuinely mad. After they had scrutinised the old man's back in silence for a moment and given each other a queer, sly look, they went on energetically piecing together their very complicated dialogue:

"Nell, Bert, Lot, Cess, Phil, Pa, he says, I says, she says, I says, I says, I says–"

"My Bert, Sis, Bill, Grandad, the old man, sugar,

Sugar, flour, kippers, greens, Sugar, sugar, sugar." The ponderous woman looked through the pattern of falling words at the flowers standing cool, firm, and upright in the earth, with a curious expression. She saw them as a sleeper waking from a heavy sleep sees a brass candlestick reflecting the light in an unfamiliar way, and closes his eyes and opens them, and seeing the brass candlestick again, finally starts broad awake and stares at the candlestick with all his powers. So the heavy woman came to a standstill opposite the oval-shaped flower bed, and ceased even to pretend to listen to what the other woman was saying. She stood there letting the words fall over her, swaying the top part of her body slowly backwards and forwards, looking at the flowers. Then she suggested that they should find a seat and have their tea. The snail had now considered every possible method of reaching his goal without going round the dead leaf or climbing over it. Let alone the effort needed for climbing a leaf, he was doubtful whether the thin texture which vibrated with such an alarming crackle when touched even by the tip of his horns would bear his weight; and this determined him finally to creep beneath it, for there was a point where the leaf curved high enough from the ground to admit him. He had just inserted his head in the opening and was taking stock of the high brown roof and was getting used to the cool brown light when two other people came past outside on the turf. This time they were both young, a young man and a young woman. They were both in the prime of youth, or even in that season which precedes the prime of youth, the season before the smooth pink folds of the flower have burst their gummy case, when the wings of the butterfly, though fully grown, are motionless in the sun.

"Lucky it isn't Friday," he observed.

"Why? D'you believe in luck?"

"They make you pay sixpence on Friday."

"What's sixpence anyway? Isn't it worth sixpence?"

"What's 'it'–what do you mean by 'it'?"

"O, anything–I mean–you know what I mean."

Long pauses came between each of these remarks; they were uttered in toneless and monotonous voices. The couple stood still on the edge of the flower bed, and together pressed the end of her parasol deep down into the soft earth. The action and the fact that his hand rested on the top of hers expressed their feelings in a strange way, as these short insignificant words also expressed something, words with short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far and thus alighting awkwardly upon the very common objects that surrounded them, and were to their inexperienced touch so massive; but who knows (so they thought as they pressed the parasol into the earth) what precipices aren't concealed in them, or what slopes of ice don't shine in the sun on the other side? Who knows? Who has ever seen this before? Even when she wondered what sort of tea they gave you at Kew, he felt that something loomed up behind her words, and stood vast and solid behind them; and the mist very slowly rose and uncovered–O, Heavens, what were those shapes?–little white tables, and waitresses who looked first at her and then at him; and there was a bill that he would pay with a real two shilling piece, and it was real, all real, he assured himself, fingering the

coin in his pocket, real to everyone except to him and to her; even to him it began to seem real; and then–but it was too exciting to stand and think any longer, and he pulled the parasol out of the earth with a jerk and was impatient to find the place where one had tea with other people, like other people.

"Come along, Trissie; it's time we had our tea."

"Wherever does one have one's tea?" she asked with the oddest thrill of excitement in her voice, looking vaguely round and letting herself be drawn on down the grass path, trailing her parasol, turning her head this way and that way, forgetting her tea, wishing to go down there and then down there, remembering orchids and cranes among wild flowers, a Chinese pagoda and a crimson crested bird; but he bore her on.

Thus one couple after another with much the same irregular and aimless movement passed the flower-bed and were enveloped in layer after layer of green blue vapour, in which at first their bodies had substance and a dash of colour, but later both substance and colour dissolved in the green-blue atmosphere. How hot it was! So hot that even the thrush chose to hop, like a mechanical bird, in the shadow of the flowers, with long pauses between one movement and the next; instead of rambling vaguely the white butterflies danced one above another, making with their white shifting flakes the outline of a shattered marble column above the tallest flowers; the glass roofs of the palm house shone as if a whole market full of shiny green umbrellas had opened in the sun; and in the drone of the aeroplane the voice of the summer sky murmured its fierce soul. Yellow and black, pink and snow white, shapes of all these colours, men, women, and children were spotted for a second upon the horizon, and then, seeing the breadth of yellow that lay upon the grass, they wavered and sought shade beneath the trees, dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere, staining it faintly with red and blue. It seemed as if all gross and heavy bodies had sunk down in the heat motionless and lay huddled upon the ground, but their voices went wavering from them as if they were flames lolling from the thick waxen bodies of candles. Voices. Yes, voices. Wordless voices, breaking the silence suddenly with such depth of contentment, such passion of desire, or, in the voices of children, such freshness of surprise; breaking the silence? But there was no silence; all the time the motor omnibuses were turning their wheels and changing their gear; like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another the city murmured; on the top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals of myriads of flowers flashed their colours into the air.

This page titled 3.11.9: Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens" (1921) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **5.10: Woolf, Virginia "Kew Gardens" (1921)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

3.11.10: More Recent Short Stories

Short Stories

Use the links below to access more recent short stories, from 1953 up through the 21st century.

Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (1953)

James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" (1954)

Louise Erdrich's "Matchimanito" (1988)

Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" (1990)

Denis Johnson's "Emergency" (1992)

Tobias Woolf's "Bullet in the Brain" (1995)

Jhumpa Lahiri's "A Temporary Matter" (1999)

David Foster Wallace's "Good People" (2007)

Margaret Atwood's "Lusus Naturae" (2014)

Cristina Henriquez's "Everything is Far From Here" (2017)

Tommy Orange's "The State" (2018)

Contributors

- Adapted from Writing the Nation: A Concise History of American Literature: 1865-current by Burk, Bleil and Cofer, Source: University of Georgia Press, CC-BY-SA

3.11.10: More Recent Short Stories is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: About Poetry

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- define poetry.
- discuss the elements of poetry.
- analyze poetry.

4.1: What is Poetry?
4.2: Reading Poetry
4.3: Case Study- A Close Reading of a Poem
4.4: Why Analyze Poetry?
4.5: The Line in Poetry
4.6: Speaker and Voice
4.7: Word Choice and Word Order
4.8: Sound in Poetry- Rhyme
4.9: Sound in Poetry- Alliteration, Consonance, Assonance
4.10: Sound in Poetry- Meter
4.11: Sensory Imagery
4.12: Figurative Language
4.13: Form in Poetry
4.14: Music and Poetry

This page titled 4: About Poetry is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

4.1: What is Poetry?



Image from Pixabay

What is Poetry?

Poetry is a condensed form of writing. As an art, it can effectively invoke a range of emotions in the reader. It can be presented in a number of forms — ranging from traditional rhymed poems such as sonnets to contemporary free verse. Poetry has always been intrinsically tied to music and many poems work with rhythm. It often brings awareness of current issues such as the state of the environment, but can also be read just for the sheer pleasure.

A poet makes the invisible visible. The invisible includes our deepest feelings and angsts, and also our joys, sorrows, and unanswered questions of being human. How is a poet able to do this? A poet uses **fresh** and **original language**, and is more interested in how the arrangement of words affects the reader rather than solely grammatical construction. The poet thinks about how words **sound**, the musicality within each word and also how the words come together.

Like fiction writers, poets mostly **show rather than tell**. They describe the scene vividly using as few words as possible and prefer to describe rather than analyze, leaving the latter to the people who read and write about poetry as you are doing in this class.

The Purpose of Poetry

If you've taken a composition or freshman writing course, you might recognize some familiar terms used above — summarizes, sources, persuades, ethos. These are all words you will rarely, if ever, use in reference to writing poetry. And why is that? Well, what's the purpose of poetry? Perhaps this is not an easy question to answer. In fact, the answer might depend on time and culture. Epics such as *Gilgamesh* aided in memorization and preserved stories meant to be passed down orally. The British Romantics valued the pleasure derived from hearing and reading poetry. In some cultures poetry is important in ritual and religious practice. In contemporary times, many describe poetry as being a tool for self-expression.

In the excellent glossary in his book *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry*, poet Edward Hirsch provides the following definition for a poem:

Poem: A made thing, a verbal construct, an event in language. The word *poesis* means "making;" and the oldest term for the poet means "maker." The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* points out that the medieval and Renaissance poets used the word *makers*, as in "courtly makers," as a precise equivalent for *poets.* (Hence William Dunbar's "Lament for the Makers.") The word *poem* came into English in the sixteenth century and has been with us ever since to denote a form of fabrication, a verbal composition, a made thing.

William Carlos Williams defined the poem as "a small (or large) machine made of words." (He added that there is nothing redundant about a machine.) Wallace Stevens characterized poetry as "a revelation of words by means of the words." In his helpful essay "What is Poetry?" linguist Roman Jakobson declared:

"Poeticity is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion, when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and internal form, acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality."

Ben Johnson referred to the art of poetry as "the craft of making." The old Irish word *cerd*, meaning "people of the craft," was a designation for artisans, including poets. It is cognate with the Greek *kerdos*, meaning "craft, craftiness." Two basic metaphors for the art of poetry in the classical world were carpentry and weaving. "Whatsoever else it may be," W. H. Auden said, "a poem is a verbal artifact which must be as skillfully and solidly constructed as a table or a motorcycle."

The true poem has been crafted into a living entity. It has magical potency, ineffable spirit. There is always something mysterious and inexplicable in a poem. It is an act—an action—beyond paraphrase because what is said is always inseparable from the way it is being said. A poem creates an experience in the reader that cannot be reduced to anything else. Perhaps it exists in order to create that aesthetic experience. Octavio Paz maintained that the poet and the reader are two moments of a single reality.

Of the many ideas provided here in this definition, perhaps the one to emphasize most is that the poem is "an event in language." It is also one of the harder to understand concepts. "A poem creates an experience in the reader that cannot be reduced to anything else," writes Hirsch. Especially not through paraphrase. This means that in order to "experience" a poem, a

reader needs to read it as it is. The poem is itself a type of virtual reality.

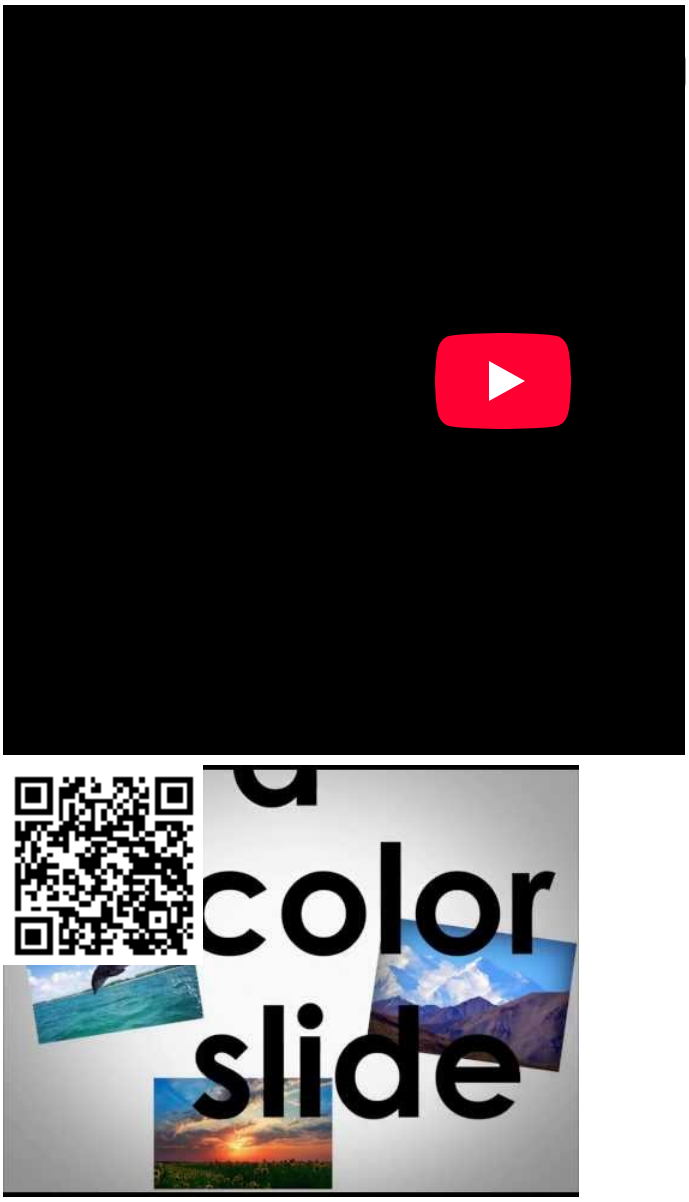
Jeremy Arnold, a professor of philosophy at the University of Woolamaloo in Canada, likens the poem to the "pensieve" device in the Harry Potter series: "A poem allows someone to preserve a mental experience so that an outsider can access it as if it were their own." When coming to poetry, there may be nothing more important to understand because nothing can shape your perspective more on how to write and for what purpose. Poetry requires a reader, an audience; therefore, the poet must learn how to best engage an audience. And this engagement doesn't happen by sharing ideas, feelings, or experiences, by telling the reader about *your* experiences — it happens by *creating* them on the page with words that evoke the senses. With *images*. These, then, are how the literary genres speak. Images are their muscles. Their heart. Images are poetry's body and soul.

Activity

Choose a poem from the Poetry Foundation's featured poems and look again at Edward Hirsh's definition of poem. How does this poem typify his explanation? Are there any ways in which it does not? Write a short response (300 words or less) explaining how you see your selected poem in relation to Hirsch's definition.

Video: Billy Collins, A Poet, Speaks Out

Watch Billy Collins' audio/visual poem:



Video 6.1.1 : Introduction to Poetry by Billy Collins

After watching the video above, read the poem here, and click on the link below to listen to a lecture by Billy Collins on his craft and how it relates to the reader.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory, sourced from SUNY, CC-BY-NC-SA

This page titled 4.1: What is Poetry? is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.1: What is Poetry?** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

4.2: Reading Poetry

Reading Poetry



Image from Pixabay

Muriel Rukeyser says in *The Life of Poetry* that in order to successfully read a poem, we must give a poem "a total response." This means giving it all of our attention, taking it in slowly, reading it several times. It means listening to the poem openly, without judgment, and without projecting our own assumed meanings onto it, but rather as Ruykeyser writes, coming "to the emotional meanings at every moment." As she explains, "That is one reason for the high concentration of music, in poetry."

To come to emotional meanings at every moment means to adjust and react to the way a poem takes shape with every word, every line, every sentence, every stanza. Each poem creates its own universe as it moves from line to line. It is a universe that Ruykeyser describes as the "universe of emotional truth." So how exactly does one listen with his or her emotions?

Reading is one of the most intimate forms of connection we can have with someone. We take their words—their breath—into ourselves. We shape the words with our own bodies and, too, give them life with our own breath. Reading poetry, we breathe in what a poet breathes out. We share breath. The words and their meanings become part of our body as they move through our mind, triggering sensations in our bodies that lead to thoughts. And through this process, we have experiences that are new and that change us as much as any other experience can.

Poetry is a condensed art form that produces an experience in a reader through words. And though words may appear visually as symbols on the page, the experience that poems produce in us is much more physical and direct. The elements of poetry permit a poet to control many aspects of language—tone, pace, rhythm, sound—as well as language's effects: images, ideas, sensations. These elements give power to the poet to shape a reader's physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual experience of the poem. Because form and function are so closely intertwined, it is impossible to paraphrase a poem. When I was an undergraduate at SUNY Brockport, my first poetry teacher Anthony Piccione used to say, "A poem is what a poem does." This is why we must read poems with full concentration and focus more than once. It is why we must read them out loud. It is why we must be attentive to every aspect of the poem on both ends: as a writer, and as a reader.

Readers come to the page with different backgrounds and a range of different experiences with poetry, but it is how we read a poem that determines our experience of it. By "read" I do not mean understand or analyze, but rather, the actual process of coming to the poem, ingesting its lines, and responding emotionally.

Be a Good Listener



Image from Pixabay

I'm willing to bet that all of us have heard someone described as a "a good listener" in our lifetimes. Well, what is it that makes someone a good listener? List the qualities we associate with good listening skills and share your experiences of people who demonstrate these skills. In contrast, what makes someone a "bad listener"? How can we relate these concepts to reading a poem?

Being a good listener requires many of the same traits as being a good reader. When we listen to someone speak, we listen to their emotions and ideas through meaning and tone, body gestures, and emphasized words. We do not judge. We do not interrupt. We may touch the speaker's arm to express care. We certainly use facial expressions and gestures to let the speaker know we are listening and understanding, that we are advancing emotionally alongside them with each turn of the story. Before offering advice, condolences, or other reactions, we as listeners try to see their perspective and its complexities from their side. We take our identities out of the equation and place their concerns in the middle of our attention.

Every poem has a speaker that seeks connection with a listener. A poet seeks to create an emotional experience in the reader through the poem's process, just as if a friend—or stranger—were telling an intense story. Unlike a person speaking, who can use the entire body to gesture, poetry has only a voice to rely on to speak. Yet the poem seeks to speak to a reader as if it had a body. The poem uses rhythm, pauses, stresses, inflections, and different speeds to engage the listener's body. As readers, it is our role to listen to the speaker of the poem and to *em*body the words the speaker speaks with our own self as if we are the ones who've spoken. We as readers identify with the speaker, with the voice of the poem. We listen with what John Keats called a "negative capability," meaning we are capable of erasing our own identity and ego in order to imagine what it is like to take on another. Although Keats used the term to apply to the writing side of poetry, it is useful to consider the concept in terms of the reading side of the equation, as well.

> A big mistake novice readers of poetry make is assuming that they can get the meaning of a poem by reading it just once. Since a poem is condensed language, the meaning reveals itself slowly, unfolding a bit at a time after multiple readings.

Like individuals, each poem's speaker speaks from a place of perspective, a place which can be physical and/or psychological. As we as readers move word to word, line to line, we must allow the universe of the poem to take root in our imaginations as if it is the only universe that exists. When we are open to the words' music and meaning, the poem has the potential to envelop our entire being and body.

Note

> Poet Emily Dickinson expresses how she can tell if something is poetry in one of her letters: "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry. These are the only way I know. Is there any other way."

A poem is structured differently from prose as poems are mostly structured around a **line** rather than a paragraph (poets can also write **prose poems** that use paragraphs). What this means is that, as a reader, you pause briefly after reading a line and moving onto the next line. Sometimes, poets might break up a sentence midway between lines. This is called **caesura** and poets use this to emphasize the meanings of words either directly before the line break or on the following line. Seeing how a poem is visually laid

out is as important as hearing it read as contemporary poets might work more with the white space of the page to emphasize meaning.

Poets break up lines in a poem into **stanzas**, the equivalent of paragraphs in prose. Often, a stanza has a meaning that is distinct from other stanzas. Understanding why a poet has chosen to group lines together in stanzas is important in ascertaining the meaning of the poem at large.

Note

A big mistake novice readers of poetry make is assuming that they can get the meaning of a poem by reading it just once. Since a poem is condensed language, the meaning reveals itself slowly, unfolding a bit at a time after multiple readings.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory, sourced from SUNY, CC-BY-NC-SA

This page titled 4.2: Reading Poetry is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Michelle Bonczek Evory (OpenSUNY) .

- **6.3: Reading Poetry** by Michelle Bonczek Evory is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

4.3: Case Study- A Close Reading of a Poem

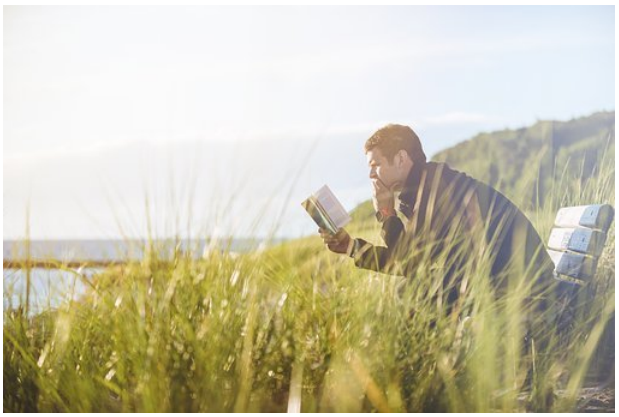


Image from Pixabay

How to Conduct a Close Reading of a Poem

The Title Matters

Reading a poem, we start at the beginning — the title, which we allow to set up an expectation for the poem in us. A title can set a mood or tone, or ground us in a setting, persona, or time. It is the doorway into the poem. It prepares us for what follows.

Exercise 6.4.1

Read the titles of the poems that follow. What do the titles bring up for you? Discuss your findings.

- Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening
- Happiness
- Wishes for Sons
- Riot Act, April 29, 1992
- Reckless Sonnet
- Pissing Off the Back of the Boat into the Nivernais Canal
- How Much Is This Poem Going to Cost Me?
- The Turtle
- A Blessing
- Girl Friend Poem #3
- Sex at Noon Taxes
- The Tree of Personal Effort
- The First Time Through

Upon a first reading, it's important to get an idea of what it is you are entering. *Read* the poem out loud. *Listen* for the general, larger qualities of the poem like tone, mood, and style. *Look up* any words you cannot define. *Circle* any phrases that you don't understand and *mark* any that stand out to you. Some questions we may ask ourselves include:

1. What is my first emotional reaction to the poem?
2. Is this poem telling a story? Sharing thoughts? Playing with language experimentally? Is it exploring one's feelings or perceptions? Is it describing something?
3. Is the tone serious? Funny? Meditative? Inquisitive? Confessional? Here is a list of tonal descriptors that may help you pin down what you're hearing:
    - Abrasive, accepting, admiring, adoring, angry, anxious, apologetic, apprehensive, argumentative, awe-struck
    - Biting, bitter, blissful, boastful
    - Candid, childish, child-like, clipped, cold, complimentary, condescending, critical
    - Despairing, detached, didactic, direct, discouraged, doubtful, dramatic

- Fearful, forceful, frightened
- Happy, heavy-hearted, horrified, humorous
- Indifferent, ironic, irreverent
- Loving
- Melancholic, mysterious
- Naïve, nostalgic
- Objective, optimistic, peaceful, pessimistic, playful, proud
- Questioning
- Reflective, reminiscent
- Sad, sarcastic, satirical, satisfied, seductive, self-critical, self-mocking, sexy, shocked, silly, sly, solemn, somber, stunned, subdued, sweet, sympathetic
- Thoughtful, threatening
- Uncertain, urgent
- Whimsical

These initial questions will emotionally prepare you to be a good listener. When we come to a text, though we release ourselves of any preconceived judgments, we do come prepared emotionally. Picking up a book of fiction is different than opening a book of nonfiction essays. Within us there is an ever-so-slight yet important preparation. Think about it. Although both nonfiction and fiction share similar writing tropes, how would you feel if someone told you that the nonfiction book you are reading—the one that brought you to tears—is not nonfiction, but actually fiction? Most people become upset. It feels like you've been lied to. To put it another way, think about how differently you prepare to engage with a performance depending on its genre. How do you set yourself up differently for a stand-up comic as opposed to an opera? Not only are the effects of the performance different, but the way we emotionally prepare ourselves to receive them is also different.

Let's begin to apply our approaches to the following poem by Stephen Dunn:

Poem: The Insistence of Beauty by Stephen Dunn

The day before those silver planes
came out of the perfect blue, I was struck
by the beauty of pollution rising
from smokestacks near Newark,
gray and white ribbons of it
on their way to evanescence.

And at impact, no doubt, certain beholders
and believers from another part of the world
must have seen what appeared gorgeous—
the flames of something theirs being born.

I watched for hours—mesmerized—
that willful collision replayed,
the better man in me not yielding,
then yielding to revenge's sweet surge.

The next day there was a photograph
of dust and smoke ghosting a street,
and another of a man you couldn't be sure
was fear-frozen or dead or made of stone,

and for a while I was pleased
to admire the intensity—or was it the coldness?—
of each photographer's good eye.
For years I'd taken pride in resisting

the obvious—sunsets, snowy peaks,
a starlet's face—yet had come to realize

even those, seen just right, can have
their edgy place. And the sentimental,

beauty's sloppy cousin, that enemy,
can't it have a place too?
Doesn't a tear deserve a close-up?
When word came of a fireman

who hid in the rubble
so his dispirited search dog
could have someone to find, I repeated it
to everyone I knew. I did this for myself,
not for community or beauty's sake,
yet soon it had a rhythm and a frame.

"The Insistence of Beauty," from THE INSISTENCE OF BEAUTY: POEMS by Stephen Dunn. Copyright © 2004 by Stephen Dunn. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Begin with the title: "The Insistence of Beauty." What does this title do to you? What kind of expectations and tone does it set up?

Perhaps you expect a poem about beauty, or because it is the "insistence of" you may feel determination, or like beauty is up against some other force. Or maybe you expect a poem about art.

Then ask and begin to answer these questions:

1. What is my first emotional reaction to the poem?
    - There is no one answer to this, obviously. But maybe you feel loss. Or hope. Or desperation. Or sadness. Or admiration. Maybe you're confused or feel a combination of these.
2. Is this poem telling a story? Sharing thoughts? Playing with language experimentally?
    - This poem seems to be telling a story. The poem contains a sequence of events: "The day before"; "I watched for hours"; "the next day." The speaker is sharing emotional reactions to something, as well as his actions to an event.
3. Is the tone serious? Funny? Meditative?
    - It seems serious, inquisitive, and confessional. It's not humorous and isn't experimental.



Image from Pixabay

Images and Tone

After an initial introduction to the poem, read slowly and allow the meanings to emerge as you move from line to line, paying attention next to images and **tone**. Before moving ahead, ask what your emotional response is at the end of each line, as lines can create different meanings and give the poem complexity. For instance, in the following stanza, we respond one way to the first two lines' image, and another way after its turn to the third line:

The day before those silver planes
came out of the perfect blue, I was struck

by the beauty of pollution rising
from smokestacks near Newark

In the second line, the phrase “I was struck” forms an image with what precedes before it can form an image with what follows. This second line leaves us with the image of the speaker being struck by something. It might be different for you, but because I am holding the image of a plane in my mind, a plane being a large and physical object, I immediately imagine the speaker being “struck” physically by an object. Therefore, we momentarily hold the image of being struck physically: “The day before those silver planes / came out of the perfect blue, I was struck.”

But when we move to the third line, the image changes. The speaker is no longer struck by an object , but by an emotion or idea: the “beauty of pollution rising.” Although we may think of pollution as ugly, here we are being told that it is beautiful. The word reverses our assumptions; maybe we see in our mind’s eye the cliché image of smog rising from smokestacks and ask, “How is that beautiful?” Or maybe we think about how smog makes the colors of sunsets more intense. Either way, the speaker is telling us that he sees pollution as beautiful even with all of its complications (it’s harmful, smelly, ugly, et cetera). Rather than leave us with only the speaker’s judgement of pollution, the next lines create for us an image of that “beauty” so we can see it, too: “gray and white ribbons of it / on their way to evanescence.” These last two lines help us make sense of the idea that pollution is beautiful. The ribbons evaporating maybe *are* somehow beautiful. If we disconnect our knowledge from the image so we do not think about how the ribbons are smoke, if we simply see the visual the smoke makes: “ribbons… on their way to evanescence,” we experience what the speaker experiences: beauty. Or, perhaps, what the speaker sees as beautiful is the pollution disappearing. From this perspective, the speaker would see not the gray and white ribbons as beautiful, but the gray and white ribbons *disappearing* as beautiful.

Tonally, the words “perfect” and “struck” stand out for different reasons in the first two lines — one for meaning, one for sound. When something is “perfect” we feel admiration, maybe the need to protect it. Since nothing really is perfect, it also sounds a little romantic, subjective, or too good to be true, which may also produce tension as we know perfection isn’t real, or doesn’t last. The word “struck” is a harsh, violent, physical word. And ending the line on it emphasizes it even more. To be struck by something suggests shock, surprise, immediacy, and change.

In addition to these two words, the first phrase sets a tone, too, of expectation. We know something significant is being made of the planes because they are marking a day: “The day before those silver planes.” The event is important enough to refer to it in such a way. This is how we speak of big events. The day we were married. The day we went swimming. The day those silver planes came out of the blue.

The tone in the first stanza immediately produces a connection between the speaker and reader. We feel the speaker is disclosing something to us, or divulging something important. As we continue through the poem the speaker’s tone becomes inquisitive as he asks questions:

—or was it the coldness?—

that enemy,
can’t it have a place too?

Doesn’t a tear deserve a close-up?

Is he asking questions of the reader? To himself? A bit of both? We journey with him on his seeking.

Exercise 6.4.1

Read through Dunn’s poem and identify the rest of the images. Discuss how each image makes you feel. To what words or images is your attention drawn? What associations do you make from them?

Find Connections and Ask Questions

After moving through the poem and noting images, their effects, and the tone or places where tone changes, the next question that is helpful to ask is: What does *x* remind me of? Or, what associations am I making? Usually the connections I would suggest making would be within the poem itself and the patterns it creates—between lines, images, repetitive words or themes, **diction** (word choice)—but in Dunn’s poem, before we can make connections within the poem, we are actually reminded of something outside of the poem. In the first stanza, the two planes near Newark and two ribbons evaporating may remind you of the iconic image of the September 11th attacks on The World Trade Center in New York City. This an **allusion** (an indirect reference) to that

event, as suggested by the second stanza: “believers from another part of the world / must have seen what appeared to be gorgeous.” Making this connection provides us with a context for the poem’s occasion. Maybe we begin to ask, “How can the attacks on the World Trade Center and its subsequent collapse be seen as gorgeous?”

You may be wondering what happens if you didn’t make that connection. Will you misread Dunn’s poem? In a poem, allusions like this usually aren’t usually necessary if the poem makes use of all the other elements of poetry successfully. And in Dunn’s poem we are actually given enough, I would say, to have a sufficient experience if the allusion isn’t made. In the poem the planes cause an “impact,” believers elsewhere watch the “flames of something of theirs being born,” the speaker watches “mesmerized,” the media posts photographs of the fearful and “dead or made of stone” watching the events; then the poem focuses on the speaker’s emotional reactions and thoughts regarding the event, and what thoughts it evokes within him in regard to beauty. The poem closes with the story of the fireman and his dog and the speaker’s insights. Looking at it this way, maybe 9/11 is secondary in experiencing the poem. It’s hard to be certain since I cannot *not* make the connection to the event personally, but perhaps it is possible that the allusion is not central to the poem’s experience, since it is all of the other poetic techniques of the poem that create the sensual reaction in the reader.

Let’s for a moment pretend that the poem isn’t alluding to these events. This will leave us to focus on the private and unique universe of the poem and make connections within it. If we begin to make connections within the poem itself, one of the first connections we might make is how the ribbons in the first stanza appear beautiful to the speaker even though they are pollution, and how the flames in the second stanza appear “gorgeous” to the believers even though they are destructive. What does that suggest? The connection bridges the distance between the speaker and the believers, as they both have the capacity to see beauty in something harmful, in something that others see as ugly. This further suggests that beauty is subjective, though the ability to see it is universal.

You can see how making connections like this and asking questions about those connections can lead to insight into the poem’s experience, as well as insight into the experience of being human. Here, Dunn’s speaker has found similarities between himself and people who might be considered enemies. Beauty, we see, may be received and interpreted by our senses and not rely on context.

What other connections and patterns can we see? And what questions can these patterns raise in us? In the third stanza the speaker watches the collision “replayed”—be it on a television screen or in his mind—and admits to a desire for revenge. Later, in the last stanza, the speaker repeats the story of the fireman: “I repeated it / to everyone I knew.” What does this suggest? He says “I did this for myself, / not for community or beauty’s sake, / yet soon it had a rhythm and a frame.” How are we to understand the impact of his repeating his story? If it is told “for myself,” then what exactly is the speaker getting from this and how is it connected to the replaying of the collision? What might be meant by rhythm and frame?

In the fourth and fifth stanza the speaker makes a connection between himself admiring “the intensity” of the people in the photographs and between the photographers taking the photographs:

The next day there was a photograph
of dust and smoke ghosting a street,
and another of a man you couldn’t be sure
was fear-frozen or dead or made of stone,

and for a while I was pleased
to admire the intensity—or was it the coldness?—
of each photographer’s good eye.

The speaker asks, “Was it the coldness?” This seems to suggest a distance, or emotional coldness, in the voyeuristic qualities he is experiencing and the way photographers act as objective eyes for the audience. The photographers cannot act on their emotions or empathies; instead, to succeed, photographers in intense situations must shut down their responses and capture the moment visually, detached from their emotions. The speaker says that he admires this, “the intensity—or was it the coldness?— / of each photographer’s good eye.” Perhaps he sees courage in the act of taking these photographs, or maybe he sees something admirable in the way a person can detach himself from an event in order to focus only on the image, the visual, the camera’s eye with a “good eye” that can see art and capture it.

In the fifth and sixth stanzas, the speaker muses on how he’s reacted to beautiful things in the past just as coldly as these photographers: “For years I’d taken pride in resisting / the obvious—sunsets, snowy peaks, / a starlet’s face.” The pattern of “coldness” is established by several word choices here: “fear-frozen,” “coldness,” “snowy.” The words are used as physical description and emotional description. They are literal, and they are figurative. Our speaker then tells us how he discovered that

images of “sunsets, snowy peaks, / a starlet’s face,” too, have their “edgy” place. This is a little mysterious. Does “edgy” refer to the destructive, ugly yet mesmerizing collision and photographs he’s been viewing? Is this suggesting that serene beauty and edginess are somehow closely related?

The speaker then introduces the idea of “the sentimental,” which he refers to as “beauty’s sloppy cousin, the enemy,” and asks if it can have a place to also be appreciated. The word choice of “enemy” is interesting, as it echoes the relationship between the speaker and the believers from the beginning of the poem. What does this suggest about the relationship between enemies, and between the roles they play? The speaker ends the stanza with another question: “Doesn’t a tear deserve a close-up?” The image represents sentimentality, beauty’s “sloppy cousin,” but it actually could be another allusion, this time to a commercial by the Keep America Beautiful campaign, made in the 1970s at the start of the environmental movement. It is another reference that will not diminish the poem’s effect on a reader if he or she doesn’t know it, but it can add another layer of complexity if it is understood. In a commercial, a Native American witnesses the pollution of a river as he paddles a canoe up the river, and as he turns to the camera, we zoom in on a tear slipping from his eye. The allusion echoes the pollution that the speaker found beautiful in the first stanza.

In the last part of the poem, the speaker confesses that he retells the story about the fireman hiding in the rubble “so his dispirited search dog / could have someone to find.” And that he retells it not “for community or beauty’s sake,” but for himself. Why would he do that? Why does it matter that he does? The story is moving. Who isn’t moved by the relationship between a man and his dog? Our focus shifts from all of the people who perished in the rubble whom the fireman and his dog cannot help, to the “dispirited” feelings of the dog that the fireman tries to help. It is almost as if all the devastating emotion we feel thinking about those people and their families, empathizing with them, transfers to the emotion we feel thinking about the dog, empathizing with the fireman who feels such empathy and emotion for the dog that he hides in the rubble so the dog can find someone. In this moment, the feelings the dog has become as important and as worthy as our own—a dog’s emotions equate with a human’s. If we can feel such strong empathy toward the dog, as the fireman clearly does, can we not also feel it toward our enemies? And are these feelings in any way similar to “revenge’s sweet surge,” referred to earlier in the poem? Are they maybe one side and the other, sloppy cousins of each other like beauty and sentimentality? Or is the dog and fireman story too sentimental to fall in love with? And if it is, doesn’t it “deserve a close-up” too?



Image from Pixabay

Look Closely at Diction

When reading a poem, you should always look up words you do not know, but sometimes it can help to look up words that you do know when they have more than one meaning, too. The last line of the poem may seem a bit mysterious: “I did this for myself, / not for community or beauty’s sake, / yet soon it had a rhythm and a frame.” A rhythm and a frame? What on earth does that have to do with anything? Is the speaker suggesting that beauty relies somehow on rhythm and a frame? We can begin by looking in the poem for other things that have rhythm and a frame. The poem itself, does, for starters. Poetry has rhythm. Speech has rhythm. And the images of the building collapsing repetitively have a rhythm too, as well as a frame if they are being shown on television, captured through a camera lens. But “frame” is a word with many meanings. If we look at the word “frame,” we find that it is a noun defined as:

1. a border or case for enclosing a picture, mirror, etc.

2. a rigid structure formed of relatively slender pieces, joined so as to surround sizable empty spaces or nonstructural panels, and generally used as a major support in building or engineering works, machinery, furniture, etc.
3. a body, especially a human body, with reference to its size or build; physique: *He has a large frame.*
4. a structure for admitting or enclosing something: *a window frame.*
5. usually, frames. (*used with a plural verb*) the framework for a pair of eyeglasses.
6. form, constitution, or structure in general; system; order.
7. a particular state, as of the mind: *an unhappy frame of mind.*

In looking at the above definitions, there are several that have resonance in relation to this poem.

1. a border or case for enclosing a picture, mirror, etc.
   - We frame art and other works of beauty, and the title of the poem is “The Insistence of Beauty.” What is the purpose of a frame in this sense of the word?
2. a rigid structure formed of relatively slender pieces, joined so as to surround sizable empty spaces or nonstructural panels, and generally used as a major support in building or engineering works, machinery, furniture, etc.
   - The World Trade Center, like all buildings, had a frame, which was destroyed in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Were the Twin Towers a piece of art that had beauty and a frame? What did they represent symbolically?
3. a body, especially a human body, with reference to its size or build; physique
   - All people—no matter what their culture or nationality—and other living beings have frames.
4. form, constitution, or structure in general; system; order
   1. Poems have form; society has systems; the United States has a Constitution; the 9/11 terrorist attacks were very orderly and systematic. How is beauty linked to order?
5. a particular state, as of the mind
   - A poem’s speaker has a state of mind, as does the reader; the events of 9/11 place us in a certain “frame of mind.” What frame of mind is the reader in? What frame of mind does the poem put the reader in?

The word “frame” adds layers of meaning that can contribute to our interpretations, reactions, and understandings of this poem, as the word relates to many of the poem’s themes: beauty, violence, love, destruction, storytelling, and the visual nature of art, to name a few. Considering these definitions, we might follow our thoughts to conclude something like this:

“Frame” can refer to the building’s architecture, the human body, systems, and orders. We frame photographs—a single moment captured from time—and hang them on our walls. A frame lends support, gives something its shape. And rhythm? Our first rhythm: our mother’s heartbeat—rhythm is elemental and basic. It is the basis of music and poetry. The human body finds rhythms pleasing. Rhythms repeat themselves. The man telling the story of the fireman and his dog creates a rhythm through its repetition; it becomes artful, monumental. It becomes an experience shared rather than isolated. It stands as a symbol, an allegory for the wreckage of person, animal, and city. Perhaps the retelling becomes its own type of architecture that listeners can enter, or the bones within someone, like the fireman, who in retelling this story finds strength and support.

Activity

What is your experience of this poem? How do you interpret its meaning? After discussing your reactions to the poem, discuss the specific approaches you used to come to your interpretation. What do you think is the most powerful part of the poem? What, if anything, confused you in its reading? Did that change once you conducted a closer reading of the poem? Did your interpretation align with mine in some places? Or are there sections in which it differed? Remember, there is no one way to interpret a poem. That’s what makes discussing them so pleasing and rewarding.

Exercise 6.4.1

Read the poem by Wordsworth below aloud the first time to hear the sound of the words and the brief pauses with each line break. Each and every word, every punctuation mark is deliberately chosen by the poet, so read thoughtfully and carefully. You can also use "Those Winter Sundays" by Robert Hayden or "Catch" by Robert Francis.

I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud *by William Wordsworth*

I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host, of golden daffodils;

Beside the lake, beneath the trees,

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine

And twinkle on the milky way,

They stretched in never-ending line

Along the margin of a bay:

Ten thousand saw I at a glance,

Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they

Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:

A poet could not but be gay,

In such a jocund company:

I gazed—and gazed—but little thought

What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie

In vacant or in pensive mood,

They flash upon that inward eye

Which is the bliss of solitude;

And then my heart with pleasure fills,

And dances with the daffodils.

2) Go through the same process the author used to read Stephen Dunn's poem to do a close reading of Wordsworth's poem. What is your first emotional reaction to the poem? Next, follow the steps below to do a close reading.

1. What does this title do to you? What kind of expectations and tone does it set up?
2. What do you notice about the structure of the poem?
3. How are the lines organized differently than prose? Where do they break?
4. What do you notice about the last word of each line?
5. Is this poem telling a story? Sharing thoughts? Playing with language experimentally?
6. Is the tone serious? Funny? Meditative?
7. Read through and identify the images in the poem and also the tone and places where the tone changes. Discuss how each image makes you feel. To what words or images is your attention drawn? What associations do you make from them?
8. Find connections and ask questions. What does *x* remind me of? Or, what associations am I making? What other connections and patterns can we see?
9. Look closely at diction or word choice, especially as the connotative and denotative meanings of words.
10. What do you think is the most powerful part of the poem?
11. What, if anything, confused you in its reading? Did that change once you conducted a closer reading of the poem?
12. What is your experience of this poem? How do you interpret its meaning? What are the specific approaches you used to come to your interpretation?
13. Now, read the poem in your own mind again once or twice. Pause at each word that “jumps” out at you because it is either an unusual image or it elicits a mood, or it could just be that you don’t know the meaning of the word and will need to refer to a dictionary.

14. Note recurring ideas or images—color code these with highlighters for visual recognition as you look at the poem on the page.
15. Determine formal patterns. Is there a regular rhythm? How would you describe it? Can it be characterized by the number of syllables in each line? If not, do you note a certain number of beats (moments where your voice emphasizes the sound) in the line? Are there rhyming sounds? Where do they occur?
16. What is the overarching effect of all these elements taken together? What do you think is the message conveyed by the poem?

As you learn more about the elements of poetry, you will be looking at word choices a poet makes and also changes in tone. Are there any figures of speech the poet uses? What is the form of the poem? Each of these contributes to the overall meaning of a poem.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory under the license CC BY-NC-SA

This page titled 4.3: Case Study- A Close Reading of a Poem is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.4: Case Study - A Close Reading of a Poem** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.4: Why Analyze Poetry?

Analyzing Poetry

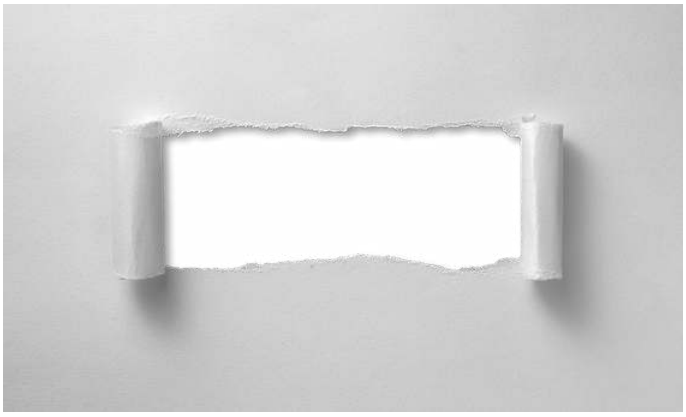


Image from Pixabay

What is the point of analyzing poetry? One simple answer is that the more we know about anything the more interesting it becomes: listening to music or looking at paintings with someone who can tell us a little about what we hear or see–or what we're reading–is one way of increasing our understanding and pleasure. That may mean learning something about the people who produced the writing, music, painting that we are interested in, and why they produced it. But it may also mean understanding why one particular form was chosen rather than another: why, for example, did the poet choose to write a **sonnet** rather than an **ode**, a **ballad**, or a **villanelle**? To appreciate the appropriateness of one form, we need to be aware of a range of options available to that particular writer at that particular time. In the same way, we also need to pay attention to word choice. Why was this particular word chosen from a whole range of words that might have said much the same? Looking at manuscript drafts can be really enlightening, showing how much effort was expended in order to find the most appropriate or most evocative expression.

Exercise 6.5.1

Click on the link below to read and compare the two versions of William Blake's "Tyger." The one on the left is a draft, the other is the final published version.

William Blake's "Tyger"

What are the differences between the two versions?

Answer

The most obvious difference between the two is that stanza 4 of the draft does not survive in the published version, and an entirely new stanza, "When the stars threw down their spears," appears in the finished poem. Significantly this introduces the idea of "the Lamb," a dramatic contrast to the tiger, as well as the idea of a "he" who made the lamb. One similarity between draft and final version is that each is made up entirely of unanswered questions. But if you look at the manuscript stanza 5, you can see revisions from "What" to "Where," and the struggle with the third line, where Blake eventually decided that the idea of an arm was redundant, subsumed in the notions of grasping and clasping. The two rhyme words are decided–grasp/clasp–but in which order should they come? "Clasp" is a less aggressive word than "grasp"; "clasp" is not quite as gentle as an embrace, but it is closer to embracing than "grasp" is – so it must be for deliberate effect that we end up with "What dread grasp/Dare its deadly terrors clasp?"

It is rare to have manuscript drafts to examine in this way, but I hope that this convinces you of the kind of attention writers pay to word choice.

Exercise 6.5.1

Let us take one more example. Think about this first stanza of Thomas Hardy's "Neutral Tones" (1867); what do you notice about the word choice in the last line?

We stood by a pond that winter day,

And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,

And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;

– They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

(Gibson, 1976, p. 12)

Answer

Notice that, in the last line, "oak" or "elm" would work just as well as far as the **rhythm** or music of the line is concerned, but "ash" has extra connotations of greyness, of something burnt out, dead, finished ("ashes to ashes," too, perhaps?), all of which contribute to the mood that Hardy conveys in a way that "oak" or "elm" wouldn't.

To return to my original question then, "What is the point of analyzing poetry?", one answer is that only an analytical approach can help us arrive at an informed appreciation and understanding of the poem. Whether we like a poem or not, we should be able to recognize the craftsmanship that has gone into making it, the ways in which stylistic techniques and devices have worked to create meaning. General readers may be entirely happy to find a poem pleasing, or unsatisfactory, without stopping to ask why. But *studying* poetry is a different matter and requires some background understanding of what those stylistic techniques might be, as well as an awareness of constraints and conventions within which poets have written throughout different periods of history.

You may write poetry yourself. If so, you probably know only too well how difficult it is to produce something you feel really expresses what you want to convey. Writing an essay presents enough problems – a poem is a different matter, but certainly no easier. Thinking of poetry as a discipline and a craft which, to some extent, can be learned, is another useful way of approaching analysis. After all, how successful are emotional outpourings on paper? Words one might scribble down in the heat of an intense moment may have some validity in conveying that intensity, but in general might they not be more satisfactory if they were later revised? My own feeling is that a remark Wordsworth made 200 years ago has become responsible for a number of misconceptions about what poetry should do. In the Preface to a volume of poems called *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) he wrote that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Owens and Johnson, 1998, p.85,11.105–6). The second time he uses the same phrase he says something that I think is often forgotten today: "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion *recollected in tranquillity*" (my italics) (ibid., p. 95, ll.557–8). Notice the significant time lapse implied there – the idea that, however powerful or spontaneous the emotion, it needs to be carefully considered before you start writing. He goes on:

> *The emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation is gradually reproduced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins.*

You don't have to agree with Wordsworth about what poetry is or how best to achieve it. (Would you always want a poem to express powerful emotion, for example? I referred to Hardy's "Neutral Tones" above, where the whole point is that neither of the two characters described feels anything much at all.) But the idea of contemplation is a useful and important one: it implies distance, perhaps detachment, but above all re-creation, not the thing itself. And if we try to re-create something, we must choose our methods and our words carefully in order to convey what we experienced as closely as possible. A word of warning though: writers do not always aim to express personal experiences; often a persona is created (see discussion of "Voice").

The poet Ezra Pound offered this advice to other poets in an essay written in 1913: "Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something" (Gray, 1990, p. 56). And in the 1950s William Carlos Williams advised, "cut and cut again whatever you write." In his opinion, the "test of the artist is to be able to revise without showing a seam" (loc. cit.). That sewing image he uses appeals to me particularly because it stresses the notion of skilled craftsmanship. Pound and Williams were American, writing long after Wordsworth, but, as you can see, like countless other poets they too reflected very seriously on their own poetic practice. I hope this helps convince you that as students we owe it to the poems we read to give them close analytical attention.



Image from Pixabay

Elements of Poetry

In what follows, section headings like "Rhyme," "Rhythm," "Line lengths and line endings," "Alliteration," and so on are intended to act as signposts to help you use this course (if terms are unfamiliar, look them up in the glossary at the end of this free course). But these headings indicate only the *main* technique being discussed. While it is something we need to attempt, it is very difficult to try to isolate devices in this way – to separate out, for example, the effects of rhythm from rhyme. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't look for particular techniques at work in a poem, but we need to be aware that they will be interdependent and the end product effective or not because of the way such elements work together.

If you are working on a poem, it can be a good idea to print it, maybe even enlarge it, and then write anything you find particularly striking in the margins. Use highlighters or coloured pens to underline repetitions and link rhyme words. Patterns may well emerge that will help you understand the way the poem develops. Make the poems your own in this way, and then, if you are the kind of person who doesn't mind writing in books, you can insert notes in a more restrained way in the margins of your book.

If you prefer to work on your computer, you can do a similar thing by using an annnotation tool on your word processor.

Whatever you do, always ask yourself what the effect of a particular technique that you identify is. Noticing an unusual choice of words, a particular **rhyme scheme** or use of **alliteration** (see section on alliteration) is an important first step, but you need to take another one. Unless you go on to say why what you have noticed is effective, what it contributes to the rest of the poem, how it endorses or changes things, then you are doing less than half the job. Get into the habit of asking yourself questions, even if you can't always answer them satisfactorily.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Approaching Poetry by Dr. Sue Asbee. Provided by OpenLearn, The Open University. License: CC-NC-SA
- Adapted from *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory under the license CC BY-NC-SA

This page titled 4.4: Why Analyze Poetry? is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.5: Why Analyze Poetry?** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.5: The Line in Poetry

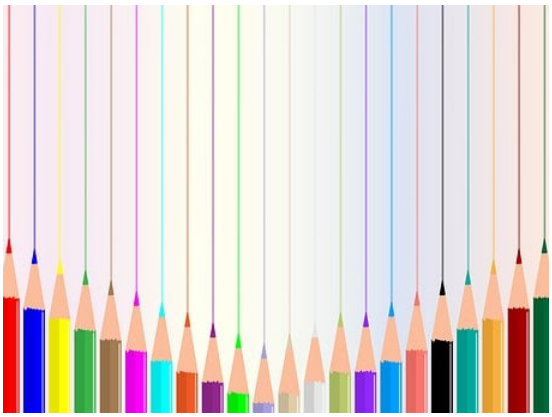


Image from Pixabay

In poetry, there are three units of architecture, or structure: words, lines, and stanzas. As with all forms of writing, words comprise the most basic level of form. But what makes poetry unique as a genre is **verse**—lines—which work as both a unit of sensibility and music. Lines assemble into stanzas, or "rooms" in Italian. Sometimes poems can have sections, too, where stanzas are confined yet relate to one another, and sometimes poems can break from line and stanza into what we call prose poems, which we will discuss later.

The Line: Rows

Originally, poetry was used as a way to remember stories, which were delivered orally by a speaker or "the poet" to an audience. The units created *verse*, which in Latin translates to "line," "row," or "furrow," musical measures that were easier to remember. Poetry existed before writing; and even after writing was invented most people could not read. Poetry has been a way throughout human existence for people to pass on history, news, entertainment, and wisdom from one generation to the next. With the spread of literacy, the function of lines began to take on more complexity, increasing auditory and visual impacts. By the twentieth century, typeface allowed poets to place visual form at the center of their art.

It is apt that "verse" translates to "row" or "furrow," words we also use when speaking of gardens and farms (and also to the lines on our foreheads when we brood!). Think of each line of poetry you write as a row in your garden that is the poem. Every garden is different and the plants in it do not simply lie atop the surface; roots go deep and flourish from the nutrients in the soil. In a poem, those nutrients are the knowledge and emotions of the poet which, like in a garden, we do not see. Instead we see emotions and ideas transformed linguistically into imagery and music. In this analogy, words are the plants and flowers that the poet/gardener has chosen, and they are rooted into the earth, into history, into what came before. Words cannot detach themselves from their meanings and nuances. Each is a seed fallen from a mother plant. Poetry, the garden in which generations of words may flourish, gives opportunities for words to evolve. It is why the poet is known as the "keeper of language," giving words to the unspeakable, naming the unnameable.

In our gardens, the line is a unit of measurement different from that of sentences. A line can ignore syntax and grammar to create interesting effects. For instance, a line can end on a verb and suspend the object onto the next line. This move can increase speed, or the pace, of the poem, as the reader is propelled forward to complete the thought. The line break can also create an image or idea that can transform when the reader reaches the next line. For example, in Bruce Snider's poem "Epitaph," the word "alive" creates one meaning that changes with the turn to the next line:

… I could sense
him down there, satin-lined,
curled like the six-toe cat
we'd found bloated in the creek, alive
with lice and maggots.

As reader we think at first that the cat is alive, only to find that it is alive but with "lice and maggots." The effect comes from the use of an **enjambed** line, a line that does not end with punctuation. This enjambment is referred to as *hard* enjambment because it

has so much of an effect and impact on the poem's reading. Enjambed lines can suggest complex meaning, create images or emphasis, and control the music, or **prosody** of the poem. In contrast, when a line ends with a form of punctuation, or with a complete phrase, we refer to those lines as **end-stopped**.

Deciding where to break a line can be determined by a number of things: rhythm, rhyme, emphasis, pace, or the way a poem looks on a page. Classic forms predetermine the form a poem takes, and include rules concerning meter, rhyme, and repetition. Some forms like the Shakespearean sonnet include the element of a turn, or a **volta**, in which there is a marked change in the speaker in thought, emotion, or rhetoric. Forms are fun to experiment with and assert pressure on the writer in interesting ways that result in surprises that wouldn't occur otherwise.

Today, most poetry is written in free verse, or *verslibre* in Latin, not requiring the poet to follow any prescribed rules of form. Robert Frost famously referred to writing free verse as "playing tennis without a net." And as you saw in the previous chapter, Billy Collins has noted the way free verse poems have come to rely on tone of voice to hold it together.



Image from Pixabay

End-Stopped Lines and Enjambment

In the following poem, James Wright keeps his lines syntactically intact and uses almost entirely end-stopped lines. Read the poem via the Poetry Foundation.

The pauses at the ends of Wright's lines are natural in speech and adhere to the formation of phrases, the units of sentences. Incorporating enjambment, Wright could've altered the music, meaning, and emphasis of this poem if he had started:

In the Shreve High football stadium, I think

Of Polacks nursing long beers in Titonsville.

You can see in this example how the speaker's thinking is emphasized more than in the original because now the verb, "think," falls at the end of the line. This formation also sets up a delay for the reader to find out what the speaker is thinking about. If this were the first line of the poem, we'd initially have more of a focus on the speaker and his thinking, his brooding. Instead, the first four lines of the original end with a place—stadium, Titonsville, Benwood, and Wheeling Steel. In addition, the punctuation enforces more of a pause at the end of the line than the break already does. We sense the separation of the places, yet their connectedness through the stanza that joins them, as well as the last line of the stanza which unites the Polacks, Negroes, and watchman through an action: "dreaming of heroes." The collective action suggests that the speaker, part of this larger community, is also dreaming of heroes.

The only line not end-stopped with punctuation in the poem happens in the last stanza: "Their sons grow suicidally beautiful," and this difference, as any change does, makes the line stand out. Even though there's no punctuation, this line is not forcefully enjambed, as Wright continues to adhere to syntactical units:

Possessive pronoun (Their)—noun (sons)—verb (grow)—adverb (suicidally)—adjective (beautiful)

And because he does, there is little if any jarring with the break to "At the beginning of October."

Overall, the end-stopped lines and syntactical intactness of the lines moves the poem slowly, one step it seems at a time until it reaches its sum: "Therefore," at which point the poem loosens its pace and speeds up just for a bit, as if the sons begin to "gallop" or run, as the line itself runs over into the next.

At the end of another one of Wright's poems, "A Blessing," enjambment is used to surprise the reader with an image that changes as the **penultimate,** or second to last, line gives way to the final line:

Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

The hard enjambment between "break" and "blossom" creates an initial image of breaking in which the tone is harsh, violent, a loss, a break in need of repair. But the last line changes the tone with the image of a body breaking into blossom rather than simply breaking.

In contrast to Wright's poem, the following poem by Aimee Nezhukumatathil employs mostly enjambed lines that ignore syntactically complete units in this poem about the explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark:

Lewis and Clark Disagree

Because Meriwether ate the last berry
without consulting William. Because

the prairie dog only let *William* feed
it dried corn. Because the Nez Perce

gave one a necklace of purple quartz
and not the other. Because Osage oranges

gave Meriwether hives. Because a grizzly
chased William into an oak tree, left him

high for hours. Because "Someone" tucked
buffalo chips into Merriwether's knapsack

when he wasn't looking. Because after walking,
rowing, swimming, climbing, trotting, pulling,

cutting, all they really wanted was a name
for a fruit one found sour, the other, so sweet.

"Lewis and Clark Disagree" from Miracle Fruit, *published by Tupelo Press, copyright © 2003 Aimee Nezhukumatahil. Used with permission.*

The form is almost the exact opposite of Wrights': ten enjambed lines followed by two end-stopped, then an enjambed line, then an end-stopped line. In this poem the lines break sometimes on the first word of the next sentence. If we were to lay out the lines in terms of sentences, we would be left with an almost bullet-pointed list of reasons for why "Lewis and Clark Disagree" and they would look like this:

Because Meriwether ate the last berry without consulting William.

Because the prairie dog only let *William* feed it dried corn.

Because the Nez Perce gave one a necklace of purple quartz and not the other.

Because Osage oranges gave Meriwether hives.

Because a grizzly chased William into an oak tree, left him high for hours.

Because "Someone" tucked buffalo chips into Meriwether's knapsack when he wasn't looking.

Because after walking, rowing, swimming, climbing, trotting, pulling, cutting, all they really wanted was a name for a fruit one found sour, the other, so sweet.

Because, because, because, because, because. Instead, verse allows Nezhukumatathil to tone down the repetition of "Because" while also allowing her to manipulate rhythm and layer meaning. Take, for instance, the following lines:

… Because a grizzly
chased William into an oak tree, left him

high for hours. Because “Someone” tucked
buffalo chips into Merriwether’s knapsack

when he wasn’t looking. Because after walking,

The break after “left him” allows the image and idea of abandonment to linger before its meaning evolves into the complete thought “left him high for hours.” The next two lines use the break to emphasize the alliteration of “tuck” and “-sack,” which even continues beyond that couplet to the next with “walk.” “Walk” and “Tuck” also being verbs, we are propelled forward to the next line by action. As for meaning, we come to “tuck” and think: tucked what?

With lines, generally the first and last words will take on extra emphasis, and in “Lewis and Clark Disagree” they have multiple effects. Some lines begin and end where they do to emphasize meaning: “left him” and “when he wasn’t looking” suggest tension that feeds back to the relationship between Lewis and Clark; abandonment and sneakiness aren’t marks of kindness. We read “left him” and think how terrible! We turn to “when he wasn’t looking” and think, oooooh sneaky.

Like Wright’s poem, this poem changes its pattern, moving from enjambed lines to end-stopped lines. The last sentence of the poem is strung out over four lines and arranged in a way so that the acoustics develop the feel of a burden or a long list:

… Because after walking,
rowing, swimming, climbing, trotting, pulling,

cutting, all they really wanted was a name
for a fruit one found sour, the other, so sweet.

Listen to how the rising pitch in the first line gives way to a list of actions that propels us into the penultimate line:

. . . walking, [↑]

[→] rowing, swimming, climbing, trotting, pulling, [a big pause]

cutting

There is a long pause between “pulling” and “cutting” produced from the break of momentum in the list of actions. Nezhukumatathil could’ve placed all the verbs on one line to create an entirely different feel:

walking, rowing, swimming, climbing, trotting, pulling, cutting

But instead, in order to keep the inflection and pitch varied, she rearranges words on a line differently, regardless of their syntactical relationships.

Exercise 6.6.1

Read the following prose extract taken from Walter Pater’s discussion of the *Mona Lisa*, written in 1893, and then complete the activity:

> *She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands*

When W.B. Yeats was asked to edit *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892–1935* (1936), he chose to begin with this passage from Pater, but he set it out quite differently on the page. Before you read his version, write out the extract as a poem yourself. The exercise is designed to make you think about line lengths, where to start a new line and where to end it when there is no rhyme to give you a clue. There is no *regular* rhythm either, though I’m sure you will discover rhythms in the words, as well as repeated patterns. How can you best bring out these poetic features?

Answer

Of course, there is no right answer to this exercise, but you should compare your version to Yeats's, printed below, to see if you made similar decisions.

She is older than the rocks among which she sits;
Like the Vampire,
She has been dead many times,
And learned the secrets of the grave;
And has been a diver in deep seas,
And keeps their fallen day about her;
And trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants;
And, as Leda,
Was the mother of Helen of Troy,
And, as St Anne,
Was the mother of Mary;
And all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes,
And lives
Only in the delicacy
With which it has moulded the changing lineaments,
And tinged the eyelids and the hands.

I wonder whether you used upper case letters for the first word of each line, as Yeats did? You may have changed the punctuation, or perhaps have left it out altogether. Like Yeats, you may have used "And" at the beginnings of lines to draw attention to the repetitions: nine of the lines begin in this way, emphasising the way the clauses pile up, defining and redefining the mysterious Mona Lisa. Two lines begin with "She": while there was no choice about the first, beginning the third in the same way focuses attention on her right at the start of the poem. Yeats has used Pater's punctuation to guide his line endings in all but two places: lines 13 and 14 run on – a stylistic device known as enjambment. The effect is an interesting interaction between eyes and ears. While we may be tempted to read on without pausing to find the sense, the line endings and white space of the page impose pauses on our reading, less than the commas and semicolons that mark off the other lines, but significant nevertheless.

Yeats's arrangement of the words makes the structure and movement of Pater's long sentence clearer than it appears when written as prose. The poem begins with age–she is "older than the rocks"– and refers to "Vampire", death, and "grave" in the first lines. The decision to single out the two words "And lives" in a line by themselves towards the end of the poem sets them in direct opposition to the opening; we have moved from great age and living death to life. The arrangement of lines 8-11 highlights her links with both pagan and Christian religions: the Mona Lisa was the mother of Helen of Troy and the Virgin Mary. The wisdom and knowledge she has acquired is worn lightly, nothing more than "the sound of lyres and flutes", apparent only in the "delicacy" of colour on "eyelids and hands."

The aim of the preceding exercise was to encourage you to think about form and structure even when a poem does not appear to follow a conventional pattern. Because you have now "written" a poem and had the opportunity to compare it with someone else's version of the same words, you should begin to realize the importance of decisions about where exactly to place a word for maximum effect, and how patterns can emerge which will control our reading when, for example, successive lines begin with repetitions. It should have made you think about the importance of the beginnings of lines, as well as line endings. What has been achieved by using a short line here, a longer one there? How do these decisions relate to what is being said? These are questions that can usefully be asked of any poem.

Earlier, discussing the extract from Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*, I asked you to concentrate on the sound qualities of the poetry. Here, I want you to consider the visual impact of the poem on the page. It is a good thing to be aware of what a complex task reading is, and to be alive to the visual as well as the aural qualities of the verse.

Length of a Line



Image from Pixabay

If you simply browse the poems included in any anthology, you will see all types of shapes on the page. The length of the line is one of the most important decisions a poet makes about a poem, and the decision usually comes to define a poet's style. Robert Creeley's poems use short lines. C. K. Williams, long. Most poets write somewhere in between. The decision of how long to make lines can be driven by a number of factors, but mostly it is chosen by prosody, the musical component of the language that projects the speaker's voice and breath. As we've seen in the last chapter, where we choose to break lines also has a tremendous effect on the poem's tone and meaning.

One of the elements that determine line length is the character of the language in which you write. English contains many iambic patterns that often sound most right on a line between four and five feet long. Lines one foot long are barely poems at all; it is difficult to create tension or musical phrases with only two beats per line. Lines with four feet are frequently used to tell stories as is the case often with Robert Frost's poems. Longer lines lend themselves well to conversational tones, like that of Denise Duhamel's, or in lyric poems like Larry Levis'.

Some poets like Allen Ginsberg and Charles Olson, who wrote about it in his essay "Projective Verse," considered a line to be a unit of breath. Olson writes:

And the line comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes, and thus is, it is here that, daily work, the WORK, gets in, for only he, the man who writes, can declare, at every moment, the line its metric and its ending—where its breathing, shall come to, termination.

There can be no denial of the essential relationship between the poetic line and breath. Or between any carefully constructed writing and the pace at which it's read. Just look at Olson's passage and his use of commas, which causes us to stagger through the sentence.

Poetry is an oral art which comes fully to life when read aloud. Lines are instructions for how often and how long to pause. Like sheet music, the lines guide our pace, emphasis, and silence. If you were to read short-lined poems, however, taking a new breath at each line's start, you'd sound like a panting dog. So, there is some room for interpretation on Olson's assertion. Nonetheless, breath and line are intertwined, as you will see from the following examples.

As we read through these, note the different line lengths and their effects:

Here from this mountain shore, headland beyond stormy headland plunging

like dolphins through the blue sea-smoke

Into pale sea—look west at the hill of water: it is half the planet: this dome, this half globe, this bulging

Eyeball of water, arched over to Asia,

Australia and white Antarctica: those are the eyelids that never close; this is the staring unsleeping

Eye of the earth; and what it watches is not our wars.

(Robinson Jeffers, from "The Eye")

In this excerpt from Robinson Jeffers' poem "The Eye" we see the different effects long and short lines have on the breath. The first lengthy line full of images beyond the human—the headlands, the mountain, the shore, the dolphin, the smoke—in a long line

like this we are given a sense of being overwhelmed as the images keep building and drawing out the breath until we are breathless. Compare this line to what follows two lines below: “Eyeball of water, arched over to Asia.” If you read both out loud you can feel how the length changes the way you use your lungs: long breath, short breath. The effect of the shorter line is like a quick glance—the eye open from the Pacific coast to Asia.

Exercise 6.6.1

Click on the following link to take a look at the first four lines of Allen Ginsberg’s poem “Howl.”

Knowing that Ginsberg considered a line to be a unit of breath, it is easy for us to read the lines the way they were intended. In Ginsberg’s long lines we sense overwhelming frustration, exasperation, and urgency. There is the sense that the speaker has so much to say that he cannot contain himself, that he cannot take a breath deep enough to capture all of his thoughts. What happens when you read the last line here out loud? Try it if you haven’t. What happens is that you need to speak quickly, and this creates a voice of desperation—perfectly appropriate given the subject matter of Ginsberg’s great generational poem “Howl.” The title itself, taken from a line in Walt Whitman’s great poem “Song of Myself,” reflects the tone that Ginsberg’s lines create.

In the strange house
In the strange town
Going barefoot past the parents’ empty room
I hear the horses the fire the wheel bone wings
Your voice

(Jean Valentine, from “The Messenger”)

Rather than breaking the line after words or phrases to create a pause, many poets incorporate white space into the line itself. Here, the spaces in line four visually mimic the footsteps referred to in line three, as well as create the pacing — as though the steps being taken are slow. Notice that the phrase “Your voice,” which is part of the list in line four, is moved to line five. That means there must be some difference between the effect created between the phrases with white space and those created by line breaks. It seems that the pauses between the list in line four are slightly shorter, more staccato, than the pause created between “bone wings” and “Your voice.” The more poetry you read, and the more poetry you write, the more you will begin to identify the subtleties of these techniques.



Image from Pixabay

“Lines”, from *The Star-Spangled Banner* by Denise Duhamel

On our first date, instead of holding my hand, my future-husband looked

at my palm. *Here’s your fame line your heart line the lucky M*

he said *you were in danger but you are coming out of it now.*

He said it like he meant it, the way the old women in the Philippines

had taught him. *Now make a fist these two little lines under your pinky*

these are the two kids you'll have.

My sister keeps waiting

for her third baby. She has three lines. Three kids, that's what the palm reader

at Rocky Point told her. *You'll get married next year*

and you'll have three beautiful daughters. My sister laughed and said

I'll get a second opinion because she was just a junior in high school

and sure she was going to college.

On our first date my future-husband

traced

the lines on my palm with his finger and I closed my hand around his

because it tickled. *If the pad near your thumb is fleshy*, he said,

it means you're very passionate. His own palms were chubby and pink,

his brown fingers tapered and elegant. He wore a silver and turquoise ring.

He said, *You'll get married only once*

but later there'll be an affair.

Now that we're married, he can't find that wrinkle of infidelity.

Our palms change, he tells me, especially our right palms

that mutate through our behavior. He examines the bunch of tiny *xs*

that look like windshield frost, the wishbones, the spider webs,

the triangle dragon teeth.

My sister will most likely have that third baby.

My husband sees those three lines though my sister groans,

Two are enough. Her oldest is already fourteen, and my sister

is finally able to start taking classes at the community college.

My husband says to make everyone feel better: *I was only kidding*

I don't really know that much about predictions.

That night we all go

to Rocky Point which isn't as fun as it used to be, which is going bankrupt,

my sister says, like everything else in Rhode Island. The rollercoaster

is broken down, the cars off the tracks, lying on their sides

like cows. And hanging from the booths' roofs, giant Tweety Birds and Pink Panthers,

the cuddly neon elusive ones that hardly anyone ever wins.

Copyright © 1999 by Denise Duhamel. Reprinted by permission of Southern Illinois University Press.

One of the most conversational of contemporary poets, Duhamel speaks to us like we are a long-time friend. Her voice is energetic though the lines are long. And in this poem she varies line lengths drastically but keeps to an overall pattern so it still looks uniform on the page. Once again, like other poems we've looked at, the form reflects and enhances the subject: the lines on our hands that palm readers use to predict our future. As we read the poem, we read the lines as though we are scanning a palm. Ironically, poems are made of lines too! In addition to the visual echo, the spaces also create pauses that mimic the way a fortune teller speaks: slowly, interpreting, considering — "He said, *You'll get married once* / [space] *But later there'll be an affair*." The space also

creates suspense and drama. In this excerpt, there is one line on which only one word sits: “trace.” It is the only line in the poem that contains one word. What is the effect? Why this word?

Exercise 6.6.1

Follow the link to Gwendolyn Brooks’ poem “We Real Cool.” This short poem accomplishes a lot with its short lines and enjambment. Reflecting the theme of rebellion, each line ignores standards of syntax and ends on a word that actually starts the next sentence. The enjambment places a stress on the word “We” and therefore emphasizes the will of the speaker to identify the group. What else do you think this poem accomplishes with its lines?

If the poem is laid out so that each sentence falls on its own line, what happens to the poem’s energy? Music? Tone? Or what if you place one-and-a-half sentences on each line? Try rearranging the lines differently again and see what the effect is.

Alternatively, try another excerpt from above. Break “Howl” up into short lines, Duhamel’s poem into medium lines. Experiment with how line affects music and emphasis in meaning. Try it in one of your own poems.

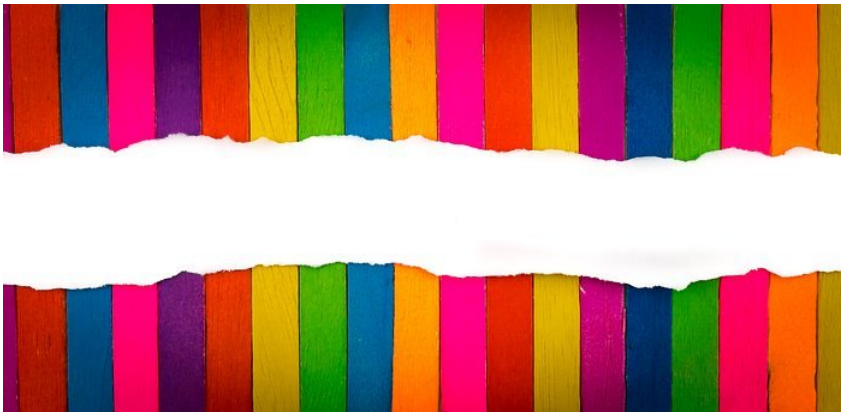


Image from Pixabay

What Stanzas Do

There is no way around the fact that stanzas, which dictate the way space is used on the page, create unity and separation. Even if the motive is to break a poem into stanzas to make the poem easier to read on the page—a huge chunk of text can be intimidating and heavy—or even if the motive is to control the music of the language by adding longer pauses—breaking a poem into stanzas invites the ideas of division and unification into the poem.

Just like the rooms of houses, walls say “This is the den (let’s relax!),” or “This is the dining room (no clutter allowed!).” Rooms help us create space and define the tone of that space. When I was young, my sister and I shared a doorway with no door. Our bedrooms flowed into and out of each other, but the walls still defined our own individual space. We were connected as siblings, could see into each other’s rooms, but still had control over what we wanted in our private space. Like my childhood bedroom, stanzas in poems can suggest connection, or confine ideas, images, and sounds to their own space while still sharing the same roof. Punctuation and other devices in the last and first lines of a stanza suggest whether the doorway is open like mine and my sister’s bedrooms, or whether it contains a titanium door.

There are endless ways to organize stanzas and infinite decisions that can be made in the process of doing so. Usually stanzas are built on more than one idea, for more than one reason (like all aspects of a poem). Lines are part of stanzas, and words are part of lines. These three elements—words, lines, and stanzas—work together to cause all sorts of effects from creating music to drawing parallels between ideas and images. There is no way to provide a comprehensive review of what stanzas do, but the following examples will offer a small sampling of what stanzas *can* do.

Organize space and time

1) To label the past, present, and future:

In Lee’s poem below, the first stanza is delivered in the present tense and the second brings us to the future with “lives far ahead.”

A Story

by Li Young Li

In a room full of books in a world
of stories, he can recall
not one, and soon, he thinks, the boy
will give up on his father.

Already the man lives far ahead, he sees
the day this boy will go. Don't go!
Hear the alligator story! The angel story once more!
You love the spider story. You laugh at the spider.
Let me tell it!

2) To illustrate differences in location:

Read Chad Sweeny's poem below to see how stanza breaks affect location:

The Mile

by Chad Sweeny

My grandmother crowns the hill,
her headlights lathing the dark,
a farm route

through rye then cotton
then the red and gold of wheat,
the scrub oak crowding

a little nameless river
where fog holds to low places.
Who would have seen the tractor

aimed down the highway by a boy
his first summer behind the wheel
with no lights but the holy

somnolence of a cowboy radio?
The next car over the rise
is my father

blind into the fog.
There is so much to talk about
at this moment,

so many lines of cause and effect
trembling taut into that gully.
How does my father choose,

with his mother's ribs broken,
his new wife moaning from the ditch,
to carry the limp body

of someone else's child
a mile over night fields
toward the insinuation of a roof?

Everyone is bleeding and starlight
drizzles over the summer wheat.
The poem holds them there

long enough to trace the flight
of an owl
from a cedar's black minaret

its wings underlit by brake-lights.
Which of you, dear reader,
is in the next Oldsmobile

to clatter over the bluff
shouting help into your CB radio?
Which of you opens the front door

weeping
to wrap your unconscious boy
in quilts? Do you kill

the man
who carries him?
In most endings I am never

born. In most,
you buy my family's farm cheap
at auction. Who among you

is rushing the ambulance
past the county line at mile 67
when the tire blows? The story

moves through telephone wires
at the pitiless speed of rumor:
when my father reaches the house

with the boy expiring in his arms,
a white rectangle of light
and grief

seers his eyes forever.
In the cave of my mother's
body

I listen to the first fire.

Copyright © Chad Sweeney. "The Mile" is licensed CC-BY-NA-SA.

Here, Sweeney's stanzas bring us on a journey. We move with the grandmother over the hill, then through the grain fields, then beside a river. The lack of punctuation between the stanzas unifies the locations and makes the transitions feel like one journey. Had punctuation such as periods been used at the end of each stanza, there would be a stronger sense of isolation:

My grandmother crowns the hill,
her headlights lathing the dark.

A farm route
through rye then cotton
then the red and gold of wheat.

Then, the scrub oak crowding
a little nameless river
where fog holds to low places.

3) Indicate shifts in a poem's mode or voice

Stanzas can mark transitions between narrative and lyrical modes, descriptions and questions, and shifts in tone or perspective. Look for the shifts in voice or address in the stanzas below:

Dinner Out

by Christopher Howell

We went to either the Canton Grill
or the Chinese Village, both of them
on 82nd among the car lots
and discount stores and small nests
of people waiting hopelessly
for the bus. I preferred the Canton
for its black and bright red sign
with the dragon leaping out of it
sneezing little pillows of smoke.
And inside, the beautiful green
half-shell booths, glittery brass encrusted
lamps swinging above them.

What would I have?
Sweet and sour?
Chow mein with little wagon wheel shaped
slices of okra and those crinkly noodles
my father called deep fried worms?
Fried rice?

Among such succulence, what did it matter?
We could eat till we were glad and full, the whole
family sighing with the pleasure of it.
And then the tea!
All of this for about six bucks, total,
my father, for that once-in-awhile, feeling
flush in the glow of our happy faces
and asking me, "How you doing, son?"

Fine, Dad. Great, really, in the light
of that place, almost tasting
the salt and bean paste and molasses, nearly
hearing the sound of the car door
opening before we climbed in together
and drove and drove,
though we hadn't far to go.

From Gaze *by Christopher Howell (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions). Copyright © 2012 by Christopher Howell. Reprinted with permission from Milkweed Editions. milkweed.org*

In each stanza we hear a shift in voice. The first opens in a narrative mode as we are given a place and time, a description of the street on which the restaurant the speaker and his dad go to eat. In the second stanza, the voice shifts into an interrogative mode, asking questions about what will be ordered. Though the third stanza also begins with a question, this is a different type of question than what is posed in the second stanza. Here, the voice becomes lyrical and introspective: "Among such succulence, what did it matter?" In the last stanza the voice shifts to answer the question posed by the dad in the end of the third stanza and in this way, the first line of the last stanza directly addresses the dad. In Howell's poem each stanza is used to mark a slight shift in voice.

4) A shift in thought or a resolution:

You are the bread and the knife,
the crystal goblet and the wine.
You are the dew on the morning grass
and the burning wheel of the sun.
You are the white apron of the baker,
and the marsh birds suddenly in flight.

However, you are not the wind in the orchard,
the plums on the counter,
or the house of cards.
And you are certainly not the pine-scented air.
There is just no way that you are the pine-scented air.

It is possible that you are the fish under the bridge,
maybe even the pigeon on the general's head,
but you are not even close
to being the field of cornflowers at dusk.

(Billy Collins, from "Litany")

As in Howell's poem, in Collins' poem there is a shift in the voice's pitch. But in "Litany," the stanzas emphasize moves in the thought process that build upon the ideas established in the preceding stanza. You can follow these turns of thought by the transition words that begin them: "You are"…"However, you are not…" "It is possible that you are…"

5) Create emphasis on individual images:

Passover: The Injections

Clouds pass over, endless,
black fruit dripping
sap from the branches
of lightning.

We lie down in the field,
thousands of us,
never mind the rain.

Soldiers come toward us,
groups of three or four.
The wind opens their long coats.
Underneath, their uniforms are black.

They bend over to the babies.
The babies cry,
for a little while.

"We are living in Biblical times,"
a woman says.

"Passover: The Injections", from The Candle: Poems of Our Twentieth Century Holocausts *by William Heyen. Copyright © 2016 by William Heyen. Used by permission of Etruscan Press.*

Rarely is there one reason for the way stanzas are arranged. In the above excerpt, the stanzas isolate images, but they also organize space and actions. Each stanza is end-stopped, further emphasizing the divide between the fields, the prisoners, the soldiers.

On Enjambment

Even the tumbleweed

is a stowaway sneaked in

with the grass seed, given

an easier-to-say name. It became

American. We are lonely

when it stumbles by, but it’s just

a weed. We made it

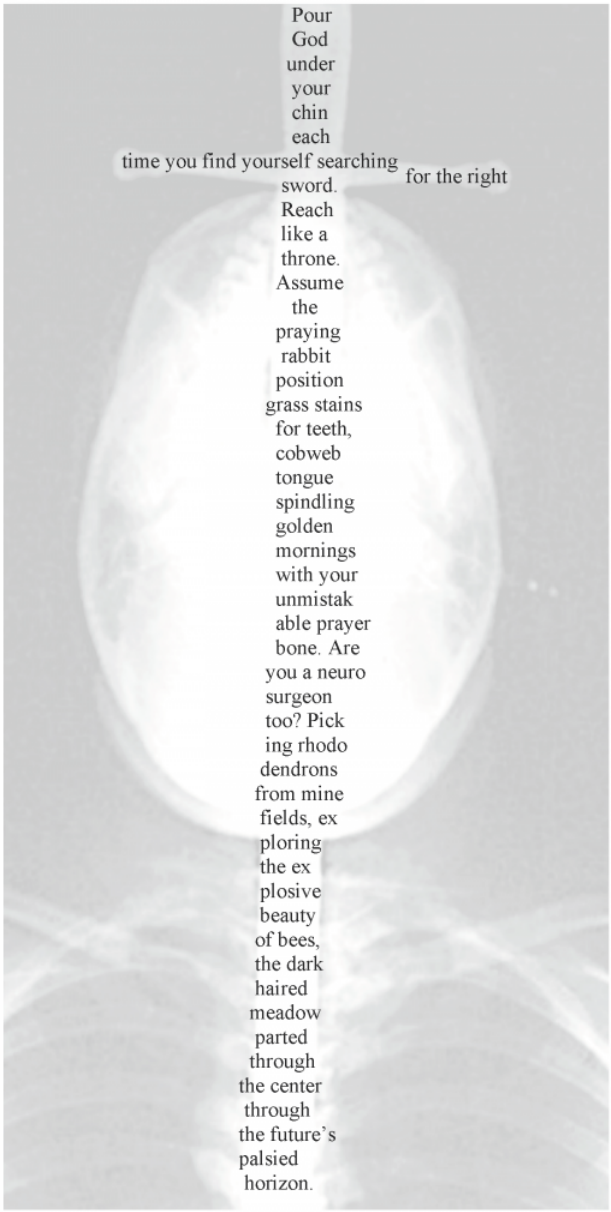
a thing sadder than itself,

like a nursing home lunch.

(Bethany Schultz Hurst, from “Settler”)

The stanzas used by Hurst accentuate the way the enjambment affects images and sounds. Each stanza break makes the line break even harder. When we end the first stanza, we are left with the idea of sharing or giving something away. There is connection: “Even the tumbleweed / is a stowaway sneaked in / with the grass seed, given.” It sounds thoughtful. It sounds like we are receiving—“given.” But moving to the second stanza, the meaning changes: “given // an easier-to-say name.” This happens again in the transition from the second to third stanzas with the meaning of “just” changing from the idea of justice or fairness—“but it’s just”—to something different: “but it’s just // a weed.” The beginning of both the second and third stanzas undercut the sentiment we are left with at the end of the preceding stanza and the way the stanzas are formed emphasize this change.

6) Create an image with the words on the page



Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory under the license CC BY-NC-SA
- Adapted from Approaching Poetry, by Dr. Sue Asbee. Provided by OpenLearn, The Open University. License: CC-NC-SA

This page titled 4.5: The Line in Poetry is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.6: The Line in Poetry** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.6: Speaker and Voice

Voice



Image by Kathleen Tyler Conklin: CC BY: Attribution

The speaker is the bridge between the poem's experience and the reader. Similar to language, when it works best, it becomes invisible, cemented to, part and particle of the poem's experience. Tone of voice is responsible for creating trust between the reader and the speaker, in seducing the reader to lose him or herself in the experience; it is responsible for letting a reader be enraptured by the poem.

In the introduction to the *2006 Best American Poetry* anthology, the judge for that year, poet Billy Collins, explains the key role that a poem's tone of voice played in determining which poems to place in the pile that left him "cold" and which poems to place in the pile that caught him "in their spell," those that he would eventually consider for inclusion in the collection. Collins begins by elucidating how the voice of a poem took on a bigger role once Modern poetry began to experiment with free verse:

> *Once Walt Whitman demonstrated that poetry in English could get along without standard meter and end-rhyme, poetry began to lose that familiar gait and musical jauntiness that listeners and readers had come to identify with it. But poetry also lost something more: a trust system that had bound poet and reader together through the reliable recurrence of similar sounds and a steady dependable beat. Whatever emotional or intellectual demands a poem placed on the reader, at least the reader could put trust in the poet's implicit promise to keep up a tempo and maintain a sound pattern. It is the same promise that is made to the listeners of popular songs. What has come to replace that system of trust, if anything? However vague a substitute, the answer is probably tone of voice. As a reader, I come to trust or distrust the authority of the poem after reading just a few lines. Do I hear a voice that's making reasonable claims for itself—usually a first-person voice speaking fallibly but honestly—or does the poem begin with a grandiose pronouncement, a riddle, or an intimate confession foisted on me by a stranger? Tone may be the most elusive aspect of written language, but our ears instantly recognize words that sound authentic and words that ring false. The character of the speaker's voice played an indescribable but essential role in the making of those two piles I mentioned, one much taller than the other.*

It is interesting that Collins refers negatively to the "voice of a stranger," as aren't all speakers of poems strangers to a reader? We do not know the poet, so how can we possibly know the speaker? Yet here, Collins suggests that there is something in us that does know something of the speaker, some credibility that "sounds authentic" rather than "ringing false," and this has more to do with tone of voice than subject matter. After all, who believes someone who doesn't sound trustworthy? It is like watching a play with bad acting — you can't lose yourself in the story or character, you cannot transport, you cannot release yourself to get "caught in its spell." We have trouble trusting our senses and giving our time to the speaker without suspicion, which acts as a barrier between the reader and the experience. It is similar to what poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge called a "suspension of disbelief," in a sense: We need to be willing to be wrapped up in a poem's experience and if we're untrusting then we're not willing. Tone of voice develops from the many moves a poem makes and can be considered, in another way, the *stance* the speaker takes, the relationship between the subject matter and the speaker.

Exercise 6.8.1

Is the speaker in a poem one and the same as the writer? Stop and consider this for a few moments. Can you think of any poems you have read where a writer has created a character, or persona, whose voice we hear when we read?

Wordsworth's *The Prelude* was written as an autobiographical poem, but there are many instances where it is obvious that poet and persona are different. Charlotte Mew's poem "The Farmer's Bride" (1916) begins like this:

Three summers since I chose a maid,
Too young maybe — but more's to do
At harvest-time than bide and woo.

When us was wed she turned afraid
Of love and me and all things human;

(Warner, 1981, pp. 1–2)

Answer

Mew invents a male character here, and clearly separates herself as a writer from the voice in her poem. Some of the most well-known created characters—or personae—in poetry are Browning's dramatic monologues.

Exercise 6.8.1

Analysis of Voice in Browning's Poetry

Consider the opening lines from three Robert Browning poems below. Robert Browning was one of the most important poets of the Victorian period (1812-1889). Who do you think is speaking?

Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister (1842)

Gr-r- r — there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flower-pots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you!
What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming?
Oh, that rose has prior claims —
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
Hell dry you up with its flames!

The Last Duchess (1842)

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Porphyria's Lover (1842)

The rain set early in to-night,

The sullen wind was soon awake,

It tore the elm-tops down for spite,

And did its worst to vex the lake:

I listened with heart fit to break.

Answer

Well, the first speaker isn't named, but we can infer that, like Brother Lawrence whom he hates, he's a monk. The second must be a Duke since he refers to his "last Duchess" and, if we read to the end of the third poem, we discover that the speaker is a man consumed with such jealousy that he strangles his beloved Porphyria with her own hair. Each of the poems is written in the first person ("*my* heart's abhorrence"; "That's *my* last Duchess"; "*I* listened with heart fit to break"). None of the characters Browning created in these poems bears any resemblance to him: the whole point of a dramatic monologue is the creation of a character who is most definitely not the poet. Charlotte Mew's poem can be described in the same way.

Contributors and Attributions

- "Voice" section Adapted from "Chapter Four: Voice" *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory under the license CC BY-NC-SA

- Exercises Adapted from "8: Voice" from "Approaching Poetry" by Dr. Sue Asbee. Provided by OpenLearn, The Open University. License: CC-NC-SA

This page titled 4.6: Speaker and Voice is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.8: Voice** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.7: Word Choice and Word Order

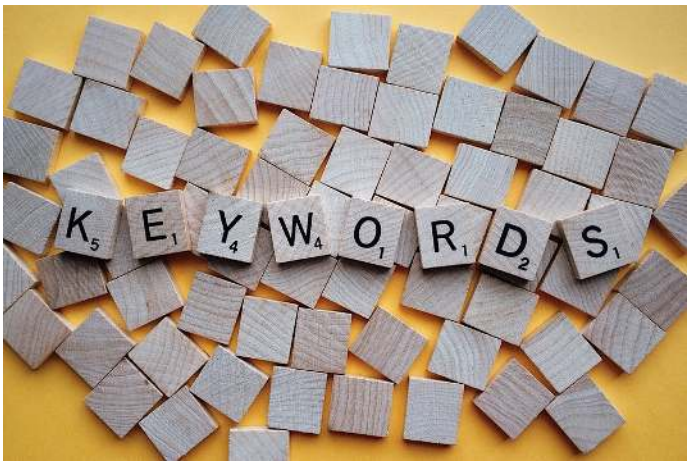


Image from Pixabay

Word Choice

Connotation vs. Denotation

When we read something, we first understand it at its most basic, literal level. This is called **denotation.** You can think of the denotation of a word as its dictionary definition. For instance, when you read the word "cow," you think of a four-legged herbivorous mammal. However, every word carries a **connotation** as well as a denotation. A connotation is the non-literal meaning we associate with words. To continue our example, "cow" might connotate farm life, the countryside, or a glass of fresh milk. Poets use both **denotation** or the actual/ dictionary meaning of words and also **connotation** or the implied meaning of words. For example, the dictionary definition of "home" is a place where one lives, but the connotation can mean security, warmth, belonging.

Examples

Here are a few more examples of denotations and their possible connotations.

Word(s)	Denotation	Connotation
George Washington	First U.S. President	Never told a lie, cut down a cherry tree, wooden teeth, crossed the Delaware
Rose	A flower	Love, affection, romance, sensuality, beauty, the color red
New York City	A major U.S. city	Crowded, center of art and culture, night life, traffic, Statue of Liberty
Green	A color	Vegetation, fertility, growth, envy, money, life, springtime, prosperity

Tone

Watch out for changes in **tone** for they can happen within a line or a few lines of poem and are critical in understanding a poem. Poems can be serious, sarcastic, grieving, happy etc. One of the definitions of tone, according to Dictionary.com, is "the general character or attitude of a place, piece of writing, situation, etc." Words that have positive or negative associations give a specific tone to writing.

The connotation of words impacts the tone of the poem, as a word with a positive connotation lends itself to a happier tone. Connotations change over time as they are based upon readers' experiences within a given period of time. An **allusion**, according to Dictionary.com, is an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly; an indirect or passing reference. Allusions, like connotative words, refer to something beyond just the dictionary meaning of the word.

As you can see, words have many connotations. Every person will find different connotations for a word, as connotation depends on a person's background, cultural setting, emotions, and subjective opinions. For instance, while the color green often represents prosperity to Western cultures, Eastern cultures associate the color red with wealth and good fortune. However, there are often a number of connotations that are widely accepted as connected to a word. People from all over the world, for example, associate snow with winter and heat waves with summer.

So, how do we apply this to reading? Well, when people read, certain words often stand out to them. This is usually because those words carry strong connotations for the reader. Thus, when you read, look for words whose meanings stand out, especially if they relate to a recurring theme in the text.

Furthering this idea, and also the idea of "show versus tell," we will explore how a poet's use of concrete words makes all the difference. Also, since the best way to appreciate poetry or any art is to practice it, we will try writing a few lines of poetry.



Image from Pixabay

Abstract vs. Concrete Words

The success of many poems results in the poets' uses of concrete images, the images that refer to things you can actually touch in real life. In poetry, we work with two types of words: **abstract** and **concrete**. Ideally, the poem should re-create the experience of a poem through concrete details so the reader isn't merely *told* about the experience through the speaker, but *shown* the experience which the poet re-creates in a way that engages the reader's five senses. If the poets had used mostly abstract words, their poems may not be, well, poems. They might tell us more than show us. They might report or summarize. For example, if Gary Snyder relied more on abstractions than concretes,"The Bath" might tell us outright how he feels about washing a baby or how the baby feels about being washed rather than creating images of the baby being washed. The concrete images create a scene and allow us to come to our own conclusions through the images. Here is an example of what Snyder's poem might look like if it relied too heavily on abstractions:

The baby was scared
but we were happy
in the sauna washing him
and keeping him safe
because we love him
and his body so much.

The sentiment in these lines is intimate and warm, but as readers we struggle to see the event in our mind's eye. But note, even with the abstractions, the poem cannot escape using some concretes—baby, sauna, body. Rather than putting us in the room with the bath and allowing readers to feel the actions and be there themselves, the poem shifts its spotlight on the feelings of the speaker.

Activity

- To prove the usefulness of concrete, sensory detail, and the failings of being overly abstract in one's language, especially in one's descriptive language, the poet Mike Dockins works with his creative writing students to describe the scene of a motorcycle accident. As a class, make a list on the board of various concrete (and sensory) images that a witness would observe. Telling the story with only concrete words, and literally no abstractions, does the emotional level come across? If they do, how do they accomplish chaos, panic, fear, shock, terror, death?

To better understand, let's look closer at abstract words. Here are some examples:

- Love
- Fear
- Happiness

These are what we call *abstract* words. They refer to ideas we think with our minds rather than specific, individual things we can feel with our five senses and that call an exact image into our mind's eye. Think of concrete words as something you can actually *touch*. You cannot touch "love" and "safe" but you can touch your son in "warm water / Soap all over the smooth of his thighs and stomach." Once you finely tune the images into specific, concrete details, the sentiment will come through naturally.

Sometimes this concept confuses my students. "But I can *feel* love," they say. "I can *feel* anger." And, yes, of course we can recall what those emotions feel like when they are referenced in a poem. And, in fact, we feel actual sensations brought on by these emotions when they happen. Our blood races when we're in love, our stomach jumps when our lover or someone we desire walks into sight. We feel our chests swell when we think about our mothers and our fathers, but when we read abstract words like "love" and "anger" we experience them in a vague, cloudy way, reliant more on our own individual memories that involved our five senses to make, rather than the poem itself using our five senses through imagery to create a new experience and memory.

Trying to avoid concretes is difficult. In fact, in order to even explain to you the sensations we feel when we experience love, as I just did, I had to use much more specific language that refers directly to physical things—chest, blood, stomach. Lover, mother, father. We read the word "love" and imagine love but it takes our brains on an extended voyage of neural connections; we do not have a specific image come immediately into our mind's eye. And immediacy is the poet's job and responsibility to the reader of poems—words should vanish. The walls between the experience created by the words and the reader's senses taking in that to which the words refer, should fall. When we read good writing, we get lost in the experience and in the images the words are creating in our minds. We are transported.

Activity

In contrast to abstractions, take in these words:

- Apple
- Blue
- Boat

Go around the room and have each class member share the image that comes to mind with the above words. How many different images are there for apple? Blue? Boat? Now, what if we were to make these words even more specific:

- Apple … Golden Delicious Apple
- Blue … Turquoise blue
- Boat … Sailboat

Next, begin with the following vague categories and narrow down the word making it more and more specific:

- Food
- Vehicle
- Animal

Now the brain is working more quickly. We see these things more immediately in our mind's eye.

In the poem "The Bath," Gary Snyder is very attentive to specific details. He names his son, Kai, places us in a sauna, describes the lantern as being kerosene and set on a box. There is not a window, but a *ground-level* window which the light from the lantern illuminates. The light also illuminates not the stove, but the *edge* of the *iron* stove. Kai's body stands not in water but *warm* water, and it's not his body that is soapy—but his *thighs* and *stomach*.

Snyder creates a concrete, physical world for his readers and places us in a very specific time and setting. The details feel like they are slowed down—in both the writing and reading process—so the event may be created on one side and taken in on another. Snyder slows down and looks closely so we may, too.

Once details become this specific, something magical begins to happen. The poem naturally begins to amass different levels of meaning; it grows in complexity. For example, what's the significance of the lantern being kerosene? What does that tell us about

the setting? The speaker? What do we take away from the detail about the ground-level window? What ideas come to mind when we read “ground-level”? Once we attain a literal reading, a first reading, which creates the scene, we may look again only this time more closely at the words, the diction. We may notice that “ground-level” evokes a sense of simplicity in us, an idea about being closer to the earth, being grounded. If so, how then does this feeling and idea relate to the poem as a whole?

This symbolic way of reading of poetry happens naturally when images are concrete, and details specific, and significant. Snyder could have used any words in the poem, but he used these. Why? What do these words do inside their poetic space? What we do as writers affects the way readers read our poems. But when we write—here’s the catch—we don’t necessarily have to think of how a reader will interpret and read the poem. We just need to concentrate on making the words we choose be specific and significant so language—naturally symbolic—can do its thang. After all, Alexander Fleming didn’t discover penicillin by setting out to cure disease—he saw some mold growing, tapped into his curiosity, and used his imagination.

Read the poem “What Came to Me” by Jane Kenyon and note how the poem thinks small but produces big feelings. The poem’s use of line, sound, tone, and image creates a moment in which the speaker is overwhelmed with grief. And what causes this for both the speaker and the reader? Finding a drop of gravy on the porcelain lip of a gravy boat. One “hard, brown / drop.” Why does this image have such power? It is a short poem—nine lines—and those lines are short, ranging from four syllables to one line that is seven syllables long. But although brief, it is compact and bursts with emotion. We are not told how the speaker feels. She does not say she felt sadness, pain, remorse, or loss. The first line describes action, simply, “I took.” And the penultimate, the second-to-last, line also describes an action: “I grieved.” Kenyon doesn’t write “I felt grief” (a filter) or “I thought of all the good times” (a cliché). Instead, we are there with her, lifting the gravy boat from the box, only to discover in line five, a “hard, brown” and in line six, “drop of gravy still.” The word “still” here doubly stops time and implies no movement while it also ends the line and hangs there, still on the sixth line’s edge just as the gravy drop is on the edge of the gravy boat’s lip.

As Hirsch writes, “A poem creates an experience in the reader that cannot be reduced to anything else.” The effect of Kenyon’s poem cannot be reduced only to the image of the gravy drop. As said, the diction, sound, form and tone do a lot of work. But it cannot be denied that the image is central to the poem’s effect. And when it is combined with all the other poem’s elements, it produces an experience that cannot be replicated any other way.

Activity

- Write a poem about an experience with an object that invokes emotions for you. Rather than tell the reader about this experience, show the reader by using concrete, specific words. You may wish to start by free writing about the memory and then forming it into a poem, especially if no specific object comes immediately to mind. Through writing about an emotional experience while paying close attention to specific details, a concrete object should emerge.

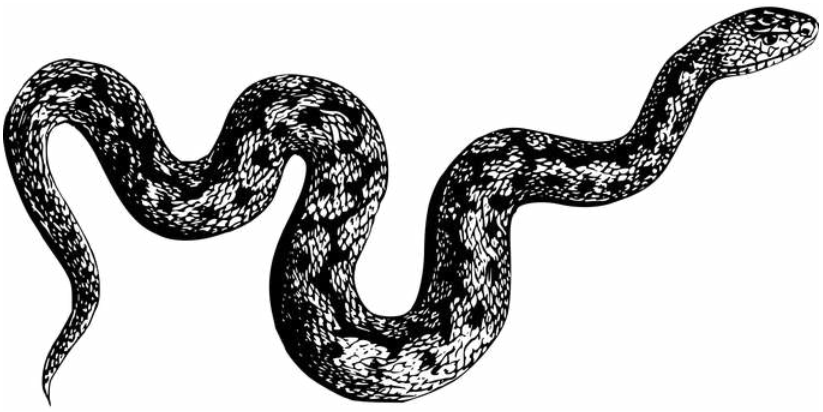


Image from Pixabay

Word Order

A poet not only chooses words carefully, but also the order in which to present them to emphasize the desired meaning. According to Dictionary.com, syntax is the “arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language.”

Poetic Inversion

Poetic inversion, or changing the usual word order of speech, is often linked to the need to maintain a rhythm or to find a rhyme. We noticed Pope's poetic inversion in *An Essay on Criticism* and saw how the rhyme was intimately linked to the rhythm of the verse. The song 'Dancing in the Street', first recorded by Martha and the Vandellas in the 1960s, does violence to word order in the interests of rhyme – 'There'll be dancing in the street/ A chance new folk to meet' – but, because the words are sung to a driving rhythm, we are unlikely to notice how awkward they are. There's a convention that we recognize, however unconsciously, that prevents us from mentally re-writing the line as 'a chance to meet new people'. ('People' rather than 'folk' would be more usual usage for me, but, as with the Pope example, this would mean that the rhythm too would be lost.

Activity

- Read Emily Dickinson's poem about a snake. Discuss how her choice of word order affects the poem.

Additional poems to study diction and syntax

To a Captious Critic

by Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872-1906)

Dear critic, who my lightness so deplores,
Would I might study to be prince of bores,
Right wisely would I rule that dull estate—
But, sir, I may not, till you abdicate.

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

by Robert Herrick (1591-1674)

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.
The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.
That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.
Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry;
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry.

To his Coy Mistress

by Andrew Marvell (1621-1678)

Had we but world enough and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.

We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust;
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.

Let us roll all our strength and all

Our sweetness up into one ball,

And tear our pleasures with rough strife

Through the iron gates of life:

Thus, though we cannot make our sun

Stand still, yet we will make him run.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations by Michelle Bonczek Evory under the license CC BY-NC-SA
- Adapted from Approaching Poetry , author: Dr. Sue Asbee. Provided by OpenLearn, The Open University. License: CC-NC-SA

This page titled 4.7: Word Choice and Word Order is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.7: Word Choice, Word Order, and Tone** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.8: Sound in Poetry- Rhyme

Rhyme

In addition to line length and rhythm, we also categorize lines by rhyme, especially in formal verse where an extended pattern is maintained. You, of course, have been rhyming from an early age. Children's books written by writers like Shel Silverstein and Dr. Seuss have delighted both children and adults with their rhyming stories. Rhyme makes language memorable and pleasurable.

In both formal verse and free verse, rhyming is elemental. In formal poetry it occurs more frequently as **end rhyme**, when two or more words that end lines rhyme. In free verse, the rhyme is more likely to be **internal** not necessarily occurring at the end of lines.

Let's take a look at an excerpt from William Wordsworth's poem "The Daffodils":

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Here we can see the first and third lines rhyme; the second, fourth and sixth; the fifth and sixth. There is definite **rhyme scheme**. When we refer to the rhymes in this stanza, we diagram the rhymes with matching letters like this: ABABCC.

I wandered lonely as a cloud (A)
That floats on high o'er vales and hills, (B)
When all at once I saw a crowd, (A)
A host, of golden daffodils; (B)
Beside the lake, beneath the trees, (C)
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. (C)

The letter changes whenever the rhyme changes, and whenever a new rhyme is introduced you add a new letter.

In the poem "They Feed They Lion," rather than end-rhyme, Philip Levine utilizes internal rhyme. Read the first stanza via this link.

In this example, Levine uses rhymes that are both **internal and slant** or off rather than exact: sacks, black, shafts; butter, tar. Even the numerous occurrences of "out" paired with "creosote" creates a kind of slant rhyme. Here is another example:

Not my hands but green across you now.
Green tons hold you down, and ten bass curve
teasing your hair. Summer slime
will pile deep on your breast. Four months of ice
will keep you firm.

(Richard Hugo, from "The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir")

In this example, the second line contains a slant internal rhyme: "ten" and "ton," which also rhyme with "hands" in line one. These sounds are tightly woven and where there isn't rhyme, per se, there is **assonance**, similar vowel sounds, or vowel rhyme: green, tease, deep; and slime, pile, ice.

Exercise 6.13.1

Turn to the entire Levine poem "They Feed They Lion" and perform a close reading with your ears. Note places of assonance and rhyme. How do these patterns affect your reading of the poem? How do these sounds work to create the poem's tone of voice?

If a poem rhymes, then considering how the rhyme works is always important. Rhyme schemes can be simple or highly intricate and complex; it will always be worth considering why a particular rhyme pattern was chosen and trying to assess its effects.

A summary of rhyme terms follows:

End rhyme: rhyme occurring on stressed syllables at the ends of verse lines. The most common form of rhyme. Couplet: a pair of end-rhyming verse lines, usually of the same length. E.g.:

Had we but World enough, and Time,

This coyness Lady were no crime.

We would sit down, and think which way

To walk, and pass our long Loves Day.

—Marvell, "To his Coy Mistress"

Internal rhyme: rhyme occurring within a single verse line.

Crossed rhyme: the rhyming of one word in the middle of a verse line with a word in the middle of the following line.

Half rhyme: also known as **slant rhyme**; an incomplete form of rhyme in which final consonants match but vowel sounds do not. E.g.:

I have heard that hysterical women say

They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow.

Of poets that are always gay,

For everybody knows or else should know

That if nothing drastic is done

Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out.

Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in

Until the town lie beaten flat.

—Yeats, "Lapis Lazuli"

The first quatrain is an example of full end rhyme; the second quatrain an example of half rhyme.

Para-rhyme: a form of half rhyme; when all the consonants of the relevant words match, not just the final consonants. E.g.:

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall, —
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

—Wilfred Owen, “Strange Meeting”

Eye rhyme: a visual-only rhyme; i.e. when spellings match but in pronunciation there is no rhyme, e.g. want/pant, five/give.

Double rhyme: a rhyme on two syllables, the first stressed, the second unstressed. E.g.

I want a hero: —an uncommon want,

When every year and month sends forth a new one,

Till, after cloying the gazettes with can't,

The age discovers he is not the true one

—Byron, *Don Juan*, I.i

The second and fourth lines are double rhymes; the first and third lines are examples of half rhyme/eye rhyme.

Exercise 6.13.1

What is the poem about, and how does the rhyme contribute to the meaning and overall effect?

Love from the North by Christina Rossetti (1862)

I had a love in soft south land,
Beloved through April far in May;
He waited on my lightest breath,
And never dared to say me nay.

He saddened if my cheer was sad,
But gay he grew if I was gay;
We never differed on a hair,
My yes his yes, my nay his nay.

The wedding hour was come, the aisles
Were flushed with sun and flowers that day;
I pacing balanced in my thoughts,—
"It's quite too late to think of nay."—

My bridegroom answered in his turn,
Myself had almost answered "yea":
When through the flashing nave I heard.
A struggle and resounding "nay."

Bridemaids and bridegroom shrank in fear,
But I stood high who stood at bay:
"And if I answer yea, fair Sir,
What man art thou to bar with nay?"

He was a strong man from the north,
Light-locked, with eyes of dangerous gray:
"Put yea by for another time
In which I will not say thee nay.

He took me in his strong white arms,
He bore me on his horse away
O'er crag, morass, and hair-breadth pass,
But never asked me yea or nay.

He made me fast with book and bell,
With links of love he makes me stay;
Till now I've neither heart nor power
Nor will nor wish to say him nay.

Answer

"Love From the North" tells a simple story. A woman about to marry one man is whisked away by another, just as she is about to exchange vows. The form of the poem is very simple: the second and fourth lines of each of the eight 4-line stanzas rhyme. More significantly, because the last word of each stanza is "nay," there is only one rhyme sound throughout. There are more internal rhymes relying on the same repeated sound, however, aren't there? Look at the last lines of stanzas 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8 where "say" "nay"; "nay" "nay"; "say" "nay"; "yea" "nay"; and "say" "nay" appear. In the second stanza, "gay" occurs twice in line 2; stanza five and six both have "yea" in line 3. What is the effect of this?

Do you think the effect might be to help over-simplify the story? Clearly the woman has doubts about the man from the south's devotion: he "never dared" to say no to her. He seems to have no will of his own: he "saddens" when she does, is "gay" when she is, wants only what she does. On her wedding day she thinks: "It's quite too late to think of nay." But is she any happier with the strong man from the north? Who is he? Has he carried her off against her will? And what exactly do you make of the last stanza? Do the "links of love" imply a chain? This strong-minded woman who imposed her will on the man from the south has "neither heart nor power/Nor will nor wish" to say no to the man from the north. Is that good, or bad? And what do you make of the "book and bell" with which she's made to stay? Certainly they imply something different from the conventional Christian marriage she was about to embark on in the middle of the poem — witchcraft, perhaps, or magic? And are the words "Till now" particularly significant at the beginning of line 3 in the last stanza? Might they suggest a new resolve to break free?

How important is it to resolve such questions? It is very useful to ask them, but not at all easy to find answers. In fact, that is one of the reasons I like the poem so much. The language is very simple and so is the form—eight quatrains (or four-line stanzas)–and yet the more I think about the poem, the more interesting and ambiguous it seems. In my opinion, that is its strength. After all, do we always know exactly what we want or how we feel about relationships? Even if we do, is it always possible to put such feelings into words? Aren't feelings often ambivalent rather than straightforward?

It is also worth bearing in mind the fact that the poem is written in ballad form. A ballad tells a story, but it does only recount events — part of the convention is that ballads don't go into psychological complexities. It is likely that Rossetti chose this ancient oral verse form because she was interested in raising ambiguities. But perhaps the point of the word "nay" chiming throughout "Love From the North" is to indicate the female speaker saying no to both men — the compliant lover and his opposite, the demon lover, alike? After all, "nay" is the sound which gives the poem striking unity and coherence.

Exercise 6.13.1

Keats's "Eve of St Agnes" (1820) also tells a tale of lovers, but it isn't a ballad, even though the rhyme scheme of the first four lines is the same as Rossetti's quatrains. The stanzas are longer, and the form more complex and sophisticated. The rhyme pattern is the same throughout all 42 stanzas, the first two of which are reproduced for the following activity: Read the first two stanzas of Keats's poem above. How would you describe the rhyme scheme, and does it seem appropriate for the subject matter?

Eve of St. Agnes by Keats

St. Agnes' Eve — Ah bitter chill it was!

The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;

The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,

And silent was the flock in woolly fold:

Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told

His rosary, and while his frosted breath,

Like pious incense from a censer old,

Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,

Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

His prayer he saith, this patient, holy man;

Then takes his lamp, and riseth from his knees,

And back returneth, meagre, barefoot, wan,

Along the chapel aisle by slow degrees:

The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,

Emprison'd in black purgatorial rails:

Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,

He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails

To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

Answer

In comparison to the Rossetti poem the rhyme sounds form complex patterns, don't they? While "was"/"grass" in the first stanza and "man"/"wan" in the second do not quite produce a full rhyme (depending on your accent), the first and third lines do rhyme in subsequent stanzas. Using a letter of the alphabet to describe each new rhyme sound, we could describe the pattern like this: a b a b b c b c c (imagine sustaining that intricate patterning for 42 stanzas). This kind of formula is useful up to a point for showing how often the same sounds recur, and it does show how complicated the interweaving of echoing sounds is. But it says nothing about how the sounds relate to what is being said — and, as I have been arguing all along, it is the relationship between meaning and word choice that is of particular interest. To give a full answer to my own question, I'd really need to consider the function of rhyme throughout the poem. It would not be necessary to describe what happens in each stanza, but picking out particular pertinent examples would help me argue a case. With only the first two stanzas to work with, I could say that, if nothing else, the intricate rhyme pattern seems appropriate not only for the detailed descriptions but also for the medieval, slightly gothic setting of the chapel where the holy man prays.

Exercise 6.13.1

Read the extract from the poem below. Again, this comes from a longer poem, so it would be useful to look it up and read the rest if you have the opportunity.

Consider the following questions:

1. Describe the rhyme in the stanza from Tennyson's "Mariana."
2. What is the first stanza about?

Mariana by Alfred Lord Tennyson (1830)

With blackest moss the flower-plots

Were thickly crusted, one and all:

The rusted nails fell from the knots

That held the pear to the gable-wall.

The broken sheds looked sad and strange:

Unlifted was the clinking latch;

Weeded and worn the ancient thatch

Upon the lonely moated grange.

She only said, "My life is dreary,

He cometh not," she said;

She said, "I am aweary, aweary,

I would that I were dead!" (Trilling and Bloom, 1973, p.396)

Answer

1) As with the Keats poem, the rhyme scheme here is quite complicated. Using the same diagrammatic formula of a letter for each new rhyme sound, we could describe this as ‘a b a b c d d c e f e f. You might notice too that indentations at the beginning of each line emphasise lines that rhyme with each other: usually the indentations are alternate, except for lines 6 and 7, which form a couplet in the middle of the stanza. It is worth telling you too that each of the stanzas ends with a variation of the line "I would that I were dead" (this is known as a refrain) so—as in Christina Rossetti’s "Love From the North"—a dominant sound or series of sounds throughout helps to control the mood of the poem.

2) We may not know who Mariana is, or why she is in the lonely, crumbling grange, but she is obviously waiting for a man who is slow in arriving. The "dreary"/"aweary" and "dead"/"said" rhymes, which, if you read the rest of the poem, you will see are repeated in each stanza, convey her dejection and express the boredom of endless waiting. As with the stanzas from Keats's "Eve of St Agnes," there is plenty of carefully observed detail—black moss on the flower-plots, rusty nails, a clinking latch on a gate or door—all of which description contributes to the desolation of the scene and Mariana's mood. Were the moated grange a lively, sociable household, the poem would be very different. Either Mariana would be cheerful, or her suicidal misery would be in sharp contrast to her surroundings. It is always worth considering what settings contribute to the overall mood of a poem.

Free Verse

Free verse refers to poetry that does not follow standard or regularized meter (the organization of stressed and unstressed syllables) or rhyme scheme. As opposed to more traditional poetry, which tends to use recurring line lengths, metrical patterns, and rhyme to unify individual lines of verse and tie them to other lines within the same poem, free verse can, at times, seem to be random, having no pattern or organization at all. Yet in the hands of many poets, free verse enables a different kind of organization, as they balance free verse's openness, its ability to provide elements of the poem with a different amount of emphasis, with the use of repeated imagery or syntactic patterns (parallel organization of grammatical elements) to maintain coherence and create a sense of connection among lines.

Free verse does, at times, draw on metrical patterns and occasional rhyme to tie lines together. What distinguishes free verse from other traditional forms of verse is that it only uses these elements occasionally—for a few lines here and there in a longer poem—and does not use them to structure the poem as a whole. A poem in free verse, then, does not lack structure—or, in many cases, some instances of metrical organization or rhyme—it simply does not maintain or use a regular pattern of meter or rhyme to structure the poem as a whole. Instead, free verse relies more on thematic, syntactic, or semantic repetition and development to create coherence.



Photo taken by Gilberto Taccari

Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is often credited as introducing free verse into English-language poetry. While not quite true (other experiments and uses preceded his), Whitman's poetry helped to establish free verse's potential for exploring a broad range of topics and its ability to embrace an extensive number of ways of organizing verse lines. Later-nineteenth century poets, such as Matthew Arnold in England, further explored the use of free verse, but it was the French symbolists (Jules Laforgue, Gustave Kahn, and Arthur Rimbaud) who practiced what they called vers libre most fully during this period. In the twentieth century, free verse came to dominate much poetic production in English, beginning with the modernists (such as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams) who saw the open form as allowing for the more nimble representation of a modern fragmented and accelerated world.

For more examples, please see the The Poetry Foundation.

Contributors:

- Adapted from Approaching Poetry, author: Dr. Sue Asbee. Provided by OpenLearn, The Open University. License: CC-NC-SA
- Adapted from *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory under the license CC BY-NC-SA
- Adapted from Literary Terms: A Guide by Simon F. Davies. License: CC BY: Attribution
- Adapted from Free Verse, provided by The Saylor Foundation. License: CC BY: Attribution

This page titled 4.8: Sound in Poetry- Rhyme is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.13: Sound in Poetry - Rhyme** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.9: Sound in Poetry- Alliteration, Consonance, Assonance



Image from Pixabay

Alliteration

This is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words. Read the poem "There Come Soft Rains" by Sarah Teasdale below to see if you can spot the alliteration:

There Will Come Soft Rains

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pool singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white;

Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself when she woke at dawn
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

CC CC-BY-SA-4.0 Originator: Sara Teasdale

Assonance

This is the repetition of vowel sounds within a word. An example of assonance can be found in the following poem by Edgar Allen Poe*: "**On**ce up**on** a midnight dr**ea**ry, while I pondered w**ea**k and w**ea**ry..."* Can you find any more?

The Raven

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"Tis some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door -
Only this, and nothing more.'

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow; - vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow - sorrow for the lost Lenore -
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels named Lenore -
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me - filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
"Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door -
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; -
This it is, and nothing more,'

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
'Sir,' said I, 'or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you' - here I opened wide the door; -
Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before
But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, 'Lenore!'
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, 'Lenore!'
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
'Surely,' said I, 'surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore -
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore; -
'Tis the wind and nothing more!'

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door -
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door -
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
'Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said, 'art sure no craven.
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore -
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!'
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

Much I marveled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning - little relevancy bore;

For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door -
Bird or beast above the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as 'Nevermore.'

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only,
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing further then he uttered - not a feather then he fluttered -
Till I scarcely more than muttered 'Other friends have flown before -
On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.'
Then the bird said, 'Nevermore.'

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
'Doubtless,' said I, 'what it utters is its only stock and store,
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore -
Till the dirges of his hope that melancholy burden bore
Of "Never-nevermore."'

But the raven still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door;
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore -
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking 'Nevermore.'

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, me thought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
'Wretch,' I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee - by these angels he has sent thee
Respite - respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!'
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! -
Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted -
On this home by horror haunted - tell me truly, I implore -
Is there - is there balm in Gilead? - tell me - tell me, I implore!'
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us - by that God we both adore -
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels named Lenore -
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels named Lenore?'

Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

'Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!' I shrieked upstarting -
'Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken! - quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!'
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted - nevermore!

Consonance

This is the repetition of consonant sounds at the end of words. An example of consonance is found in the following poem by Adrian Henry:

"Love is feeling cold in the back of ***vans***
Love is a fanclub with only two ***fans***
*Love is walking holding paintstained h****ands****…"*

Exercise 6.12.1

Read a stanza from Arthur Hugh Clough's poem, "Natura naturans." There is not enough space to quote the whole poem, but to give you some idea of the context of this stanza so that you can more fully appreciate what Clough is doing, it is worth explaining that "Natura naturans" describes the sexual tension between a young man and woman who sit next to each other in a railway carriage. They have not been introduced, and they neither speak nor exchange so much as a glance. The subject matter and its treatment is unusual and also extraordinarily frank for the time of writing (about 1849), but you need to know what is being described in order to appreciate the physicality of the lines I quote.

Natura Naturans by Arthur Hugh Clough (1890)

Flashed flickering forth fantastic flies,

Big bees their burly bodies swung,

Rooks roused with civic dim the elms,

And lark its wild reveillez rung;

In Libyan dell the light gazelle,

The leopard lithe in Indian glade,

And dolphin, brightening tropic seas,

In us were living, leapt and played: (Clough, 1890, p.262)

1. What is the single most striking technique used, and what are the effects?
2. How would you describe the imagery, and what does it contribute to the overall effect?

Answer

1) Visually the use of alliteration is striking, particularly in the first line and almost equally so in the second. If you took the advice above about paying attention to the physical business of articulating the words too, you should be in a good position to discriminate between the rapidity of the flies and the heavier movement of the bees, and to notice how tactile the language is. The effect is actually to create sensuality in the stanza.

2) Notice that though we begin with flies, bees and rooks, all of which are fairly common flying creatures, we move to the more romantic lark with its "wild" song, and then to the positively exotic gazelle, leopard, and dolphin. From the rather homely English air (flies, bees, birds), we move to foreign locations "Libyan dell" and "Indian glade," and from there to "tropic seas." (Cod in the North Sea would have very different connotations from dolphins in the tropics.) Air, earth, and sea are all invoked to help express the variety of changing highly charged erotic feelings that the speaker remembers. The images are playful and preposterous, joyfully expressing the familiar poetic subject of sexual attraction and arousal in a way that makes it strange and new. Notice that in each case the image is more effective because the alliteration emphasizes it.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory. Provided by Open SUNY Textbooks, license CC BY-NC-SA
- Adapted from Approaching Poetry by Dr. Sue Asbee. Provided by OpenLearn, The Open University, license CC-NC-SA
- Adapted from Sound by Carol Dwankowski. Provided by NDLA, license CC BY-NC-SA

This page titled 4.9: Sound in Poetry- Alliteration, Consonance, Assonance is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.12: Sound in Poetry - Alliteration, Consonance, Assonance** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.10: Sound in Poetry- Meter



Image from Pixabay

Meter: Length and Rhythm

Even before you were born, in your watery womb home, your body recognized patterns of sound. It began with the beat of your mother's heart, the swishing of her blood. Rhythm is primal. It is comforting, and it can be startling. When rhythms break, they wake us. When rhythms extend, we become entranced. Rhythm is integral to poetry and a mark of what poetry actually is. In learning to interpret poetry's structures and sound patterns, in free verse, our ears attune finely to tone, cadence, pitch, rhythm, and silence. In formal verse, we employ a particular language to help us talk about rhythm.

Rhythm

All speech has rhythm because we naturally stress some words or syllables more than others. The rhythm can sometimes be very regular and pronounced, as in a children's nursery rhyme—"JACK and JILL went UP the HILL"—but even in the most ordinary sentence the important words are given more stress. In poetry, rhythm is extremely important: patterns are deliberately created and repeated for varying effects.

The rhythmical pattern of a poem is called its **meter** and we can analyze, or scan, lines of poetry to identify stressed and unstressed syllables. In marking the text to show this, the mark "/" is used to indicate a stressed syllable, and "x" to indicate an unstressed syllable. Each complete unit of stressed and unstressed syllables is called a **foot**, which usually has one stressed and one or two unstressed syllables.

The most common foot in English is known as the **iamb**, which is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one (x /). Many words in English are iambic: a simple example is the word "**forgot**." When we say this, the stresses naturally fall in the sequence:

x /
'forgot'.

Iambic rhythm is in fact the basic sound pattern in ordinary English speech. If you say the following line aloud you will hear what I mean:

"I went across the road and bought a pair of shoes"

x / x / x / x / x / x /
I went across the road and bought a pair of shoes.

The next most common foot is the **trochee**, a stressed syllable (or beat) followed by an unstressed one (/ x), as in the word "**mountain**"

/ x
'mountain'.

Both the iamb and the trochee have two syllables, the iamb being a "rising" rhythm and the trochee a "falling" rhythm. Another two-syllable foot known as the **spondee** has two equally stressed beats (/ /), as in the phrase "**blue spurt**"

/ /
'blue spurt'.

Other important feet have three syllables. The most common are the **anapest** (x x /) and the **dactyl** (/ x x), which are triple rhythms, rising and falling respectively, as in the words "unimpressed" and "probably"

x x / / x x
'unimpressed' and 'probably'.

Here are some fairly regular examples of the four main kinds of meter used in poetry. (I have separated the feet by using a vertical slash.) You should say the lines aloud, listening for the stress patterns and noting how the **beats** fall on particular syllables or words.

Iambic meter

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day"

x / x / x / x / x /
The cur- | few tolls | the knell | of part- | ing day

Trochaic meter

"Tiger tiger burning bright"

/ x / x / x / x
Tiger | tiger | burning | bright

Anapestic meter

"She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps"

x x / x x / x x / x x /
She is far | from the land | where her young | hero sleeps

Dactylic meter

"Woman much missed how you call to me, call to me"

/ x x / x x / x x / x x
Woman much | missed how you | call to me, | call to me

The other technical point that you need to know about is the way the lengths of lines of verse are described. This is done according to the number of feet they contain, and the names given to different lengths of lines are as follows:

monometer	a line of one foot
dimeter	a line of two feet
trimeter	a line of three feet
tetrameter	a line of four feet
pentameter	a line of five feet
hexameter	a line of six feet
heptameter	a line of seven feet
octameter	a line of eight feet

By far the most widely used of these are the **tetrameter** and the **pentameter**. If you look back at the four lines of poetry given as examples above, you can count the feet. You will see that the first one has five feet, so it is an iambic pentameter line; the second one has four feet, so it is a trochaic tetrameter line; the fourth and fifth also have four feet, so are anapestic and dactylic tetrameter lines respectively. Lines do not always have exactly the "right" number of beats. Sometimes a pentameter line will have an extra beat, as in the famous line from *Hamlet*, "To be or not to be: that is the question," where the "tion" of question is an eleventh, unstressed beat. (It is worth asking yourself why Shakespeare wrote the line like this. Why did he not write what would have been a perfectly regular ten-syllable line, such as "The question is, to be or not to be"?)

Having outlined some of the basic meters of English poetry, it is important to say at once that very few poems would ever conform to a perfectly regular metrical pattern. The effect of that would be very boring indeed: imagine being restricted to using only iambic words, or trying to keep up a regular trochaic rhythm. Poets therefore often include trochaic or anapestic or dactylic words or phrases within what are basically iambic lines, in order to make them more interesting and suggestive, and to retain normal

pronunciation. Here is a brief example from Shakespeare to show you what this mean. These lines were spoken by Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Act 1, scene 2. This first version has been marked to show you the basic iambic meter.

"My father loved Sir Rowland as his soul,

And all the world was of my father's mind"

x / x / x / x / x /
My fa- | ther loved | Sir Row- | land as | his soul,
x / x / x / x / x /
And all | the world | was of | my fa | ther's mind.

If you say the lines out loud in this regular way you can hear that the effect is very unnatural. Here is one way the lines might be scanned to show how the stresses would fall in speech (though there are other ways of scanning them):

/ / x / x x x x x /
My father loved Sir Rowland as his soul,
x / x / x x x / x /
And all the world was of my father's mind.

It must be emphasized that there is no need to feel that you must try to remember all the technical terms in poetry. The purpose has been to help you to become aware of the importance of rhythmic effects in poetry, and it can be just as effective to try to describe these in your own words.

The thing to hang on to when writing about the rhythm of a poem is that, as Ezra Pound put it, "Rhythm MUST have meaning. It can't be merely a careless dash off with no grip and no real hold to the words and sense, a tumty tum tumpty tum tum ta" (quoted in Gray, 1990, p. 56). There are occasions, of course, when a tum-ty-ty-tum rhythm may be appropriate and have meaning. When Tennyson wrote "The Charge of the Light Brigade," he recreated the sound, pace, and movement of horses thundering along with the emphatic dactyls of "Half a league, half a league, half a league onward / Into the valley of death rode the six hundred." For a very different example, look at a short two-line poem by Pound himself. This time there is no fixed meter: like much twentieth century poetry, this poem is in free verse. Its title is "In a Station of the Metro" (the Metro being the Paris underground railway). It was written in 1916:

"The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough."

x x xx x x / / x x /
The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
/ x x x / / /
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Here you can see that the rhythm plays a subtle part in conveying the meaning. The poem is comparing the faces of people in a crowded underground to petals that have fallen on to a wet bough. The rhythm not only highlights the key words in each line, but produces much of the emotional feeling of the poem by slowing down the middle words of the first line and the final three words of the second.

For our final example of rhythm, here is a passage from Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* (1711).

Activity

Take a look at this excerpt from Pope's *An Essay of Criticism*. Read it aloud if you can. Listen to the rhythm, and identify why the rhythm is appropriate to the meaning.

Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,

And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;

But when loud billows lash the sounding shore,

The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.

When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,

The line too labours, and the words move slow:

Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,

Flies o'er the unbending corn, and skims along the main. (Book II, ll.366–73)

Discussion

Pope here uses a basic structure of iambic pentameters with variations, so that the lines sound as if they have a different pace, faster or slower, depending on what is being described. It is not just rhythm that contributes to the effect here: rhyme and alliteration (successive words beginning with the same sound) recreate smooth, rough, slow and swift movement. Rhythm is entirely dependent on word choice, but is also influenced by other interdependent stylistic devices. Pope's lines enact what they describe simply because of the care that has gone into choosing the right words. It doesn't matter if you don't recognize the classical allusions: from the descriptions it is clear that Ajax is a strong man and Camilla is quick and light. If you count the beats of each line, you'll notice that, in spite of the variety of sound and effect, all have five stresses, except the last, which has six. Strangely enough it is the last and longest line that creates an impression of speed. How is this achieved? Try to hear the lines by reading them again out loud.

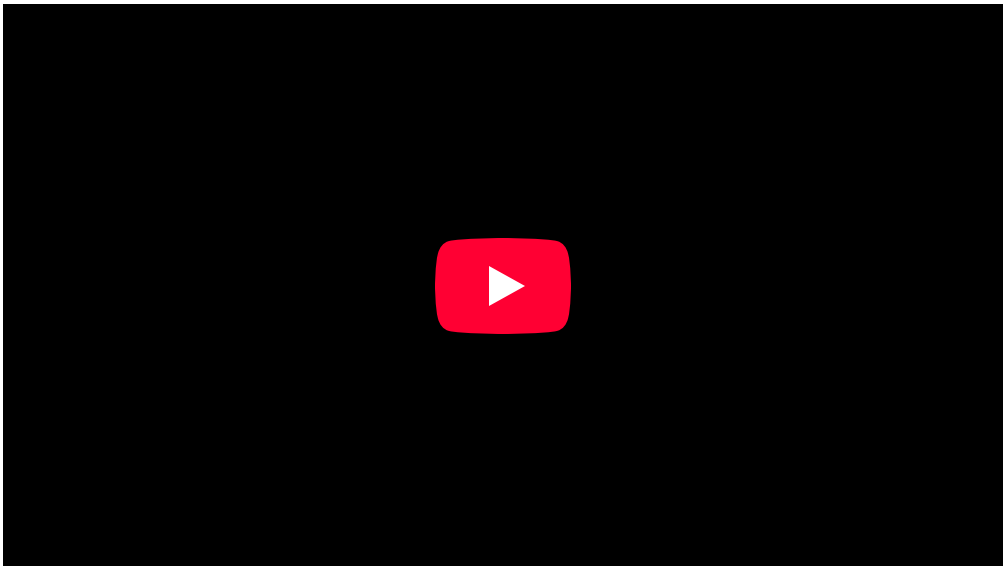
There is really only one way, and that is through the words chosen to represent movement: the repeated 's' sounds associated with Camilla trip swiftly off the tip of the tongue, whereas Ajax's lines demand real physical effort from mouth, lips, and tongue. You will get a much stronger sense of this if you form the words in this way, even if you are unable to say them out loud. In an exam, for instance, silent articulation of a poem will help you grasp many poetic techniques and effects that may otherwise be missed.

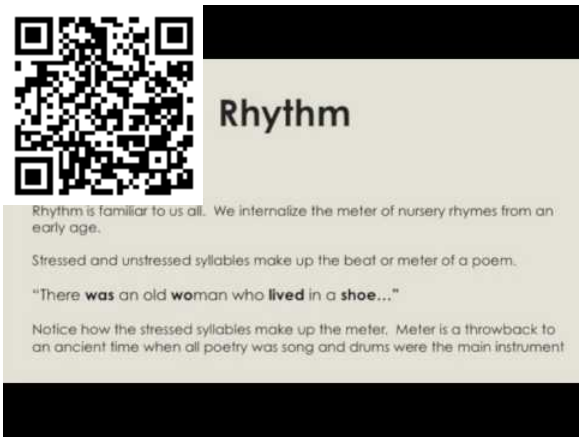
This extract from Pope's *An Essay on Criticism*, like the whole poem, is written in rhyming couplets (lines rhyming in pairs). They confer a formal, regular quality to the verse. The punctuation helps to control the way in which we read: notice that there is a pause at the end of each line, either a comma, a semi-colon, or a full stop. This use of the end-stopped line is characteristic of eighteenth-century heroic couplets (iambic pentameter lines rhyming in pairs), where the aim was to reproduce classical qualities of balance, harmony, and proportion.

Get into the habit of looking at rhyme words. Are any of Pope's rhymes particularly interesting here? One thing I noticed was what is known as poetic inversion. The rhyme shore/roar is clearly important to the sound sense of the verse, but the more natural word order (were this ordinary speech) would be "The hoarse rough verse should roar like the torrent." Had he written this, Pope would have lost the sound qualities of the rhyme shore/roar. He would have had to find a word such as "abhorrent" to rhyme with "torrent," and the couplet would have had a very different meaning. He would also have lost the rhythm of the line, in spite of the fact that the words are exactly the same.

Before we leave *An Essay on Criticism*, did you notice that Pope's subject in this poem is really poetry itself? Like Wordsworth, Pound, and William Carlos Williams, all of whom were quoted earlier, Pope too was concerned with poetry as a craft.

Click below for a Power Point presentation video that gives college students a poetry lesson.





Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Approaching Poetry, author: Dr. Sue Asbee. Provided by OpenLearn, The Open University. License: CC-NC-SA

This page titled 4.10: Sound in Poetry- Meter is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.11: Sound in Poetry - Meter** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.11: Sensory Imagery



Image from Pixabay

To put it simply and directly, creative writing is the language of images. Whereas other forms of writing like news articles, academic essays, and instruction manuals relay information from the writer to the speaker in order to *inform* or *instruct*, in fiction and poetry images are how we translate the world into a text so that a reader may *experience*. If you are a creative writer, then you are an image creator. And to be a master image creator, you need to be really good—really, really good—at finding ways to stimulate a reader's senses through significant, concrete detail. When poets write, they see through the speaker's eye, what we call *the mind's eye*. By writing through the mind''s eye, you literally describe what the speaker *sees* in order to recreate the world of the speaker in words on a page so then the reader can translate those words back into images and experience the poem.

Language is Physical

If we examine the words associated with the act of writing, we find that language is directly rooted in the physical world of the body. Let's consider the answers to the questions below.

Q. Where does poetry come from?

A. It comes from the imagination—

Imagination. Imagine. Image. This is the language of creative writing. What the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines as "a mental picture" which we as writers see through the mind's eye. When we read writing, our mind processes the words into mental images with our five senses — sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing. When we are writing poetry we want to give our readers the world in its raw form; its physical, concrete existence. The more specific we can be, the better.

For example, note how the following descriptions affect your physical, emotional, and mental experience differently:

1. The child was sad because it was her first day of school.
2. Standing in the doorway between her classroom and the sunny sidewalk, four-year-old Meredith twisted her mother's flowered skirt in her hands, hid her face in its folds, and stained its red silk with the thick mucus of her nose.

The second example is much more detailed and imagistic than the first. It, therefore, engages our senses and sensibilities much more directly.

Exercise 6.9.1

In example two above, vivid details invite your senses to take in the scene. But once a piece of creative writing contains specific images and details, those details begin to have an additional effect on the reader's intellect as the images resonate into symbols and create connections and suggestions. What effects do the images in the above example have on your intellect? What types of connections, contrasts, resonance, and suggestions do the images make? For example, notice the contrast between the shady classroom and the sunny sidewalk. What types of interpretations does this image invite? What others do you perceive?

Q. How does poetry affect the reader?

A. With sensations—

Sensation. Sensual. Sense. This is how we make sense of the writing. How we *make sense* of the words on the page. We do not understand through abstract thought. We understand mentally through what our eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin understand physically. Merriam-Webster defines "sense" as:

One of the five natural powers (touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing) through which you receive information about the world around you.

"Show Don't Tell"

How many of you have heard this phrase before? Maybe you heard it in your high school creative writing or English classroom? Or maybe this is the first time you are hearing it. The phrase reminds me of the television show *Lassie* in which eleven-year-old Timmy's collie named Lassie would run to tell Timmy's family whenever Timmy was in trouble and needed rescuing. Timmy was curious and always getting into trouble. Timmy's family couldn't do anything to help him until Lassie did more than bark; Lassie had to show them exactly what was wrong by leading them directly to Timmy so they could *see precisely* what the matter was.

In this analogy, the language of your poem can either bark generally or lead specifically. And you do this with either general, abstract words that make a reader think, or you do this with specific, concrete words that allow a reader to see. The adage "Show don't tell" is shorthand for the most important tenet of creative writing. It asks you to create with an attention to the concrete, physical world rather than telling with abstract words which produce thoughts about the speaker's experience or ideas instead of feelings in the reader's body through the five senses.

Types of Sensory Images

In the following poems, images can not only be seen, but heard, tasted, smelled, and felt. Here are some examples of the different types of imagery we use in poetry. Many use more than one kind:

Auditory Imagery

She sinks her eight ball, drinks me under
the table. I whimper for a date, a smooch,
a slap. She hits the jukebox, that old song.
(Mike Dockins, from "American Love Story")

…Oh
prayer for the hat to be a puller
for her even as it circles the city
or enters someone else's flat, hat
have an arm to keep her from his fist,
moon and train, moon and train, moon
and train: pull her, pull her, pull her.
(Michael Burkard, from "Hat Angel")

Gustatory Imagery

I love saying the name. Each sweet syllable seems like there ought to be a crush of sugar on your tongue, a tiny reward just for saying the word. These milk-balls, fried golden and soaked in sugar syrup, are glassed up in a luxuriously oversized jar that my grandmother collects under her spice table to store homemade mango and spicy lime pickles.
(Aimee Nezhukumatathil, from "Gulabjamoon Jar")

Olfactory Imagery

I loved him most
when he came home from work,
his fingers still curled from fitting pipe,
his denim shirt ringed with sweat
and smelling of salt, the drying weeds
of the ocean.
(Dorianne Laux, from "The Shipfitter's Wife")

On things asleep: No balm :
A kingdom of stinks and sighs,
Fetor of cockroaches, dead fish, petroleum,
Worse than castoreum of mink or weasel,
Saliva dripping from warm microphones,
Agony of crucifixion on barstools.
(Theodore Roethke, from “The Longing”)

Tactile Imagery

I am a man of many heads. Each one capable of loving you, each one unwrapping your paper delicately by hand, slipping my fingernail beneath your coating till I can feel the smooth skin of your nakedness.
(Robert Evory, from “Garlic”)

I love the sound of the bone against the plate
and the fortress-like look of it
lying before me in a moat of risotto,
the meat soft as the leg of an angel
who has lived a purely airborne existence.
(Billy Collins, from “Osso Bucco”)

Visual Imagery

The fish rises with a red body in the green pond.
Under the arch of heaven
The fisherman travels smoothly in his blue skiff.
(Georg Trakl, from “The Sun,” translated by Robert Bly and James Wright)

They decide to exchange heads.
Barbie squeezes the small opening under her chin
over Ken’s bulging neck socket. His wide jaw line jostles
atop his girlfriend’s body, loosely,
like one of those nodding novelty dogs
destined to gaze from the back window of cars.
(Denise Duhamel, from “Kinky”)

Notice not only how imagistic these examples are, but how specific the details are, as well. In the poem "Hat Angel," Michael Burkard recreates the sound that the train makes in the last two lines through his use of diction and line breaks. And in "Kinky," Denise Duhamel attends to the small details of a Barbie doll—"the small opening under her chin" while Robert Evory in "Garlic" brings our eye to the meeting of the delicate paper of a garlic clove and a fingernail. These poems describe a pair of pants, a Barbie doll, and a garlic clove the way we would see them if we were holding them in our hands. And with Billy Collins in his poem "Osso Bucco," we get the sense that we are looking closer and closer and closer at the meat on his (on our!) plate. In these examples, the reader must be—cannot avoid being—sensually immersed in these images, which trigger the five senses—sight, taste, smell, touch, and hearing—through memory and imagination to create an actual experience for the reader. We do not read about George Trakl’s experience on the water in the poem "Sun"; we are there ourselves.

Exercise 6.9.1

Click on the following link to read Gary Snyder’s poem "The Bath." Lines 1-9 are a good example of how the senses may be activated in multiple ways from one image. For example, the line "steaming air and crackle of waterdrops" can be classified as auditory, visual, and tactile. We see the steam and drops, hear the crackle, feel the heat.

Can you identify any other images that engage more than one sense? After Snyder, return to the preceding examples and see if you can identify places where more than one sense is being used. How are your senses activated in the poems? What pictures do you see when you take the images in? Go through each poem and underline examples of objects you can touch — pants, waistband, snap, zipper, et cetera.

Answer

> The second and third definitions reflect the impact of poetic images on a reader. These poetic images produce *vision* in the reader by manifesting "to the senses" "something immaterial." In other words, a reader's senses react to the vision, or images of an "object," created by the poem as though that object were actually real. With poetry, those images give way to "a thought, concept," or idea. In the above example describing Meredith's first day of school, for instance, we are led to the thought or concept of how she is sad via the images.

Language is the personal or private choice of words the speaker uses to express himself. Poetry makes pictures with words.

- Are there any words that are repeated or that stand out?
- Are the sentences long or short?

Contributors and Attributions

This page titled 4.11: Sensory Imagery is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.9: Imagery** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.12: Figurative Language

Figurative Language

Figurative language uses words or expressions not meant to be taken literally. Whether you realize it or not, we encounter them every day. When we exaggerate we use **hyperbole**: *I'm so hungry I can eat a horse*; when Rhianna sings about *stars like diamonds in the sky* she uses **simile**; when we say *opportunity knocked on my door* we are using **personification**. In addition to making our conversations interesting and capturing our intense feelings, figurative language is very important to the making of poetry. It is a tool that allows us to make connections, comparisons, and contrasts in ways that produce insight, raise questions, and add specificity. Earlier we worked to make words more specific. We changed *apple*, *blue*, and *boat* into *golden delicious*, *turquoise*, and *sailboat*. The changes made the images more immediate and sharper and offered the reader opportunities to understand the poem. Figures of speech are the next step to adding layers to your poems, to adding even more complexity and meaning.

Types of Figurative Language

Metaphor

Figurative language, often the comparison made between two seemingly unlike things, is almost all image-based and, therefore, a good friend of poetry. In fact, some, like Owen Barfield in his essay on metaphor in Poets.org, would go so far as to say that poetry *is* **metaphor**:

Quote:

> The most conspicuous point of contact between meaning and poetry is *metaphor*. For one of the first things that a students of etymology—even quite an amateur student—discovers for himself is that every language, with its thousands of abstract terms, and its nuances of meaning and association, is *apparently* nothing, from beginning to end, but an unconscionable tissue of dead, or petrified, metaphors. If we trace the meaning of a great many words—or those of the elements of which they are composed—about as far back as etymology can take us, we are at once made to realize that an overwhelming proportion, if not all, of them referred in earlier days to one of these two things—a solid, sensible object, or some animal (probably human) activity. Examples abound on every page of the dictionary. Thus, an apparently objective scientific term like *elasticity*, on the one hand, and the metaphysical *abstract* on the other, are both traceable to verbs meaning "draw" or "drag." *Centrifugal* and *centripetal* are composed of a noun meaning "a goad" and verbs signifying "to flee" and "to seek" respectively; epithet, theme, thesis, anathema, hypothesis, etc., go back to a Greek verb, "to put," and even *right* and *wrong*, it seems, once had the meaning "stretched" and so "straight" and "wringing" or "sour." Some philologists, looking still further back into the past, have resolved these two classes into one, but this is immaterial to the point at issue.
>
> (Owen Barfield, "Metaphor")



Image from Pixabay

"Nothing in the intellect that was not previously in the senses"

"Nothing in the intellect that was not previously in the senses," wrote philosopher John Locke. In short, the way we know *anything* is through the senses — even abstract idea originates through experience gained through our bodies. And in the case of language's

origin, as explained above, it appears that all words, at their invention, referred to something concrete: an object or a specific action that evoked the senses. As we continue to use words, they evolve, for they live their own life. And when we use a word, we invite its history and permutations into its meaning. Of course, this is all way too much to think about at once in the writing process. But it is why writers revise and cross-examine their diction, thinking out what meanings the word may suggest. Language is *naturally* symbolic in origin, in its fabric. And an art that uses words cannot help but also have more meanings than just the literal. The following types of figurative language are used most often in poetry:

- **Metaphor**: A direct comparison between two unlike things, as in *Hope is the thing with feathers* (Emily Dickinson, "Hope").
- **Simile**: A comparison that uses *like* or *as*, as in *something inside me / rising explosive as my parakeet bursting / from its cage* (Bruce Snider, "Chemistry")
- **Personification**: Human characteristics being applied to non-human things, as in *irises, all / funnel & hood, papery tongues whispering little / rumors in their mouths* (Laura Kasischke, "Hostess").
- **Metonymy**: When one thing is represented by another thing associated with it, as in *The pen is mightier than the sword* (where pen stands in for writing, and sword stands in for warfare or violence).
- **Synecdoche**: When a part of something symbolizes the whole, or the whole of something symbolizes the part, as in *All hands on deck* (where *hands* stands in for *men*), or *The whole world loves you* (where *whole world* represents only a small number of its human population).

When we read such literary devices, our mind lights up a new pathway between the two things and we discover new ways of thinking about the relationship between these two things. We wonder, how is his love a red, red rose? But before we wonder, our senses have already made a connection. As we look closer at the poem, we begin to explore the idea more.

The following is a poem by Laura Kasischke. Can you identify the numerous metaphors and similes?

Confections

Caramel is sugar burnt

to syrup in a pan. Chaos
is a pinch of joy, a bit of screaming. An infant sleeping's
a milky sea. A star

is fire and flower. Divinity
is beaten out of egg whites

into cool white peaks. Friendship

begins and ends in suspicion, unless
it ends in death. Ignite

a glass of brandy in a pan, and you'll

have cherries jubilee: sex
without love's sodden nightgown

before your house burns down. Music's

a bomb of feathers
in the air
inthe moment before it explodes
and settles itself whispering
onto the sleeves of a child's choir robe. And

a candied apple's
like a heartache—exactly

like a heartache—something
sweet and red tortured to death

with something sweeter, and more red.

Laura Kasischke, "Confections" from Fire & Flower. *Copyright © 1998 by Laura Kasischke. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc., on behalf of Alice James Books, www.alicejamesbooks.org.*

The poem begins with a sentence that mimics a metaphor — stating something is something else: *carmel is sugar burnt / to syrup in a pan*. It sounds like a metaphor, but it actually isn't. Carmel actually is sugar burnt to syrup. Rather than a metaphor, the first two lines function as a definition, which sets the stage (note my own figurative language) for understanding how metaphors work in our minds, for whether definition or metaphor, we use the same structure: x is y; our minds equate the one thing with the other. In the poem this happens with carmel to sugar burnt to syrup.

In “Confections,” the opening definition that looked like a metaphor is followed by a true metaphor (or is it?). *Chaos is a pinch of joy, a bit of screaming.* We take this as metaphor, but because we do, it brings us back to the first sentence. If sentence two is figurative, why isn’t sentence one? And if sentence one is literal, why isn't sentence two? Both are structured exactly the same. Kasischke’s poem exposes the slipperiness of language and syntax: how we use them and interpret them. The poem asks us to examine closely the line between imagination and reality and the role language plays in sorting them out, or not.

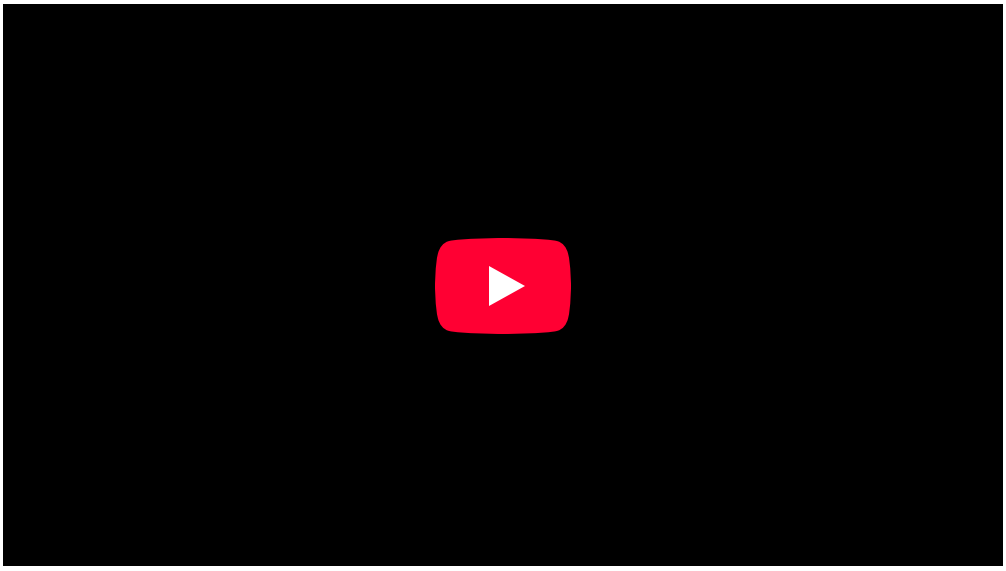
The next two metaphors are more imagistic that the previous: *An infant sleeping’s / a milky sea. A star / is fire and flower*. While we couldn’t "see" the abstraction *joy* and could only hear *screaming*, we certainly see a milky sea, and we certainly see a star flaring as fire, and flower. The parallel of fire and flower is interesting because they are so different. A flower would not survive if it were ablaze in flames. Yet, Kasischke’s comparison between the star and fire and flower makes sense to us. It plays not on the science of heat, but on the images associated with fire and flowers: they both spread outward. So, we equate the shape and motion of a star with both fire and flower. Of course, like the comparison of caramel to sugar burnt to syrup, a star actually is a fire. Again, the poem engages our ability to hold two things in the mind at once—just as a metaphor does—only with the poem as a whole, these two things are the literal and symbolic nature of language.

Activity

Read the poem "Confections" and continue to discuss the effect of the figurative language. Explore the comparisons deeper: how is an infant a milky sea? How is chaos a pinch of joy, a bit of screaming? Explore how figurative language allows us to use concrete language to relate abstract ideas.

Video

Watch the video: *The Art of the Metaphor* by Jane Hirshfield, animation by Ben Pearce.





Video 6.10.1 : The Art of the Metaphor

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory under the license CC BY-NC-SA

This page titled 4.12: Figurative Language is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.10: Figurative Language** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.13: Form in Poetry



Image from Pixabay

Form is the "shape" of a poem, its layout on the page. Specific poetic forms have been developed by many cultures over time. In more developed, closed or "received" poetic forms, which are forms that have been handed down over the generations, the rhyming scheme, meter and other elements of a poem are based on sets of rules, ranging from the relatively loose rules that govern the construction of an *elegy* to the highly formalized structure of the ghazal or villenelle. These forms are also known as "fixed" forms as they follow a set pattern or rules. More contemporary poets might choose to create their own forms where the poet dictates the rhythm, and uses techniques such as the spatial arrangement of the lines on the page. Open form poems will be discussed in the next section.

Poetic Forms Based on Stanza

Many forms use variations of a **stanza** that dictate its poetic form. Poetry is grouped in lines called stanzas. Stanzas are the poetic equivalent to paragraphs in prose. Traditional poems often use stanzas that have **rhyme schemes**. Words that end each line dictate the rhyme scheme in a stanza. We denote the end rhyme schemes with a lower case letter starting with a. Examples of rhyme schemes are ABAB or ABCD. See the example below:

A.E. HOUSMAN (1859-1936)

Loveliest of Trees, the cherry now

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now (A)
Is hung with bloom along the bough, (A)
And stands about the woodland ride (B)
Wearing white for Eastertide. (B)

Now, of my threescore years and ten, (C)
Twenty will not come again, (C)
And take from seventy springs a score, (D)
It only leaves me fifty more. (D)

And since to look at things in bloom (E)
Fifty springs are little room, (E)
About the woodlands I will go (F)
To see the cherry hung with snow. (F)

Types of Stanzas

Once the lines of our poem begin to find their length of breath, the next structural concern is how to break the lines into stanzas. In classic forms stanza lengths are predetermined. A **ballad** is written in quatrains, or stanzas containing four lines; a **roundel** has three stanzas; and a **villanelle** five **tercets**, or stanzas containing three lines. But in free verse, the poem's stanzas are determined by the poet.There are no rules when it comes to deciding what kind of stanzas to use in a poem and usually any reason that seems to intuit itself to the poet is justification. The decisions are based on personal taste with consideration to how it looks on the page, how

it affects rhythm and pacing, and what it emphasizes in the poem. Like many moves in poetry, stanzas should be organic to the poem and not feel forced or hokey. And like many of the techniques of writing poetry, knowing what to do comes with practice and fine-tuning our attention to language and the effects of poetic elements.

Like rhythm and line length, there is a nomenclature that permits us to talk about stanza length. These terms are used to speak about metrical verse, as well as free verse:

Couplet: a stanza of two lines

Tercet, or Triplet: a stanza of three lines

Quatrain: a stanza of four lines

Cinquain, or quintain, or quintet: a stanza of five lines

Sextain, or sestet: a stanza of six lines

Septet: a stanza of seven lines

Octave: a stanza of eight lines

Expanded examples:

A **couplet** are two line stanzas with end words that rhyme. Poets in the 17th-18th century like Alexander Pope often wrote "heroic couplets." See an example from Pope's "Essay of Criticism below" using a couplet rhyme scheme:

- But you who seek to give and merit fame, (A)
- And justly bear a critic's noble name, (A)
- Be sure your self and your own reach to know, (B)
- How far your genius, taste, and learning go; (B)
- Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet, (C)
- And mark that point where sense and dulness meet. (C)

A **tercet** or three line stanza uses three interlocking end rhyme-schemes: ABA, BCB CDC, DED. Dante's *Divine Comedy* uses this pattern, as does Robert Frost's *I Have Been Well Acquainted With the Night*.

The most common stanaic form is the **quatrain** which has four lines. Common rhyme schemes include AABB, ABBA, AABA and ABCB, which is used by the ballad stanza, a form that consists of alternating eight and six syllable lines. See the excerpt from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner":

It is an ancient Mariner,

And he stoppeth one of three.

'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,

Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,

And I am next of kin;

The guests are met, the feast is set:

May'st hear the merry din.'



Image from Pixabay

Non-Stanzaic Poetic Forms

Poems can also have fixed forms that do not have stanzas. A few examples of these forms are sonnets, villanelles, sestinas, and epigrams.

Sonnet

Although there are several versions of the sonnet, each has fourteen lines and contains a **volta**, or a turn in thought, which can sometimes be indicated with the words “but” or “yet.” In contemporary poetry it has become common for poets to compose sonnets with differing rhyme or meter, or with none at all.

Shakespearian:

Comprised of an octet and a sextet, this sonnet is composed in iambic pentameter and rhymes A B A B–C D C D–E F E F–G G. The volta appears either between lines eight and nine or between lines twelve and thirteen.

Petrarchan:

This sonnet contains two stanzas: one octet that rhymes as A B B A–A B B A, and a remaining sextet with varying rhyme schemes. The volta occurs between the stanzas.

Spenserian:

This sonnet modifies the Petrarchan to contain a rhyme scheme of A B A B–B C B C–C D C D–E E.

This kind of poetry is not for the amateur. A sonnet is a poem that has to comply with a certain system of rhyme and rhythm. The Shakespearian sonnet has fourteen lines with the rhyme scheme abab, cdcd, efef, gg, in a 4+4+4+2 structure. The sonnet will open for the writer's creativity within these strict rules, like a sport for poets who wants to excel and show off their word craft. The sonnet may present the poet’s view on certain aspects of life, the world, himself — but most often the sonnet is about love. Many of Shakespeare's sonnets look like passionate love letters to a lady he is in love with, while others are a sort of dialogue with a friend. Scholars have ever since wanted to find out the autobiographical background of Shakespeare's sonnets, but so far no one has succeeded in any identification of the characters. His first collection of sonnets was published in 1609 (probably without Shakespeare's approval) and tells the tale of a romantic narrator who conveys his love to a lady or renders his reflections of different aspects of life. Some of them may seem like poetic finger exercises and a bit monotone in their rigorous style. But still, Shakespeare's sonnets clearly demonstrate his poetic skills and his immaculate way with words.

Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

If By Dull Rhymes Our English Must Be Chain'd

BY JOHN KEATS

If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd,

And, like Andromeda, the Sonnet sweet

Fetter'd, in spite of pained loveliness;

Let us find out, if we must be constrain'd,

Sandals more interwoven and complete

To fit the naked foot of poesy;

Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress

Of every chord, and see what may be gain'd

By ear industrious, and attention meet:

Misers of sound and syllable, no less

Than Midas of his coinage, let us be

Jealous of dead leaves in the bay wreath crown;

So, if we may not let the Muse be free,

She will be bound with garlands of her own.

Described below are some common fixed forms of poetry widely used across a number of languages.



Image from Pixabay

Abecedarian

In this form, the poem works its way through the alphabet, each line beginning with the letter following the first letter of the previous line. There are no restrictions on meter or rhyme. The following example demonstrates the abecedarian form:

Lake Affected

April 11th and out my Michigan window: no surprise, really:
Blizzard. The small sidewalk trees sag under fluff and sky.

Cindy says she can’t take it, this weather. She misses
Dallas, the blue bells, has had enough of the lake's snow globe
Extending its stay beyond this season's home opener, yellow
Flowers and late night light for late nights
Grilling. Her hand opens back toward Texas like a beauty queen's,
Her eyes bat their long lashes: Take me back old friend, holy hell,
I am sorry. But everyone has different needs
Jig-sawing their bellies. Pieces of life floating down like, well, you
Know. Kevin, I'm leaving messages like lightning on your machine.
Lying in bed this morning I couldn't sleep. Snow
Makes electric champagne of my nerves, pops me open, twists me until sweet
Nostalgia curls me up with a book, squeezes poetry from my skull, seduces me to
Ogle over young faces in old pictures, realphabetize my library, boil
Potatoes until my kitchen windows steam. I burned yesterday's leftover
Quart of coffee reheating on the stove. But I didn't care, all
Restless as I was and hungry for everything no longer
Snuggling in my shoes or my bed, which is to say, bodies from the past.
Time, oh time and time again time
Undoes more than the elastic seams on lingerie, but like that—
Very much like that, the things that make us sexy
Wear away. And when it snows like this I want to melt until
X-rays show me one white dot, unique, branching out, stuck,
Yearning for others like me that will have a ball balling with me something
Zesty as an orange, ready to be thrown at the world.

Copyright © Michelle Bonczek Evory. “Lake Affected” is licensed CC-BY-NC-SA.

Aubade

Partner to the serenade, which focuses on evening, the aubade is a poem about the morning or dawn. There are no restrictions on line, meter, or rhyme. Here is one by Traci Brimball:

Aubade with a Broken Neck

The first night you don't come home
summer rains shake the clematis.
I bury the dead moth I found in our bed,
scratch up a rutabaga and eat it rough
with dirt. The dog finds me and presents
between his gentle teeth a twitching
nightjar. In her panic, she sings
in his mouth. He gives me her pain
like a gift, and I take it. I hear
the cries of her young, greedy with need,
expecting her return, but I don’t let her go
until I get into the house. I read
the auspices—the way she flutters against
the wallpaper’s moldy roses means
all can be lost. How she skims the ceiling
means a storm approaches. You should see
her in the beginnings of her fear, rushing
at the starless window, her body a dart,
her body the arrow of longing, aimed,
as all desperate things are, to crash

not into the object of desire,
but into the darkness behind it.

“Aubade With a Broken Neck”, from Rookery *by Traci Brimhall; Copyright © 2010 Traci Brimhall, reproduced by permission of Southern Illinois University Press.*

Ballad

Before written language, folk ballads were used around the world to transmit stories—often tragic—from one generation to another. The word "ballad" has its roots in the Latin word *ballare*, meaning “to dance,” evidence of the rhythmic qualities of the form and its frequent recital to musical accompaniment. Although written in many variations, the ballad is today most commonly written in quatrains and A B C B rhyme. The first and third lines contain eight syllables, while the second and fourth lines contain six. According to Robin Skelton, the most common rhyme scheme is iambic tetrameter alternating with iambic trimeter. The following is a ballad by Muriel Rukeyser:

Read Ballad of Orange and Grape on PoetryFoundation.org

Listen to Muriel Rukeyser read the poem here.

Blank Verse

A form that lends itself well to a meditative voice, blank verse is written in iambic pentameter lines that do not rhyme. The Poetry Foundation contains numerous examples, including links to those written in 10-syllable lines traditional of epic poems such as John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

Ch’i-Yen-Shih

In this Chinese pattern, each line contains seven monosyllabic words with a caesura after each fourth word. The rhyme scheme is comprised of the pattern A B C B.

Captured

In the low grass, a girl holds
a bright pink shell washed to land
by high white waves. Her toes grow
like a tree's roots in the sand.

Cinquain

Adelaide Crapsey established this unrhymed iambic form, which consists of a five-line stanza with the syllable count 2 4 6 8 2. Here is an example of one titled "Amaze" and another called "November Night."

Daina

This Latvian form consists of a quatrain of trochaic octometer lines with feminine endings. Although there are no end rhymes, alliteration and internal rhymes are common. The example below breaks form in the last line and adds a stressed foot for effect.

Catholic School

Every Friday early morning
we would march to church all wearing
navy beanies nuns pulled down our
heads like muffins. We preferred them

sideways, some French painter’s fancy
style. But always Sisters reaching
over pressing God's will into
bodies, taming young girls from the wild.

Dodoitsu

This Japanese form is composed of four lines with the syllable count 7 7 7 5. There is no rhyme or set meter.

Service

An altar boy holds the stained-
glass door open as women
in satin-lined skirts enter
the church like saints.

Elegy

An elegy is a lament for the dead and contains the character of sadness and loss. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland explain that an elegy "mourns for a dead person, lists his or her virtues, and seeks consolation beyond the momentary event." It is considered a public poem that when done best, according Strand and Boland, sets the customs of death in a particular culture against the decorum and private feelings of the speaker.

The following is by the poet William Heyen:

Elegy for Wilt the Stilt

October 12, 1999. Remember the date.
As of this autumn day at century's end,
God's fortunes in heaven have changed.
He's drafted and signed Himself a center.
Wilt the Stilt is dead.

Wilt the Stilt is dead before George Mikan,
first of the big men,
dead before Bill Russell,
before Kareem Abdul Jabbar,
before Moses Malone, before Shaquille O'Neal

who might have taken Him
to His own promised land.
God could wait no longer
for his franchise player,
so Wilt the Stilt is dead.

In Philly, his high school rims shiver with applause.
In Kansas, his college rims rattle with applause.
Globetrotter and NBA nets rip themselves in homage,
and in the silence of a hundred gyms
in the dead of night backboards

shatter in adulation and remembrance as, now
Wilt the Stilt ducks his head
under the transom of heaven,
as God reaches up to shake hands
with his new acquisition,

to welcome Wilt home among the constellations
of His cosmic league.
Wilt bows, vows to work hard,
to settle down with one woman,
to earn his minutes here with sweat,

to balance power and finesse,
even, on occasion, to pass the ball
out of the low post. God smiles,
cheerleaders leap, spread legs, and tumble,
for today the Stilt has joined them in death.

Copyright © William Heyen. "Elegy for Wilt the Stilt" is licensed CC-BY-NC-SA.

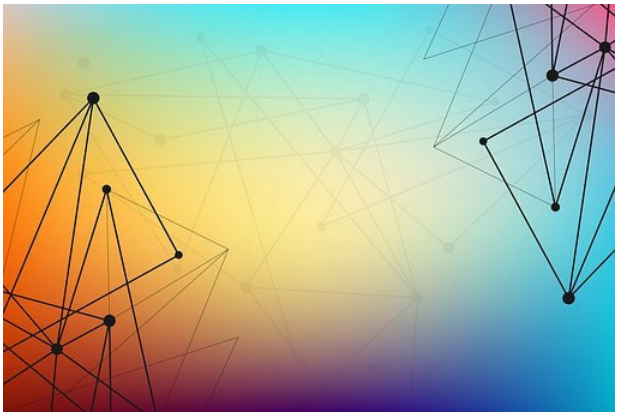


Image from Pixabay

Exquisite Corpse

This form, invented by the Surrealists, is fun to write in a group. Each person writes two lines, then folds the paper so the next person writing can see only the second line; the next person writes two more lines and folds the paper so that only the second line is visible; and so on.

Exercise 6.14.1

Work with a partner and play another Surrealist game called "If This, Then That." Each person writes without knowing what the other person is writing. The first person writes a phrase on one side of a piece of paper that begins "If…" and then passes the paper to his or her partner. Without looking at the "If" statement, the partner then writes a statement beginning "Then…" Here are some examples that make it hard to believe that these were random — but they were! You'll be surprised how the collective unconscious sometimes aligns:

If school is canceled tomorrow… then girls will dance under umbrellas in the rain.

If turkeys made honey… then no would ever have to go to bed without supper.

If you heard a sound and didn't know what it was… then the neighbors would be knockin' at your door.

Ghazal

Typically dealing with subjects of love and separation, the ghazal is a form with Arabic roots consisting of rhyming couplets of the same syllabic length and a refrain. As explained on the Academy of American Poets' Website:

The ghazal is composed of a minimum of five couplets—and typically no more than fifteen—that are structurally, thematically, and emotionally autonomous. Each line of the poem must be of the same length, though meter is not imposed in English. The first couplet introduces a scheme, made up of a rhyme followed by a refrain. Subsequent couplets pick up the same scheme in the second line only, repeating the refrain and rhyming the second line with both lines of the first stanza. The final couplet usually includes the poet's signature, referring to the author in the first or third person, and frequently including the poet's own name or a derivation of its meaning.

Here is an example of one by Patricia Smith:

Read Hip-Hop Ghazal at PoetryFoundation.org

Haiku

This well-known Japanese form is three lines long and comprised of unrhymed, unmetered lines with a 5 7 5 syllable count. Traditionally, the haiku's subject matter relates to nature or seasons.

Mother's Day

One Sunday in May
Mothers answer mothers' calls

We are all children

Italian Quatrain

The four lines are written in iambic pentameter and rhyme A B B A.

Mountain Road

We drove the silver van full speed
The branches snapped in windows
We dipped and bumped in rocky holes
From earth we felt like we'd been freed

Katauta

In this three-line poem with the syllable count 5 7 7, the first line poses a question that the next two lines attempt to answer in an intuitive, immediate way. Try answering with the first image that pops into your mind.

What's in my future?
The budding heads of tulips
Fragrant, red-lipped, and sealed.

Pantoum

Originating in Malaysia, the pantoum was adapted by French poets. It consists of an unlimited number of quatrains in which the second and fourth lines of each are repeated in the first and third lines of the next. The first and third lines of the first stanza become the final stanza's second and fourth lines. There can be some variation. For instance, the first line of the poem may be the last.

The following is an example by Melissa Rhoades:

Dutch East India Company

Back home, my new wife makes fine lace. I keep
a scrap of her work in my brine-soaked breeches.
Black waters pitch and the hull creaks
as I head for spice stores at Malacca's beach.

The scrap of her work in my brine-soaked breeches
is soiled from these sickened months
of heading for spice stores at Malacca's beach.
The taste of molded hard tack licks my tongue

and soiled from these sickened months,
we had to leave nine scurvied men with the Boers.
The taste of molded hard tack licks all our tongues
and the Captain won't say when next we moor.

Although we left nine scurvied men with the Boers,
we're all bleeding gums, thin skin, and fleas.
The Captain still won't say when we moor
and some dirty dogs talk of mutiny.

But for all our bleeding gums, thin skin, and fleas
sweet land comes, a line on the horizon.
Now, no dogs talk of mutiny,
not with palm trees visible from our galleon.

Sweet land! Malaya fills the horizon.
Scrabble at the riggings, keen to anchor.
Palm trees look heavenly from the galleon.
Once ashore, we drink till we slur,

scrabbling around port, keen from anchor.
Sweat runs down our backs. In the shade
we sprawl out, still drinking in a slur.
At dusk, I thrust into a dark-skinned maiden,

sweat running down our backs in the shade.
Black Malacca reeks of nutmeg and mace.
Again, I thrust into the dark-skinned maid
and moan. Back home, my new wife makes fine lace.

Copyright © Melissa Rhoades. "Dutch East India Company" is licensed CC-BY-NC-SA.

Pregunta

This Spanish form was practiced by poets of the court in pairs during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. One poet asks a question or series of questions in one form and the second poet, matching the form, answers. The topics usually related to love, philosophy, or morality.

Q: If two loves want one heart
And the heart thrums both loves' strings
How long before one parts
From two and chooses a single fling?

A: Since no hearts be alike
If no love presumes a thing
You may wish to keep arms wide
And see what each day brings.

Exercise 6.14.1

Alternatively, it might be fun to experiment with different topics and be loose and spontaneous with the answers and with the form. The Surrealists were great at inventing these types of games. Pair up and in the style of the Surrealists, have one person write a question and the other write an imagistic answer without knowing what the question is.

Q. How do I know if I love her?
A. The shutters will fly off the house.

Q. How do I know when to tell her?
A. A row of blackbirds a choir on a wire.

Q. How will I know when to ask her?
A. Her open hand and the light lifting from it.

Prose Poem

The prose poem, which can be any length, isn't broken into verse, but contains many of the elements of poetry: figures of speech, musical language, internal rhyme, repetition, condensed syntax, and imagery. There is some debate over the form, as there are some poets who do not consider the form a poem, per se, but something more akin to flash fiction, or at least a genre of prose rather than verse. Either way, it is a cross-genre form—half prose, half verse—and fun to experiment with.

An influential revivalist of the form was Robert Bly, who said in a 1997 interview that the form is part of an evolution in human democracy: from gods to heroes to everyday humans; from sacred culture to aristocracy to democracy; likewise, from sacred chants in which "all words are signs" to metered poetry to free verse to prose. Additionally in the interview, Bly spoke about his feeling of freedom and "safety" in writing prose poems: "The most wonderful thing about the prose poem is that nobody has set up any standards yet."

The following poem is by Russell Edson, known as "the godfather of the prose poem." As a father of the form, Edson provided one of the form's common characteristics: strangeness. His subjects tend to be odd, surreal, and humorous. The figure of the ape is one that appears frequently in his poems.

Ape and Coffee

Some coffee had gotten on a man's ape. The man said, animal did you get on my coffee?
No no, whistled the ape, the coffee got on me.
You're sure you didn't spill on my coffee? said the man.
Do I look like a liquid? peeped the ape.
Well you sure don't look human, said the man.
But that doesn't make me a fluid, twittered the ape.
Well I don' know what the hell you are,
so just stop it, cried the man.
I was just sitting here reading the newspaper when you splashed coffee all over me, piped the ape.
I don't care if you are a liquid, you just better stop splashing on things, cried the man.
Do I look fluid to you? Take a good look, hooted the ape.
If you don't stop I'll put you in a cup, screamed the man.
I'm not a fluid, screeched the ape.
Stop it, stop it, screamed the man, you are frightening me.

Russell Edson, "Ape and Coffee" from The Tunnel: Selected Poems of Russell Edson. *Copyright © 1973 by Russell Edson. Reprinted with the permission of Oberlin College Press.*

Here is another example by Devon Moore:

Motion Sick

I was five but the woman thought I was seven 'cause that's how old you had to be to be an unaccompanied minor, so that's what my daddy told me to say, so then I was an unaccompanied liar catapulting through the clouds and later I told my daddy, "I saw a lightning bolt," and he said, "Yeah, right," and I said, "Why?" and he said, "Cause I thought you said you saw an angel," and I said, "No, a lightning bolt," and we were quiet.

I was up in the clouds looking for angels and the nice stewardess offered me hot chocolate instead of pop, and maybe it was the turbulence or my open hands, but the next thing I know the scalding hot was all in my lap, and I was crying loud, but that's not the worst of it 'cause then I was standing in the front row butt naked from the waist down, just a simple small hairless vagina for all to see.

I was in the terminal on a layover, but I still thought every man I saw with black hair and a moustache might be my father, and I tried to go to them but the stewardess grabbed me back and said, "No, this is not your stop," so she sat me down on a chair and told me not to move and left me for what felt like hours and I had to pee so bad but I couldn't move 'cause I was still hoping that my daddy might surprise me and show up before his time.

I was chewing the bubblegum my mommy got me for popping ears when I started throwing up Dramamine and I might as well have been the plague or the grossest thing she'd ever seen 'cause the woman sitting next to me leapt out of her seat and pointed and said, "She's sick," which was true, but I cried anyways and then my new coat that had a detachable outer layer smelled like throw-up, so the stewardess put it in a plastic bag, which was the first thing they handed my father when he got to the airport.

Copyright © Devon Moore. "Motion Sickness" is licensed CC-BY-NC-SA.

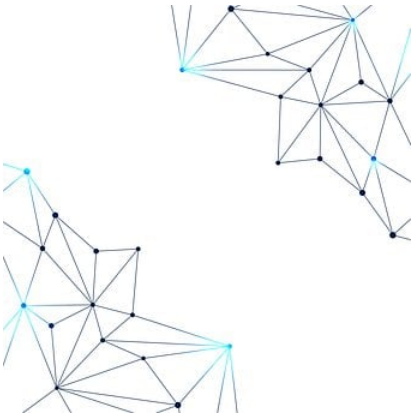


Image from Pixabay

Roundel

The roundel is an English form consisting of eleven lines in three stanzas with no set meter. The first part of line one repeats at the end of the first stanza and again as the last line of poem. The half line also forms the rhyme pattern and is indicated here as R for "refrain": A B A R–B A B–A B A R.

Spring

The daffodils roaring from the ground, at the April
market, tables are lined with buds and green
and people stand in lines looking around
at the daffodils roaring from the ground.

In winter's sleep few colors seen:
no birds or bugs outdoors make sound.
Now, voices, friends, and new bags of seed

are garden bed and birdhouse bound.
Off with gloves and scarves and wool that's been
wrapped around us for so long for now we've found
the daffodils roaring from the ground.

Sestina

The sestina consists of five sestets culminating in a final tercet called an **envoi**, also called a **tornada**. The six words that end each of the lines in the first stanza repeat throughout the poem in the following pattern:

1. A B C D E F
2. F A E B D C
3. C F D A B E
4. E C B F A D
5. D E A C F B
6. B D F E C A
7. (envoi) E C A or A C E

In addition, the envoi also repeats the words that end lines B D F in the first stanza. These three words can go anywhere in interior of the final tercet’s lines.

Here is an example by Chad Sweeney:

Michigan Sestina

I've tried to understand this winter
that grows out from no root and no
seed, yet sways like a meadow toward the mind,

sways on its white stem and is
a figure of uncertainty over hills of sleep,
where aging factories gesture to a train

and mills are shuttered over river ice. The train
crosses a bridge from Michigan into winter,
its silos and tobacco fields framed by sleep,
inscrutable and nine hells down. No
horses center the pastures where the sky is
its own pasture, a drift of snow over the mind.

Three crows motionless on a fence, in the mind
are moving, crossing the windows of the train
like Japanese characters whose sense is
effortless, a calligraphy of winter
whose shifting figures evoke a *No*
theater, three masks in a theater of sleep.

But the land draws its own lessons from sleep,
a heap of frozen images in the mind,
Polish teachers in the birch grove and no
one to bury them, shoved from the train,
the faces of the dead occupy the whole winter,
one borderless nation of snow. Memory is

unable to bury them. What *was* and what *is*
and what *never was*—mounded together in sleep:
history erects a statue to winter,
a wolf leaves its tracks across the mind,
the train and the memory of the train
arrive on the same line, though no

station is there to greet them and no
one is getting on or off. Is
it irony draws this train
west toward Chicago with its cargo of sleep?
My forehead against the window doesn't mind
closing its one eye against winter,

the train moves deeper into memory, no
train and no winter, though one crow is
changed in sleep to the Japanese character for *mind*.

Copyright © Chad Sweeney. "Michigan Sestina" is licensed CC-BY-NC-SA.

Split Couplet

Composed of two lines, the split couplet contains a first line in iambic tetrameter and a second in iambic dimeter; the two lines should rhyme. Another variation is to write the first line in iambic pentameter.

Morning Run

A rabbit hops across my trail
A bouncy tail

A fawn leans into chamomile
Its sunny meal

The miles vanish beneath my feet
It brings me peace

Tanka, or Waka

This Japanese form, which focuses primarily on nature or strong emotions, consists of five unrhymed, non-metrical lines with the syllable count 5 7 5 7 7.

In Waka, lines one and two, as well as three and four, form complete sentences, as does the last line.

July

Grasshoppers alight
Onto the sunflower’s face.
Honeybees buzzing
From lavender to basil.
The whole garden is alive.

Than-Bauk, or Climbing Rhyme

This Burmese form consists of three four-syllable lines, with rhyme falling on the fourth syllable of the first line, the third syllable of the second line, and the second syllable of the third line.

Relish your sleep
Wake, repeat, wake
Count sheep and dream

Never lose hope
There is no time
To mope around.

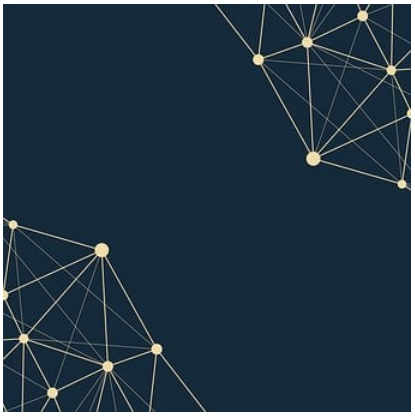


Image from Pixabay

Villanelle

This French form consists of five tercets and a final quatrain. The first stanza's first and third lines repeat in an alternating pattern as the last line in the subsequent stanzas. In the final quatrain, the two lines that have been repeating throughout the poem form the final two lines of the poem.

The following villanelle was written by Victor James Daley. It is title is simply "Villanelle":

Villanelle

We said farewell, my youth and I,
When all fair dreams were gone or going,
And Love's red lips were cold and dry.

When white blooms fell from tree-tops high,
Our Austral winter's way of snowing,
We said farewell, my youth and I.

We did not sigh, what use to sigh
When Death passed as a mower mowing,
And Love's red lips were cold and dry?

But hearing Life's stream thunder by,
That sang of old through flowers flowing,
We said farewell, my youth and I.

There was no hope in the blue sky,
No music in the low winds blowing,
And Love's red lips were cold and dry.

My hair is black as yet, then why
So sad! I know not, only knowing
We said farewell, my youth and I.

All are not buried when they die;
Dead souls there are through live eyes showing
When Love's red lips are cold and dry.

So, seeing where the dead men lie,
Out of their hearts the grave-flowers growing,
We said farewell, my youth and I,
When Love's red lips were cold and dry.

"Villanelle" by Victor James Daley is in the public domain.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from *Naming the Unnameable: An Approach to Poetry for New Generations* by Michelle Bonczek Evory under the license CC BY-NC-SA

This page titled 4.13: Form in Poetry is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **6.14: Form in Poetry** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

4.14: Music and Poetry

Music and Poetry: Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen - Rock Poets

Musicians have been bringing poetry to a mass audience who might not listen to or read poetry. The ultimate synthesis between rock music and lyrics can be a tricky one. The two forms of expression must complement each other in some kind of balance. Most rock productions tend to lean more on the music than the textual expression, while some singer/songwriters put more emphasis on the poetic choice of words in their songs. Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen belong in the last category; their literary contributions to rock and pop over half a century ranks them among the greatest modernist and contemporary poets. Cohen said about Dylan that "he put the word back into the jukebox," signifying the intrusion of art into popular culture. Dylan's rich imagery and often surreal texts and Cohen's silent and sharp poetic observations certainly were, and still are, read and listened to by an increasing audience all over the world. The songs are personal, often political but always original.

Background



Bob Dylan. (CC BY-SA-NC; Supplier Corbis Supplier NTB scanpix via ScanPix)

The American political scene of the sixties was one of turmoil and unrest with the assassinations of great leaders, race riots, civil rights rallies, the Vietnam War, the Cuba Crisis, student riots, anti-communism, and the Cold War – to list some of the key factors that characterised American society at the time. Like many of the modernist artists, Cohen and Dylan were more into their art than what was going on around them. After songs like "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" and "Masters of War" Bob Dylan was embraced as a protest singer by the anti-war activists, who wanted to make him the voice of their generation. Admittedly, "Hard Rain" was spontaneously written during the Cuba Crisis, and he certainly is aware of political malpractice and injustice. But Dylan never wanted to be labelled and put into any specific category, and when he later left his acoustic concept and turned to a loud electric performance of his songs, there was uproar among his fans – accusing him of betraying their cause. But Dylan let them down and went his own unpredictable ways like he has always done.

Leonard Cohen never intended to become a singer at all. His ambition was to make a living out of his talent for writing. He published some novels in the early sixties that did not catch on very well, so he learned fingerpicking guitar and decided to put his poems into songs. This (probably much to his own surprise) went down with the bohemian beatniks of Greenwich Village, who cared more for a profound and mystic piece of poetry than a glittering stage act and loud music.

Imagery and integrity

Bob Dylan did not set out to be a poet; his ambition was to become a folk singer in the tradition of Woody Guthrie. Leonard Cohen had studied poetry and was more conscious about his poetic project. Hence their poetic approaches are quite different and must be dealt with distinctively. What unifies the two is their integrity and devotion to their work. It is hard to pick representative examples of their massive production that spans over half a century, but the following quotes could be a small sample that may tease the appetite for a more in-depth study of their songs and poetry.

Unlike most modernist poets Cohen's and Dylan's poetry has a distinct rhythm and rhyme, which of course is because the poetry was meant for singing.

Bob Dylan's Poems

One of Bob Dylan's most famous songs is "**Mr. Tambourine Man**," from which these poetic lines are taken:

Yes, to dance beneath the diamond sky
With one hand waving free
Silhouetted by the sea, circled by the circus sands

With all memory and fate driven deep beneath the waves
Let me forget about today until tomorrow.

"Desolation Row" is another long poem stacked with enigmatic imagery and references to Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bible; this is the first stanza:

Desolation Road (Bob Dylan)
They're selling postcards of the hanging
They're painting the passports brown
The beauty parlor is filled with sailors
The circus is in town
Here comes the blind commissioner
They've got him in a trance
One hand is tied to the tight-rope dancer
The other is in his pants
And the riot squad, they're restless
They need somewhere to go
As Lady and I look out tonight
From Desolation Row

Bono (of U2) said about the following lines: "I don't have a clue about what it means, but it is beautiful":

I Want You (Bob Dylan)
The guilty undertaker sighs
The lonesome organ grinder cries
The silver saxophones say I should refuse you
The cracked bells and washed out horns
Blow into my face with scorn
But it's not that way
I wasn't born to lose you

The lines are quite surreal; Dylan paints images and creates suggestive associations that stir the curiosity of his audience.

Leonard Cohen's Poetic Voice



Leonard Cohen CC CC-BY-NC-SA-4.0 Photographer: Erik Thorberg

Leonard Cohen's poetry is more subtle and low-voiced as he in this poem speaks of how love appears where you least expect it to. Note the poetic and evocative juxtapositions (birthmark/stain, snowman/rain etc.)

Love Calls You By Your Name (Leonard Cohen)
You thought that it could never happen
To all the people that you became,
Your body lost in legend, the beast so very tame.
But here, right here,
Between the birthmark and the stain
Between the ocean and your open vein,
Between the snowman and the rain
Once again, once again
Love calls you by your name.

The woman in your scrapbook
Whom you still praise and blame
You say they chained you to your fingernails
And you climb the halls of fame.
Oh, but here, right here
Between the peanuts and the cage
Between the darkness and the stage
Between the hour and the age
Once again, once again
Love calls you by your name

These are the two first stanzas of a beautiful song included on one of his early albums, *Songs of Love and Hate* (1971). The next example is an excerpt from a more recent poem, included on *The Future* (1992).

Anthem (Leonard Cohen)
The birds they sang
At the break of day
Start again
I heard them say
Don't dwell on what
Has passed away
Or what is yet to be

Ah, the wars they will
Be fought again
The holy dove
She will be caught again
Bought and sold
And bought again
The dove is never free

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in

In his humble way Leonard Cohen has said about this poem that "it is probably the one I am most pleased with." And indeed, the

last two lines sum up much of Cohen's poetry beautifully; his melancholy way of pointing out that despite, or even because of our defects we can see our blessings and the bright sides of life. Like the title of one of his novels also indicates, we are *Beautiful Losers*.

Bob Dylan was born in 1941 and Leonard Cohen in 1934. They are still active producing music and poetry, and they are both still touring.

Exercise 6.2.1

1. What do you make of the imagery of Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man"? What do you associate with it? What is the singer asking for?
2. The imagery of "Desolation Row" is both wild and fantastic. On the internet you will find a full version; read it and play the song. See if you can place all his references and allusions.
3. Like Bono said, it is hard to figure out any meaning in the lines of "I Want You," but find it on the internet, play it, and follow the lyrics. Does it make any sense or is it just words and changing imagery?
4. Look at the juxtapositions of Cohen's "Love Calls You by Your Name." What can you say about the distance between the two items in each one?
5. Read the second stanza of Cohen's "Anthem." What is this about, and how do you interpret "the dove"?
6. Explain the two last lines of Cohen's "Anthem." What do we call such a literary technique?

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen - Rock Poets by Jan-Louis Nagel, provided by ndla license: CC CC-BY-SA-4.0

This page titled 4.14: Music and Poetry is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Jan-Louis Nagel.

- **6.2: Music and Poetry** by Jan-Louis Nagel is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Poetry Readings

Assigned Readings

5.1: Aphra Behn's "On Her Loving Two Equally" (1684)
5.2: T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915)
5.3: Theodore Roethke's “My Papa’s Waltz” (1948)
5.4: Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" and "Fever 103°" (1962)
5.5: Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Pied Beauty" (1887)
5.6: Ben Jonson's "On My First Son" (1616)
5.7: Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842)
5.8: William Shakespeare's Sonnets 73 and 116 (1609)
5.9: Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" (1863)
5.10: Edna St. Vincent Millay's "I, being born a woman and distressed" (1923)
5.11: Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921) and "Let America Be America Again" (1935)
5.12: Judith Ortiz Cofer's "El Olvido" (1987)
5.13: Additional Readings
5.13.1: Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599)
5.13.2: Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" (1600)
5.13.3: Margaret Cavendish's "The Hunting of the Hare" (1653)
5.13.4: Phillis Wheatley's "An Hymn to the Morning" and "An Hymn to the Evening" (1773)
5.13.5: Robert Burns' "To a Mouse" (1785)
5.13.6: John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819)
5.13.7: Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832-42)
5.13.8: Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Song to the Men of England" (1839)
5.13.9: Walt Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums!" (1861)
5.13.10: Stephen Crane's "In the Desert" (1895)
5.13.11: Alice Ruth Moore's "Amid the Roses" (1895)
5.13.12: Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Richard Cory" (1897)
5.13.13: Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (1916)
5.13.14: William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923)
5.13.15: Yoon Dong-joo's "A Poem That Came Easily" (1942)
5.13.16: Maya Angelou's “On the Pulse of Morning” (1993)
5.13.17: Sean Hill's "Distance Between Desires" (2013)
5.13.18: Hieu Minh Nguyen's "The Study" and "White Boy Time Machine- Override" (2018)
5.13.19: Athena Kashyap's "Partition Story" (2019)

Supplemental Readings

These linked readings are not included in this textbook due to copyright permissions and/or space constraints.

- Poetry Foundation includes extensive online libraries of poetry
- The Academy of American Poets is an extensive library of poetry and poetry resources

For an extensive list of American poetry readings, ordered chronologically, please refer to Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865-present by Berke, Bleil, & Cofer, sourced from University of North Georgia Press, CC-BY-SA.

5: Poetry Readings is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.1: Aphra Behn's "On Her Loving Two Equally" (1684)



"File:Aphra Behn by Peter Lely.jpg"by Gabriel VanHelsing is licensed under CC0 1.0 .

Aphra Behn (14 December 1640? – 16 April 1689) was a British playwright, poet, translator and fiction writer from the Restoration era. As one of the first English women to earn her living by her writing, she broke cultural barriers and served as a literary role model for later generations of women authors. Rising from obscurity, she came to the notice of Charles II, who employed her as a spy in Antwerp. Upon her return to London and a probable, brief stay in debtors' prison, she began writing for the stage. She belonged to a coterie of poets and famous libertines such as John Wilmot, Lord Rochester. She wrote under the pastoral pseudonym Astrea. During the turbulent political times of the Exclusion Crisis, she wrote an epilogue and prologue that brought her into legal trouble; she thereafter devoted most of her writing to prose genres and translations. A staunch supporter of the Stuart line, she declined an invitation from Bishop Burnet to write a welcoming poem to the new king William III. She died shortly after.

Behn is now regarded as a key dramatist of the seventeenth-century theatre, and her prose work is critically acknowledged as having been important to the development of the English novel. She is perhaps best known to modern audiences for her short novel *Oroonoko* (1688), the tale of an enslaved African prince. It is notable for its exploration of slavery, race, and gender.

Behn was immensely prolific, adapting plays, writing fiction and poetry, and translating works from French and Latin. She caused scandal in some of her chosen subject matter, often alluding to sexual desire. She was aware, and stated that, the works would not have caused problems if they had been written by a man. Behn's work frequently takes homoerotic themes, featuring same-sex love between men. One of her best known poems, "The Disappointment," is the story of a sexual encounter told from a woman's point of view that may be interpreted as a work about male impotence.

Additional information on Behn's life, work, and influence can be found here.

"On Her Loving Two Equally"

I.

How strongly does my Passion flow,

Divided equally 'twixt two?

Damon had ne'er subdu'd my Heart,

Had not *Alexis* took his part;

Nor cou'd *Alexis* pow'rful prove,

Without my *Damons* Aid, to gain my Love.

II.

When my *Alexis* present is,

Then I for *Damon* sigh and mourn;

But when *Alexis* I do miss,

Damon gains nothing but my Scorn.

But if it chance they both are by,

For both alike I languish, sigh, and die.

III.

Cure then, thou mighty winged God,

This restless Feaver in my Blood;

One Golden-Pointed Dart take back:

But which, O *Cupid*, wilt thou take?

If *Damons*, all my Hopes are crost;

Or that of my *Alexis*, I am lost.

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Aphra Behn. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Aphra_Behn. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

This page titled 5.1: Aphra Behn's "On Her Loving Two Equally" (1684) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.2: T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915)

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born into a large, upper-middle-class family in St. Louis, Missouri. His early interest in literature was fostered by his education, beginning at Smith Academy, where he studied classical and modern languages; followed by a prep year at Milton Academy; and concluding in America when he attended Harvard University. There he completed work for a Ph. D. in Philosophy, but failed to earn the degree because he did not complete the final oral exam.

He expanded his knowledge of philosophy by studying at the Sorbonne in Paris, France, where he attended lectures by Henri Bergson (1859-1941), and at Merton College, Oxford University. From Oxford, Eliot frequently traveled to London where he met Ezra Pound, an Imagist poet and major figure in the Modernist movement in literature.

Determined to remain in England, Eliot earned a living as a teacher, as an accountant at Lloyd's Bank, and as an editor at Faber and Faber publishers. In 1927, Eliot converted to Anglicanism —professing as an Anglo-Catholic—and became a British citizen. His poetry expressed a parallel search for stability and personal, spiritual, and cultural meaning and coherence. As a modernist, his experiments in form, sound, and imagery used fragmentation and multi-vocalism along with the mythic method that gave shape to apparent chaos and spiritual meaning to apparent vacuity.

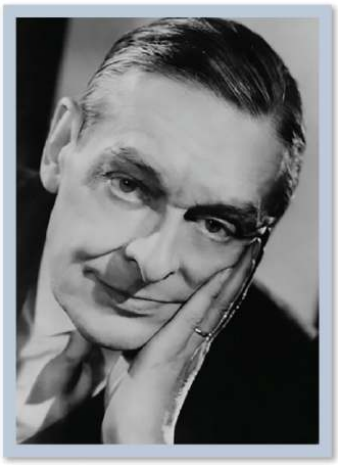


Image 3.20 | Photo of T. S. Eliot
Photographer | Ellie Koczela
Source | Wikimedia Commons
License | CC BY-SA 4.0

In his poetry, Eliot often counterpointed the distant past with the present to highlight inner vacuity, or the modern individual's tendency to be cut off from the unconscious and alienated from nature and the natural cycle. In the "Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), he depicted the individual self as tenuous, changing and discontinuous, without integrity, unity, or freedom and subject to external conditions. Like Conrad, Eliot sought to put such almost inexpressible horrors into words, relying on objective correlatives that use externals/symbols to express emotion and thought.

His most famous poem *The Waste Land* (1922) grounds its grail-like quest for meaning and renewal in the syncretic research of Sir James Fraser's *The Golden Bough* (1890), a study in comparative religion that searched for the one myth to which all myths referred. *The Waste Land* seeks for archetypal/socio-cultural identities beyond the egoistic self and the immediate historical moment. His later poems, particularly *Four Quartets* (1943), locate the intersection of the immediate moment and eternity, movement and stasis, spirituality and art.

Eliot influenced literature and culture through not only his poetry but also such important critical essays as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1921) and "Hamlet and his Problems" (1921). His work led to the revival of the metaphysical poets, especially John Donne (1572-1631), and influenced younger critics and poets such as Woolf, William Empson (1906-1984) and W. H. Auden (1907-1973). Eliot won many awards and recognitions, including the Nobel Prize in Literature and an Order of Merit.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse

A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,

Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.

Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo

Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,

Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.

Let us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table;

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question. . . .
Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time

To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
(They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”)
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
(They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”)
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?
****
Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes

Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.
****
And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:

Would it have been worth while

If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,

And turning toward the window, should say:

“That is not it at all,

That is not what I meant, at all.”

****

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

Am an attendant lord, one that will do

To swell a progress, start a scene or two,

Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,

Deferential, glad to be of use,

Politic, cautious, and meticulous;

Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;

At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—

Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves

Combing the white hair of the waves blown back

When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from British Literature II - Romantic Era to the Twentieth Century and Beyond by Robinson. Sourced from LibreTexts , license: CC BY-SA

5.2: T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.3: Theodore Roethke's “My Papa’s Waltz” (1948)

Theodore Huebner Roethke (May 25, 1908 – August 1, 1963) was an American poet. He published several volumes of award-winning and critically acclaimed poetry. Roethke is regarded as one of the most accomplished and influential poets of his generation. Roethke’s work is characterized by its introspection, rhythm and natural imagery. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1954 for his book *The Waking*, and he won the annual National Book Award for Poetry twice, in 1959 for *Words for the Wind* and posthumously in 1965 for *The Far Field*.

"My Papa's Waltz"

Please click the link to access this poem on Poetry Foundation's website.

Reader-response Essay

Click on the link below to read an essay responding to the poem “My Papa’s Waltz,” using reader-response criticism.

- “Reaction to Poem: ‘My Papa’s Waltz,’ Theodore Roethke” from Hubpages

CC licensed content, Original

- Introduction to My Poppa's Waltz. **Provided by**: Extended Learning Institute of Northern Virginia Community College. **Located at**: http://eli.nvcc.edu/. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*
- Introduction to Reader-response to My Poppa's Waltz. **Provided by**: Lumen Learning. **Located at**: http://lumenlearning.com/. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Biography of Theodore Roethke. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_Roethke. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

5.3: Theodore Roethke's “My Papa’s Waltz” (1948) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.4: Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" and "Fever 103°" (1962)

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Plath's father, a professor of biology at Boston University and an authoritarian figure within the family, died when Plath was eight years old, and Plath struggled for the rest of her life to come to terms with her complicated feelings for him. Plath's mother went to work to provide for Plath and her brother. From a young age, Plath was a high achiever, showing an early talent as a writer and poet. She received a scholarship to Smith College and, after graduating, was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to Cambridge University. In spite of a history of depression and one suicide attempt, Plath excelled at academics and worked diligently on her writing, periodically publishing her work. At Cambridge, Plath met the young, upcoming British poet Ted Hughes; the two shared an intense and immediate attraction, marrying only a few months later. Plath and Hughes enjoyed their first years together as writing partners, encouraging each other as poets. The two lived for a time in America, travelled broadly, and eventually returned to England to live. Plath gave birth to two children and engaged in domestic routines while still working on poems that would eventually be included in her posthumous collection, *Ariel* (1965). She continued to struggle with depression, and after discovering Ted Hughes's affair with a mutual friend, Assia Wevill, Plath's depression worsened. She eventually separated from Hughes and moved to London with her children in an attempt to start over on her own. Most of the poems that comprise *Ariel* were written while she lived in London. During a particularly difficult winter where she saw her novel *The Bell Jar* published to less than enthusiastic reviews in January 1963, Plath's mental state deteriorated. She committed suicide in February 1963, leaving her children behind, as well as the new collection of poems that would eventually make her famous after her death.



Image 6.11 | Sylvia Plath, n.d.
Photographer | Unknown
Source | Wikipedia
License | Fair Use

Plath's most critically acclaimed poems are those that appeared in her posthumous collection, *Ariel*. In these last poems composed before her suicide, Plath appears to have reached a new level of creative complexity in imagery and theme. Her poems exhibit a raw power and anger, as she battles with despair and attempts to find the fortitude to endure her psychic pain. Within the postmodern milieu and contributing to its innovations, Plath does not create a distinct persona through which she filters these intense, private emotions. Poetic form and tradition become less significant with postmodern poets, and the poet's voice achieves primacy, especially in the school of poetry termed "Confessional." Poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Anne Sexton, and Plath in the 1950s were willing to probe their psyches in very private, personal ways, "confessing" their deepest, most private, even disturbing feelings. In the time period, this kind of psychological probing of the self was new and provocative. From a feminist perspective, Plath in the *Ariel* poems openly explores her feelings of rage against the men in her life and against patriarchal authority in general. Plath also explores her feelings of ambivalence about being a mother, the cultural pressures she experienced of becoming a wife and mother, the pain she endured as a result of her husband's infidelity, and her battle with depression that culminated in suicide attempts. In "Daddy," the prevalent Nazi imagery is not autobiographical but is used to depict the extreme emotions at work in the narrative voice's desperate, raging attempt to cut the cord of paternalistic domination. The narrative voice urgently and angrily wants to break from daddy's control, domination, and influence in order to forge her own identity as a woman and as a person. In "Fever 103°," the narrative voice offers hallucinogenic images of a fevered self, burned pure of fleshly needs and desires into an acetylene virgin, a bodiless entity that is almost invisible but nevertheless combustible. In her virginal state, untouched by the "lecherous" patriarchy, she is most volatile and powerful.

"Daddy"

Please click the link to access this selection.

"Fever 103°"

Please click the link to access this selection.

Exercise 7.26.1

Reading and Review Questions

1. In Plath's "Daddy," analyze the imagery of Nazism associated with the "father" in the poem. What is the meaning of the imagery? Why is it so extreme?
2. In "Daddy," who or what is the narrator trying to break away from? Explain the nature of this break or escape the narrator is trying to make.
3. How would you describe the narrator of "Daddy": a victim? a survivor? a heroine?
4. In "Fever 103°," examine ways in which the flesh and the spirit (or soul) are distinguished through imagery.
5. Examine the nature of "fever" in "Fever 103°." What is the symbolic significance of "fever" in the poem?
6. Analyze the terms "purity" and "sin" in the poem in light the narrator's apparent transformation.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from Writing the Nation by Berke, Bleil, Cofer, & Davis, Professors (English) at Middle Georgia State University, College of Coastal Georgia, Georgia College, & Gordon State College. Sourced from University of North Georgia Press, license: CC-BY-NC-SA

5.4: Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" and "Fever 103°" (1962) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **7.26: Sylvia Plath** has no license indicated.

5.5: Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Pied Beauty" (1887)

Gerard Manley Hopkins, born to Manley and Catherine Smith in 1844, went to grammar school in Highgate then to Balliol College, Oxford. There, he won a poetry prize for “The Escorial,” a poem about a ruined palace built to St. Lawrence. His tutors at Oxford included Walter Pater and theologian Benjamin Jowett. Hopkins vacillated between his interest in aestheticism and religion, ultimately converting to Roman Catholicism through the influence of John Henry Newman. Like Wilde, Hopkins graduated with a double first in Classics. Before entering the Society of Jesus, Hopkins experimented with various styles of poetry, including the Romantics’ and D. G. Rossetti’s and Christina Rossetti’s.

In 1862, when he entered training as a Jesuit, Hopkins burned his poems, considering poetry to be a distraction. As a priest, Hopkins held various posts in industrial cities. He taught at a seminary, eventually becoming a professor of Greek at a Catholic university in Dublin. He was uncertain whether or not this work was the right form of service to God, and he endured a tension between his religious and artistic desires.

In 1875 occurred the wreck of the Deutschland in which five Franciscan nuns died. It moved Hopkins to write “The Wreck of the Deutschland,” the first of his major poems. Reading the works of Duns Scotus (1265-1308) helped Hopkins to reconcile his faith and art, particularly as Hopkins developed his concept of “inscape.” As with landscape, inscape draws relationships and patterns, connecting individual objects with their groups by their significant patterns.

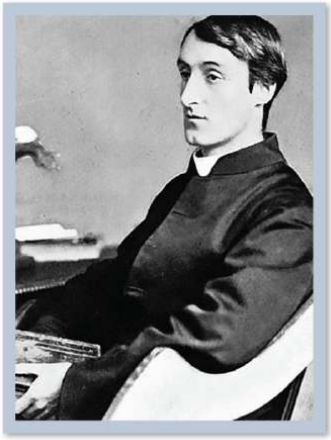


Image 2.33 | Photo of Gerard Manley Hopkins
Photographer | Unknown
Source | Wikimedia Commons
License | Public Domain

Through his study of Welsh, Hopkins developed another characteristic concept of his poetry, “sprung rhythm.” This unique, syncopated rhythm uses reversals of feet and is monosyllabic; the rhythm goes not by line but by stanza. Through it, Hopkins thought he could approximate ordinary speech in his poetry.

Up until 1884, Hopkins wrote a burst of poems, many of which used brilliant nature imagery. In the few years remaining before his death in 1889, Hopkins felt an alienation from God that he expressed in what are called the “terrible sonnets.” Few of Hopkins’s poems were published in the nineteenth century. His friend Robert Bridges published a heavily annotated edition of Hopkins’s poems in 1918.

"Pied Beauty"

Glory be to God for dappled things—

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;

    For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim:

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;

    And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

    With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

    Praise him.

? Exercise 5.5.1

Reading and Review Questions

1. Because the majority of his poems were published in the twentieth century, Hopkins’s work sometimes is characterized as modern rather than Victorian. What Victorian features, if any, does Hopkins’s poem possess?
2. How organic, if at all, are his images, and why?

3. What is the effect, if any, of Hopkins's unusual diction in his poems, including his use of archaic and compound words and dialect?
4. How does his concept of inscape shape the meaning and effect of the poem?

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from British Literature II - Romantic Era to the Twentieth Century and Beyond by Robinson. Sourced from LibreTexts , license: CC BY-SA

5.5: Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Pied Beauty" (1887) is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.6: Ben Jonson's "On My First Son" (1616)

Ben Jonson was born probably around London, though some scholars believe he was born in Westminster. He was probably born in 1572, though that has been disputed, as well. Jonson himself specifies the day of his birth as the eleventh of June. He was a posthumous child, his father, a minister, having died a month before Jonson's birth. His mother remarried a bricklayer, a trade to which Jonson was apprenticed but which he came to loathe. He was educated at the Royal College of St. Peter in Westminster where he studied grammar, rhetoric, Hebrew, and the Classics, including drama. He may have studied at Cambridge; he certainly participated in the English campaigns in the Netherlands. His proudest achievement during this campaign was his killing an enemy in single combat, and claiming the spoils of his defeated opponent.

He returned to London, and in 1594 married Anne Lewis. And he committed himself to a career in the theater, acting probably at Philip Henslowe's (1550-1616) Rose Theatre and later for Henry Herbert, 2nd Earl of Pembroke's (1538-1601) Men. He ultimately turned his talents to writing. Theaters were coming under Puritan attack, seen as places of corruption, scandal, and disease. Indeed, in 1597, Jonson was arrested and accused of performing in a seditious and scandalous play, *The Isle of Dogs*, but he was released within months. But Jonson's work did much to elevate the prestige of theaters and of playwrights. And he actively saw to the publication of his plays in individual and collected form, thereby claiming their importance and his own as a writer. Jonson's writing is noted for its adherence to classical models, its scholarship, wit, and style. The play he placed at the head of his collected *Works* was *Every Man in His Humour*, performed in 1598 by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company that included Shakespeare.

That same year, Jonson was arrested and tried for manslaughter. He pled guilty for having argued with and then having killed the actor Gabriel Spenser (1578-1598) in a duel. Jonson was branded with a hot iron and his goods were confiscated. He continued to write for the theater, though, including for Shakespeare's Globe. He also wrote poetry, odes, and satires. For his art and livelihood, Jonson actively sought and won support from patrons that included Sir Robert Thownshend (1512-1556), a wealthy Parliamentarian, and Esme Stuart, 7th Seigneur d'Aubigny (1542- 1583), who was a cousin of James I. With Inigo Jones (1573-1652), James I's architect, Jonson wrote several elaborate court masques. He eventually was awarded pensions from William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (1580-1630), and James I.



Image 3.6 | Ben Jonson
Artist | Abraham van Blijenberch
Source | Wikimedia Commons
License | Public Domain

Jonson became a leader of the men of letters of his day. Such cavalier poets (Royalist poets) as Robert Herrick and Richard Lovelace (1617-1657) described themselves as the "Sons of Ben" and followed Jonson in adhering to classical forms, rules, and unities. Jonson was granted honorary degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge. He also helped prepare for publication the collected works of Shakespeare, the *First Folio*, in which appears Jonson's poem "To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Master William Shakespeare, And What He Hath Left Us." His work influenced not only his own time but also the future, particularly the Neoclassical Age. His classically-inspired art improves on nature that "first beget the imperfect" by proceeding "she to the perfect" (*The Alchemist*, II.iii.158, 159).

"On My First Son"

Please click the link to access this poem on Poetry Foundation's website.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from British Literature I - Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century and Neoclassicism by Robinson and Getty. Sourced from LibreTexts , license: CC BY-SA

This page titled 5.6: Ben Jonson's "On My First Son" (1616) is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Bonnie J. Robinson & Laura Getty (University of North Georgia Press) .

5.7: Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842)

Robert Browning's father, Robert Browning, worked as a clerk in the Bank of England. His mother, Sarah Anna Wiedemann, was devoutly religious. So Browning was born into an apparently conventional middle-class Victorian household. But Browning's father had a strong scholarly bent and encouraged his son to delve into art and literature, particularly by means of the quirky personal library Browning senior had amassed. Browning consequently became something of an autodidact, even as he received formal education at home from his father. His mother, too, had a deep love of music that seems to have influenced Browning's work, both in style and subject matter.

Critics deemed Browning's first published work, *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* (1833), as too inclined towards Romanticism, revealing too much influence by Shelley. He consequently moved towards more objective expression, in both dramatic and poetic form, particularly his *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). Many poems in this collection take the Dramatic Monologue form. This form takes a relativistic attitude to Truth. Because it derives its effects from the ambiguity of values, it makes demands on the reader's perceptivity. Dramatic Monologues always have a single, first person speaker, an audience, and an action. The action is usually a deepening of the reader's understanding of the speaker's mind.

The Dramatic Monologue became a popular form in the Victorian era probably due to a reaction to Romanticism. The Romantics established the "I" as the prophetic speaker, the visionary voice, the authority. The Victorians were suspicious of this prophetic position; they wanted to establish a difference between the speaker and the poet and their different points of view, so they resorted to drama. Like the Romantics, though, Browning's poetry worked toward a greater understanding of human nature. The speakers of many of his poems stretch stereotypes and expectations. The titular speaker of "Porphyria's Lover," with terrifying passive aggression, strangles Porphyria to save her from her frivolous love—even though his voice, stance, and actions express extraordinary anger at a woman who rejects him as a social inferior yet who has "loved" him and clearly enjoys his suffering love for her.



Image 2.12 | Portrait of Robert Browning
Artist | Michele Gordigiani
Source | National Portrait Gallery
License | Public Domain

The Duke of Ferrari, the speaker in "My Last Duchess," seems indifferent to anyone's judgement but his own—to the point that he confesses to having his wife killed for not sufficiently deferring to his pride. The subject matter of this poem suggests Browning's interest in women's issues, in the situation of women condemned to remain under the rule of fathers and husbands who may be domestic tyrants and even murderers. And Browning's interest in religion appears through the "The Bishop Orders His Tomb," which criticizes the Oxford Movement and its goal of having England return to "ideal" Roman Catholicism.

In 1846, Browning eloped with Elizabeth Barrett to Italy where they had a son, Robert "Pen" Browning (1849-1912). After Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in 1861, Robert and Pen returned to London. Browning began to win critical acclaim, particularly with the publication of his monumental *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69), a poem based on the seventeenth-century trial testimony of an Italian nobleman condemned to death for murdering his wife.

"My Last Duchess"

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive. I call

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will't please you sit and look at her?I said

'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ‘twas not
Her husband’s presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess’ cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say ‘Her mantle laps
Over my lady’s wrist too much,’ or, ‘Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:’ such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate’er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, ‘twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody’s gift. Who’d stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, ‘Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark’—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
– E’en that would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene’er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will’t please you rise? We’ll meet



Image 2.13 | My Last Duchess
Artist | Agnolo Bronzino
Source | Wikimedia Commons
License | Public Domain

The company below, then. I repeat,

The Count your master’s known munificence

Is ample warrant that no just pretence

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;

Though his fair daughter’s self, as I avowed

At starting, is my object. Nay, we’ll go

Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,

Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,

Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

? Exercise 5.7.1

Reading and Review Questions

1. How, if at all, does Browning evoke sympathy for his speaker, and why? What are the possible dangers of such sympathy? What are the possible strengths?
2. The Romantics suggested that “heaven” could be reached through the senses. Does Browning’s use of concrete details, details evoking the senses, appeal solely to the senses? Why, or why not?
3. Why, and to what effect, does Browning use actual figures from the historical past? Why would readers be interested in figures who lived at least 100 years before their own time? How, if at all, does Browning make these figures relevant, and why?
4. How moral is the speaker in his dramatic monologue? How do you know? What’s the effect of his morality, or lack thereof?

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from British Literature II - Romantic Era to the Twentieth Century and Beyond by Robinson. Sourced from LibreTexts , license: CC BY-SA

5.7: Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842) is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.8: William Shakespeare's Sonnets 73 and 116 (1609)

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, and he died on April 23. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, and he died in Stratford-upon-Avon. These facts frame many additional facts and many conjectures. He probably received an education in Latin studies at the town's grammar school, as his father was a municipal officer (mayor and justice of the peace) so could send his son to the school for free. At the age of eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway (1556-1623), a woman who was eight years his senior and who lived in nearby Shottery. Their child Susanna (1583-1649) was born five months later. Two years after that, their twins Hamnet and Judith were born, with Hamnet dying at the age of eleven and Judith surviving to the age of seventy-seven. Anne outlived Shakespeare by seven years, receiving in his will his second-best bed and being buried next to him in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Stratford-upon-Avon.



Image 2.15 | William Shakespeare
Artist | John Taylor
Source | Wikimedia Commons
License | Public Domain

Seven years after the birth of the twins, Robert Greene (1558-1592) writes of Shakespeare as an actor and playwright in London, describing him in Greenes Groatsworth of Wit (1592) as "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country." Green was a member of the "University Wits," a group of Cambridge and Oxford young men—including Christopher Marlowe—that sought to bring their classical learning to the stage. Although Shakespeare attended neither Cambridge nor Oxford, his early plays echo Marlowe's blank verse; indeed, Shakespeare's Henry VI Parts I, II, and III, according to the Oxford University Press, may have been co-written by Marlowe, so Marlowe's influence may have been direct. Shakespeare also demonstrated classical learning on the stage with his Plautean Comedy of Errors (performed in 1594) and his Senecan tragedy Titus Andronicus (performed in 1594).

He dedicated two classically-themed poems to his patron Henry Wriothesley, third earl of Southampton. Both Venus and Adonis (1593) and The Rape of Lucrece (1594) were published as quarto pamphlets, with Venus and Adonis running through eighteen editions and The Rape of Lucrece, eight editions by 1655. In 1594, Shakespeare was a partner in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a theater company from which he derived profits for such plays as Romeo and Juliet (performed around 1595-1596), The Merchant of Venice (performed around 15996-97), Henry IV Parts I and II (performed around 1597-1598), and Twelfth Night: Or, What You Will (performed around 1600-1602).

From 1595, he also probably worked on his sonnet sequence that was not published until 1609. These sonnets employ numerous conventions, such as the idealized and aloof woman. He also used the already-extant rhyme scheme of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Yet he used it so deftly and naturally that the form is now known as the Shakespearean sonnet. His sonnets reflect on the power of poetry and the matters of poetic art, such as romantic love, in language that compels belief in their truth and authenticity—even though their possibly autobiographical elements have not been proven. For example, they trace a friendship with a beautiful young man and a romance with a dark lady. The identity of either of these figures is unknown, though early conjectures identify the young man as Shakespeare's patron Wriothesley and the dark lady as a sonnet convention along the lines of Petrarch's Laura. When published, the sequence was dedicated to an unknown Mr. W. H., described as the sonnets' only begetter.

In 1599, Shakespeare's company built the Globe Theater, with Shakespeare being one of six shareholders; the others included the great actor Richard Burbage (1567-1619) and John Heminges (1566-1630) who, with Henry Condell (1576-1627), edited the First Folio (1623) collection of Shakespeare's plays. In 1613, during a performance of Shakespeare's Henry VIII, the Globe was destroyed by fire but was rebuilt the next year. Upon the accession of James I (1603), the Lord Chamberlain's Men was renamed the King's Men, and Shakespeare began writing his greatest tragedies, including Othello (performed around 1604), King Lear

(performed around 1605-1606), and Macbeth (performed around 1606). With his profits, Shakespeare built New Place, the second largest house in Stratford-upon-Avon.

In 1606, the King's Men acquired a private theater, Blackfriars, along with its playwrights Francis Beaumont (1584-1616) and John Fletcher (1579-1625), whose style may have influenced Shakespeare's final romances, including Cymbeline (performed around 1609-1610), The Winter's Tale (performed around 1610-1611), and The Tempest (performed in 1611). Shakespeare collaborated with Fletcher on Henry VIII (performed around 1612-1613), The Two Noble Kinsmen (performed around 1612- 1613), and Cardenio (performed around 1612-1613). In 1613, Shakespeare retired to Stratford-upon-Avon. He died in 1616, a little over two months after his daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney (1589-1663).

Although these facts seem sparse, they are more in number than facts known about other playwrights of Shakespeare's time. Yet, they still offer too little knowledge to those around the world who have loved Shakespeare's works over the course of four hundred years—a man whose invented words enrich the English language; whose characters fill imaginations; and whose range of style, sheer beauty of expression, and depth and breadth of insight authenticate the most profound of human emotions.

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed, whereon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from British Literature I - Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century and Neoclassicism by Robinson and Getty. Sourced from LibreTexts , license: CC BY-SA

Public domain content

- The Sonnets. **Authored by**: William Shakespeare. **Located at**: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1041. **License**: *Public Domain: No Known Copyright*

5.8: William Shakespeare's Sonnets 73 and 116 (1609) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.9: Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" (1863)

The following content originally appeared in *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present* by the University System of Georgia, and is used in accordance to license CC BY-SA 4.0.



Born into an influential and socially prominent New England family in 1830, Emily Dickinson benefited from a level of education and mobility that most of her contemporaries, female and male, could not comprehend. The middle child of Edward Dickinson and Emily Norcross, Dickinson, along with her older brother Austin and younger sister Lavinia, received both an extensive formal education and the informal education that came by way of countless visitors to the family homestead during Edward Dickinson's political career. Contrary to popular depictions of her life, Dickinson did travel outside of Amherst but ultimately chose to remain at home in the close company of family and friends. An intensely private person, Dickinson exerted almost singular control over the distribution of her poetry during her lifetime. That control, coupled with early portrayals of her as reclusive, has led many readers to assume that Dickinson was a fragile and timid figure whose formal, mysterious, concise, and clever poetry revealed the mind of a writer trapped in the rigid gender confines of the nineteenth century. More recent scholarship demonstrates not only the fallacy of Dickinson's depiction as the ghostly "Belle of Amherst," but also reveals the technical complexity of her poetry that predates the Modernism of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore by almost threequarters of a century. In the selections that follow, Dickinson's poetry displays both her technical proficiency and her embrace of techniques that were new to the nineteenth century. Like her contemporary Walt Whitman, Dickinson used poetry to show her readers familiar landscapes from a fresh perspective.

"Because I could not stop for Death"

Because I could not stop for Death—
He kindly stopped for me—
The Carriage held but just Ourselves—
And Immortality.

We slowly drove—He knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility—

We passed the School, where Children strove
At recess—in the ring—
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain—
We passed the Setting Sun—

Or rather—He passed Us—
The Dews drew quivering and chill—
For only Gossamer, my Gown—
My Tippet—only Tulle—

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground—
The Roof was scarcely visible—
The Cornice—in the Ground—

Since then—’tis centuries— and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses’ Heads
Were toward Eternity—

5.9: Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" (1863) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.10: Edna St. Vincent Millay's "I, being born a woman and distressed" (1923)



Image 5.7 | Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1933
Photographer | Carl Van Vechten
Source | Wikimedia Commons
License | Public Domain

Millay represents both a continuation of poetic traditions and a new approach to appropriate subject matter for women's poetry. Like many female poets of the early part of the twentieth century, Millay appears at once to straddle two worlds: on one hand her poetry shows great technical skill, which permits her entry into the ranks of so-called serious poets, while on the other hand, her verses show a lightness, a frankness, and a freshness from which a poet like Dickinson would retreat. For Millay and other female poets, as for their African-American contemporaries like Countee Cullen, it was often necessary to embrace traditional poetic forms even as their subject matter was decidedly modern.

One of three daughters of a divorced mother at the turn of the century, Millay's early successes resulted in the unusual opportunity to attend Vassar College in her early twenties, and these social and educational connections proved highly useful to the young writer. A gifted playwright as well as a poet, Millay was a member of the experimental theatre group, the Provincetown Players, for whom she frequently wrote while also composing several books of poetry. As a sometime expatriate in the 1920s, Millay liberally combined traditional poetic forms and contemporary subjects in her verse, prose, and drama. The winner of the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1923, for *The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver*, Millay was both a critically and a commercially successful writer.

"I, being born a woman and distressed"

Please click the link to access this poem on Poetry Foundation's website.

? Exercise 5.10.1

Reading and Review Questions

1. How does Millay's choice of the sonnet form distinguish her work from that of other Modernists such as Eliot? Also, why do writers like Cullen and Millay experiment with the sonnet form?
2. Millay is one of the first American poets to write candidly about female sexuality. How does Millay's poetry reflect the attitudes of Modernism in relation to female sexuality?

This page titled 5.10: Edna St. Vincent Millay's "I, being born a woman and distressed" (1923) is shared under a CC BY 4.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Berke, Bleil, & Cofer (University of North Georgia Press) via source content that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.11: Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921) and "Let America Be America Again" (1935)

James Mercer Langston Hughes (February 1, 1902 – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from Joplin, Missouri.

He was one of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form called jazz poetry. Hughes is best known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance in New York City. He famously wrote about the period that "the negro was in vogue," which was later paraphrased as "when Harlem was in vogue."

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

"Let America Be America Again"

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home—
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—

And yet must be—the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Let America Be America Again. **Authored by**: Langston Hughes. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Let_America_be_America_Again. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*
- Biography of Langston Hughes. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Langston_Hughes. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

This page titled 5.11: Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921) and "Let America Be America Again" (1935) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.12: Judith Ortiz Cofer's "El Olvido" (1987)

Judith Ortiz Cofer (February 24, 1952 – December 30, 2016) was a Puerto Rican American author. Her critically acclaimed and award-winning work spans a range of literary genres including poetry, short stories, autobiography, essays, and young-adult fiction. Ortiz Cofer was the Emeritus Regents' and Franklin Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Georgia, where she taught undergraduate and graduate creative writing workshops for 26 years. In 2010, Ortiz Cofer was inducted into the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame, and in 2013, she won the University's 2014 Southeastern Conference Faculty Achievement Award.

"El Olvido"

Please click the link to access this poem on Poetry Foundation's website.

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Biography of Judith Ortiz Cofer. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith_Ortiz_Cofer. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

5.12: Judith Ortiz Cofer's "El Olvido" (1987) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.13: Additional Readings

5.13: Additional Readings is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.13.1: Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599)

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
By shallow rivers to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

And I will make thee beds of roses
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle;

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull;
Fair lined slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold;

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs:
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherds' swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning:
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love.

This page titled 5.13.1: Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **7.16: Marlowe, Christopher. "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

5.13.2: Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" (1600)

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Time drives the flocks from field to fold
When Rivers rage and Rocks grow cold,
And *Philomel* becometh dumb;
The rest complains of cares to come.

The flowers do fade, and wanton fields
To wayward winter reckoning yields;
A honey tongue, a heart of gall,
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

Thy gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies
Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten:
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

Thy belt of straw and Ivy buds,
Thy coral clasps and amber studs,
All these in me no means can move
To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last and love still breed,
Had joys no date nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee and be thy love.

This page titled 5.13.2: Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" (1600) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **7.19: Raleigh, Walter. "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" (1600)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

5.13.3: Margaret Cavendish's "The Hunting of the Hare" (1653)

Betwixt two Ridges of land, lay Wat,
Pressing his Body close to Earth lay squat.
His Nose upon his two Fore-feet close lies,
Glaring obliquely with his great gray Fyes.
His Head he alwaies sets against the Wind;
If turne his Taile his Haires blow up behind:
Which he too cold will grow, but he is wise,
And keepes his Coat still downe, so warm he lies.
Thus resting all the day, till Sun doth set,
Then riseth up, his Reliefe for to get.
Walking about until the Sun doth rise,
Then back returnes, downe in his Forme he lyes.
At last, Poore Wat was found, as he there lay,
By Hunts-men, with their Dogs which came that way.
Seeing, gets up, and fast begins to run,
Hoping some waies the 〈◊〉 Dogs to shun.
But they by Nature have so quick a Sent,
That by their Nose they trace what way he went.
And with their deep, wide Mouths set forth a Cry,
Which answer'd was by Ecchoes in the Skie.
Then Wat was struck with Terrour, and with Feare,
Thinkes every Shadow still the Dogs they were.
And running out some distance from the noise,
To hide himselfe, his Thoughts he new imploies.
Under a Clod of Earth in Sand-pit wide,
Poore Wat fat close, hoping himselfe to hide.
There long he 〈◊〉 not sat, but strait his Eares
The Winding 〈◊〉, and crying Dogs he heares:
Starting with Feare, up leapes, then doth he run,
And with such speed, the Ground scarce treades upon.
Into a great thick Wood 〈◊〉 strait way gets,
Where underneath a broken Bough he sits.
At every Lease that with the wind did shake,
Did bring such 〈◊〉, made his Heart to ake.
That Place he left, to Champian Plaines he went,
Winding about, for to deceive their Sent.
And while they 〈◊〉 were, to sind his Track,

Poore Wat, being weary, his swift pace did slack.
On his two hinder legs for ease did sit,
His Fore-feet rub'd his Face from Dust, and Sweat.
Licking his Feet, he wip'd his Eares so cleane,
That none could tell that Wat had hunted been.
But casting round about his faire great Eyes,
The Hounds in full Careere he him 'spies:
To Wat it was so terrible a Sight,
Feare gave him Wings, and made his Body light.
Though weary was before, by running long,
Yet now his Breath he never felt more strong.
Like those that dying are, think Health returnes,
When tis but a faint Blast, which Life out burnes.
For Spirits seek to guard the Heart about,
Striving with Death, but Death doth quench them out.
Thus they so fast came on, with such loud Cries,
That he no hopes hath left, nor help espies.
With that the Winds did pity poore Wats case,
And with their Breath the Sent blew from the Place.
Then every Nose is busily imployed,
And every Nostrill is set open, wide:
And every Head doth seek a severall way,
To find what , or Track, the Sent on lay.
Thus quick Industry, that is not slack,
Is like to Witchery, brings lost things back.
For though the Wind had the Sent up close,
A Busie Dog thrust in his Nose:
And drew it out, with it did foremost run,
Then Hornes blew loud, for th' rest to follow on.
The great slow-Hounds, their throats did set a Base,
The Fleet swift Hounds, as Tenours next in place;
The little Beagles they a Trebble sing,
And through the Aire their Voice a round did ring?
Which made a Consort, as they ran along;
If they but words could speak, might sing a Song,
The Hornes kept time, the Hunters shout for Joy,
And valiant seeme, poore Wat for to destroy:
Spurring their Horses to a full Careere,

Swim Rivers deep, leap Ditches without feare;
Indanger Life, and Limbes, so fast will ride,
Onely to see how patiently Wat died.
For why, the Dogs so neere his Heeles did get,
That they their sharp Teeth in his Breech did set.
Then tumbling downe, did fall with weeping Eyes,
Gives up his Ghost, and thus poore Wat he dies.
Men hooping loud, such Acclamations make,
As if the Devill they did Prisoner take.
When they do but a shiftlesse Creature kill;
To hunt, there needs no Valiant Souldiers skill.
But Man doth think that Exercise, and Toile,
To keep their Health, is best, which makes most spoile.
Thinking that Food, and Nourishment so good,
And Appetite, that feeds on Flesh, and Blood.
When they do Lions, Wolves, Beares, Tigers see,
To kill poore Sheep, strait say, they cruell be.
But for themselves all Creatures think too few,
For Luxury, wish God would make them new.
As if that God made Creatures for Mans meat,
To give them Life, and Sense, for Man to eat;
Or else for Sport, or Recreations sake,
Destroy those Lifes that God saw good to make:
Making their Stomacks, Graves, which full they fill
With Murther'd Bodios, that in sport they kill.
Yet Man doth think himselfe so gentle, mild,
When he of Creatures is most cruell wild.
And is so Proud, thinks onely he shall live,
That God a God-like Nature did him give.
And that all Creatures for his sake alone,
Was made for him, to Tyramize upon.

This page titled 5.13.3: Margaret Cavendish's "The Hunting of the Hare" (1653) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **7.8: Cavendish, Margaret. "The Hunting of the Hare" (1653)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

5.13.4: Phillis Wheatley's "An Hymn to the Morning" and "An Hymn to the Evening" (1773)

Selections from *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*



Portrait of Phillis Wheatley which appeared in *Revue des Colonies* in Paris between 1834 and 1842 (Source: Schomburg Center via Public Domain Review)

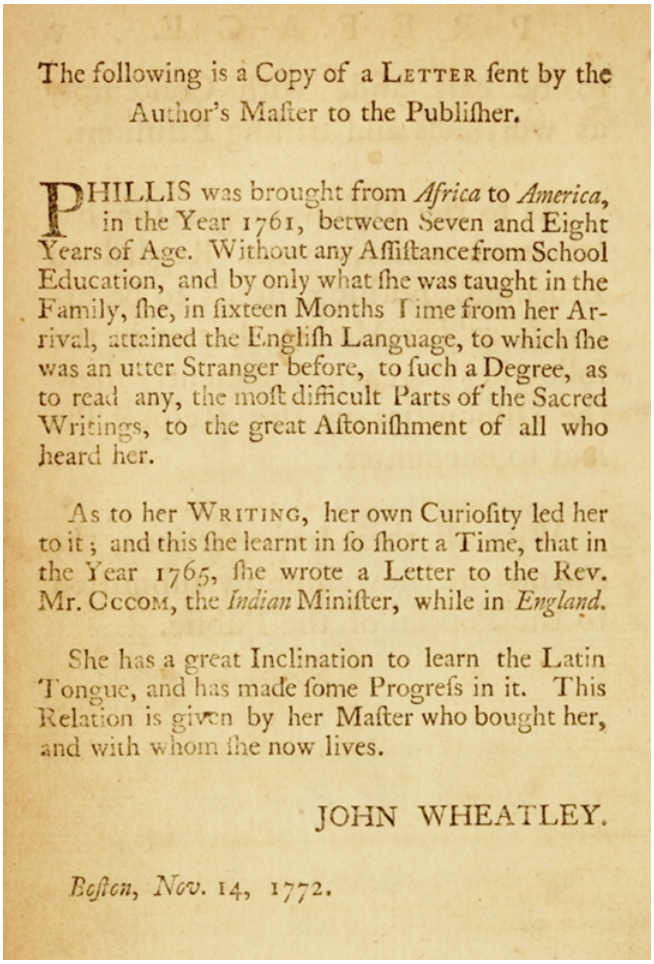
An Hymn to the Morning

ATTEND my lays, ye ever honour'd nine,
Assist my labours, and my strains refine;
In smoothest numbers pour the notes along,
For bright Aurora now demands my song.
Aurora hail, and all the thousand dies,
Which deck thy progress through the vaulted skies:
The morn awakes, and wide extends her rays,
On ev'ry leaf the gentle zephyr plays;
Harmonious lays the feather'd race resume,
Dart the bright eye, and shake the painted plume.
Ye shady groves, your verdant gloom display
To shield your poet from the burning day:
Calliope awake the sacred lyre,
While thy fair sisters fan the pleasing fire:
The bow'rs, the gales, the variegated skies
In all their pleasures in my bosom rise.
See in the east th' illustrious king of day!
His rising radiance drives the shades away--
But Oh! I feel his fervid beams too strong,
And scarce begun, concludes th' abortive song.

An Hymn to the Evening

SOON as the sun forsook the eastern main
The pealing thunder shook the heav'nly plain;
Majestic grandeur! From the zephyr's wing,
Exhales the incense of the blooming spring.
Soft purl the streams, the birds renew their notes,
And through the air their mingled music floats.
Through all the heav'ns what beauteous dies are spread!
But the west glories in the deepest red:
So may our breasts with ev'ry virtue glow,
The living temples of our God below!
Fill'd with the praise of him who gives the light,
And draws the sable curtains of the night,
Let placid slumbers sooth each weary mind,
At morn to wake more heav'nly, more refin'd;
So shall the labours of the day begin
More pure, more guarded from the snares of sin.
Night's leaden sceptre seals my drowsy eyes,
Then cease, my song, till fair Aurora rise.

Letter from John Wheatley to the English publisher of Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773).



The following is a Copy of a LETTER ſent by the Author's Maſter to the Publiſher.

PHILLIS was brought from *Africa* to *America*, in the Year 1761, between Seven and Eight Years of Age. Without any Aſſiſtance from School Education, and by only what ſhe was taught in the Family, ſhe, in ſixteen Months Time from her Arrival, attained the Engliſh Language, to which ſhe was an utter Stranger before, to ſuch a Degree, as to read any, the moſt difficult Parts of the Sacred Writings, to the great Aſtoniſhment of all who heard her.

As to her WRITING, her own Curioſity led her to it; and this ſhe learnt in ſo ſhort a Time, that in the Year 1765, ſhe wrote a Letter to the Rev. Mr. OCCOM, the *Indian* Miniſter, while in *England*.

She has a great Inclination to learn the Latin Tongue, and has made ſome Progreſs in it. This Relation is given by her Maſter who bought her, and with whom ſhe now lives.

JOHN WHEATLEY.

Boſton, Nov. 14, 1772.

Phillis was brought from Africa to America in the year 1761, between seven and eight years of age. Without any assistance

from school education, and by only what she was taught in the family, she, in sixteen months time from her arrival, attained the English language, to which she was an utter stranger before, to such a degree, as to read any, the most difficult parts of the sacred writings, to the great astonishment of all who heard her.

As to her writing, her own curiosity led her to it; and this she learned in so short a time, that in the year 1765 she wrote a letter to the Rev. Mr. Occum, the Indian minister, while in England.

She has a great inclination to learn the Latin Tongue, and has made some progress in it. This relation is given by her master, who bought her, and with whom she now lives.

John Wheatley.

Boston, Nov. 14, 1772.

This page titled 5.13.4: Phillis Wheatley's "An Hymn to the Morning" and "An Hymn to the Evening" (1773) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **7.21: Wheatley, Phillis. Selections from Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral (1773)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

5.13.5: Robert Burns' "To a Mouse" (1785)

Wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a pannic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry man's dominion,
Has broken nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

I doubt na, whiles, but thou may thieve;
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen icker in a thrave
'S a sma' request;
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,
An' never miss't!

Thy wee bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,
An' weary winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell-
Till crash! the cruel coulter past
Out thro' thy cell.

Thy wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,
Has cost thee mony a weary nibble!
Now thou's turn'd out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald,
To thole the winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld!

But, Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,
In proving foresight may be vain;
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!

Still thou art blest, compar'd wi' me
The present only toucheth thee:
But, Och! I backward cast my e'e.
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear

This page titled 5.13.5: Robert Burns' "To a Mouse" (1785) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.13.6: John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819)

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.
O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:
Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.
Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.
I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.
Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.
Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.
Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades

Past the near meadows, over the still stream,

Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep

In the next valley-glades:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

This page titled 5.13.6: John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.13.7: Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832-42)

"The Lady of Shalott"



"Illustration to Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott'" by W. E. F. Britten (1901) is in the public domain

I

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And through the field the road runs by
To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott,

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Through the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and for gray towers
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle embowers
The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow-veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly

Down to tower’d Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers, “’Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott.

II

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down on Camelot.
She know not what the curse may be
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving through a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-haired page in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower’d Camelot;
And sometimes through the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two;
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror’s magic sights,
For often through the silent nights
A funeral with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed;
“I am half sick of shadows,” said
The Lady of Shalott.

III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling through the leaves
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.

A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glittered free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot.
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewelled shone the saddle-leather;
The helmet and the helmet feather
Burned like one burning flame together.
As he rode down to Camelot.
As often through the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed;
On burnished hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flowed
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flashed into the crystal mirror;
"Tirra lirra" by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces through the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She looked down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror cracked from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat

Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse –
Like some bold seer in trance,
Seeing all his own mischance –
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right –
The leaves upon her falling light –
Through the noises of the night
As she floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
Turned to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reached upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? And what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they crossed themselves for fear,
All the knights at Camelot;
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;

God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott”.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from "A.L.Tennyson: The Lady of Shalott" from NDLA by Jan-Louis Nagel (2018) CC BY-SA

This page titled 5.13.7: Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832-42) is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.13.8: Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Song to the Men of England" (1839)

Men of England, wherefore plough
For the lords who lay ye low?
Wherefore weave with toil and care
The rich robes your tyrants wear?

Wherefore feed, and clothe, and save,
From the cradle to the grave,
Those ungrateful drones who would
Drain your sweat – nay, drink your blood?

Wherefore, bees of England, forge
Many weapon, chain and scourge,
That these stingless drones may spoil
The forced produce of your toil?

Have ye leisure, comfort, calm,
Shelter, food, love's gentle balm?
Or what is ye buy so dear
With your pain and with your fear?

The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps;
The robes ye weave, another wears;
The arms ye forge, another bears.

Sow seed, - but let no tyrant reap;
Find wealth, - but let no imposter heap;
Weave robes, - let no idle wear;
Forge arms, - in your defence to bear.

Shrink to your cellars, holes and cells;
In halls ye deck, another dwells.
Why shake the chains ye wrought? Ye see
The steel ye tempered glance on ye.

With plough and spade, and hoe and loom,
Trace your grave, and build your tomb,
And weave your winding-sheet, till fair
England be your sepulchre.

This page titled 5.13.8: Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Song to the Men of England" (1839) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.13.9: Walt Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums!" (1861)



Image 1.1 | Walt Whitman, 1887.
Photographer | George C. Cox
Source | Wikimedia Commons
License | Public Domain

"Beat! Beat! Drums!"

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!

Through the windows—through doors—burst like a ruthless force,

Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,

Into the school where the scholar is studying,

Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with his bride,

Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain,

So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!

Over the traffic of cities—over the rumble of wheels in the streets;

Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the houses? no sleepers must sleep in those beds,

No bargainers' bargains by day—no brokers or speculators—would they continue?

Would the talkers be talking? would the singer attempt to sing?

Would the lawyer rise in the court to state his case before the judge?

Then rattle quicker, heavier drums—you bugles wilder blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!

Make no parley—stop for no expostulation,

Mind not the timid—mind not the weeper or prayer,

Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,

Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the mother's entreaties,

Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the hearses,

So strong you thump O terrible drums—so loud you bugles blow.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Walt Whitman: I Hear America Singing, Writer: Jan-Louis Nagel, Provided by NDLA, license: CC CC-BY-SA-4.0
- Adapted from Writing the Nation, provided by Libretexts, license: CC-BY-SA

This page titled 5.13.9: Walt Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums!" (1861) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.13.10: Stephen Crane's "In the Desert" (1895)

In the desert

I saw a creature, naked, bestial,

Who, squatting upon the ground,

Held his heart in his hands,

And ate of it.

I said, “Is it good, friend?”

“It is bitter—bitter,” he answered;

“But I like it

Because it is bitter,

And because it is my heart.”

This page titled 5.13.10: Stephen Crane's "In the Desert" (1895) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **7.9: Crane, Stephen. "In the Desert" (1895)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

5.13.11: Alice Ruth Moore's "Amid the Roses" (1895)

There is tropical warmth and languorous life
    Where the roses lie
    In a tempting drift
Of pink and red and golden light
Untouched as yet by the pruning knife.
And the still, warm life of the roses fair
    That whisper "Come,"
    With promises
Of sweet caresses, close and pure
Has a thorny whiff in the perfumed air.
There are thorns and love in the roses' bed,
    And Satan too
    Must linger there;
So Satan's wiles and the conscience stings,
Must now abide—the roses are *dead*.

This page titled 5.13.11: Alice Ruth Moore's "Amid the Roses" (1895) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **7.17: Moore, Alice Ruth. "Amid the Roses" (1895)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

5.13.12: Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Richard Cory" (1897)

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,

We people on the pavement looked at him:

He was a gentleman from sole to crown,

Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,

And he was always human when he talked;

But still he fluttered pulses when he said,

"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—

And admirably schooled in every grace:

In fine, we thought that he was everything

To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,

And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;

And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,

Went home and put a bullet through his head.

This page titled 5.13.12: Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Richard Cory" (1897) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **7.20: Robinson, Edwin Arlington. "Richard Cory" (1897)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

5.13.13: Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (1916)



CC-BY-NC-4.0 Photographer: Ole Fossgård

"The Road Not Taken"

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in the wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from Robert Frost: The Road Not Taken, Writer: Jan-Louis Nagel, Provided by NDLA, CC CC-BY-SA-4.0

This page titled 5.13.13: Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (1916) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.13.14: William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923)

So much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

This page titled 5.13.14: William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.13.15: Yoon Dong-joo's "A Poem That Came Easily" (1942)

"A Poem That Came Easily"

The night rain whispers outside the window
of my six-mat room, in an alien country.
The poet has a sad vocation, I know:
should I write another line of poetry?
Having received my tuition from home in an envelope
soaked with the small of sweat and love,
I tuck my college notebook under my arm
and go off to listen to the lecture of an old professor.
Looking back, I see that I have lost my childhood friends:
one and two at a time—all of them.
What was it that I was hoping for,
and why am I simply sinking to the bottom alone?
Life is meant to be difficult:
it is too bad
that a poem comes so easily to me.
My six-mat room in an alien country:
The night rain whispers outside the window.
I light the lamp to drive out the darkness a little,
and I, in my last moments, wait for the morning,
which will come like a new era.
Extending a small hand to myself,
I offer myself the very first handshake,
tears, and condolences.

June 3, 1942

Contributors

- Poems and biography excerpted from *Sky, Wind, and Stars* (2003) reprinted with permission from Jain Publishing Company, Kyung-nyun Kim Richards and Steffen F. Richards. Licensed CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

This page titled 5.13.15: Yoon Dong-joo's "A Poem That Came Easily" (1942) is shared under a CC BY-NC-ND license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

5.13.16: Maya Angelou's “On the Pulse of Morning” (1993)

Maya Angelou’s 1993 inaugural poem and remarks

12 January 2009

This document and its associated audio file (5:48) are distributed with permission of the Clinton Presidential Library.

Mr. President and Mrs. Clinton,
Mr. Vice-President and Mrs. Gore,
And Americans Everywhere …

A Rock, A River, A Tree
Hosts to species long since departed,
Marked the mastodon.

The dinosaur, who left dry tokens
Of their sojourn here
On our planet floor,
Any broad alarm of their hastening doom
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,
Come, you may stand upon my
Back and face your distant destiny,
But seek no haven in my shadow.

I will give you no hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than
The angels, have crouched too long in
The bruising darkness,
Have lain too long
Face down in ignorance.

Your mouths spilling words
Armed for slaughter.

The Rock cries out to us today, you may stand on me,
But do not hide your face.

Across the wall of the world,
A River sings a beautiful song,
It says come rest here by my side.

Each of you a bordered country,
Delicate and strangely made proud,
Yet thrusting perpetually under siege.

Your armed struggles for profit
Have left collars of waste upon
My shore, currents of debris upon my breast.

Yet, today I call you to my riverside,
If you will study war no more. Come,

Clad in peace and I will sing the songs
The Creator gave to me when I and the
Tree and the rock were one.

Before cynicism was a bloody sear across your
Brow and when you yet knew you still

Knew nothing.

The River sang and sings on.

There is a true yearning to respond to
The singing River and the wise Rock.

So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew
The African, the Native American, the Sioux,
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheikh,
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,
The privileged, the homeless, the Teacher.
They all hear
The speaking of the Tree.

They hear the the first and last of every Tree
Speak to humankind today. Come to me, here beside the River.

Plant yourself beside the River.

Each of you, descendant of some passed
On traveller, has been paid for.

You, who gave me my first name, you
Pawnee, Apache, Seneca, you
Cherokee Nation, who rested with me, then
Forced on bloody feet, left me to the employment of
Other seekers–desperate for gain,
Starving for gold.

You, the Turk, the Swede, the German, the Eskimo, the Scot …
You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru, bought
Sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare
Praying for a dream.

Here, root yourselves beside me.

I am that Tree planted by the River,
Which will not be moved.

I, the Rock, I the River, I the Tree
I am yours–your Passages have been paid.

Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need
For this bright morning dawning for you.

History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyes upon
This day breaking for you.

Give birth again
To the dream.

Women, children, men,
Take it into the palms of your hands.

Mold it into the shape of your most
Private need. Sculpt it into
The image of your most public self.

Lift up your hearts
Each new hour holds new chances
For new beginnings.

Do not be wedded forever
To fear, yoked eternally
To brutishness.

The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.
Here, on the pulse of this fine day
You may have the courage
To look up and out and upon me, the
Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.

No less to Midas than the mendicant.

No less to you now than the mastodon then.

Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes, and into
Your brother's face, your country
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.

Read more: http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2009/01/20090112155227berehellek0.2457697.html#ixzz3oNfd7X00

Maya Angelou (born **Marguerite Annie Johnson**; April 4, 1928 – May 28, 2014) was an American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist. She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, and was credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees. Angelou is best known for her series of seven autobiographies, which focus on her childhood and early adult experiences. The first, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), tells of her life up to the age of 17 and brought her international recognition and acclaim.

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Biography of Maya Angelou. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_Angelou. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

Public domain content

- On the Pulse of the Morning. **Authored by**: Maya Angelou. **Located at**: http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2009/01/20090112155227berehellek0.2457697.html#axzz3oNfJyFyy. **License**: *Public Domain: No Known Copyright*

5.13.16: Maya Angelou's "On the Pulse of Morning" (1993) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **5.11: Maya Angelou, "On the Pulse of Morning," 1993** by Lumen Learning is licensed Public Domain.

5.13.17: Sean Hill's "Distance Between Desires" (2013)

Distance Between Desires

From the moon to the end of this poem
hums the distance between desires.
In troughs of night Jasmine slept,
numb from the consumption of rays

from the moon. Through to its end, this poem
fends off desire. A toast to the heavy
drum that pulls us daily and urges that we

hum the distance. Between desires,
men scoff at the moon, hung lightly to shine
plum-dark night as they measure breaths

from the moon to the end. Of our poems,
ends tossed out to hold them off, we hope
some may say they rumble on and pleasingly

hum the distance between. Desires
bend us and bend. Doff your hat, where I come
from, a show of respect. Desires plumb where we come
from. The moon to the end of this poem
lends soft light. As one desire leaves another
hums the distance between desires.

Author Bio

- Sean Hill is an award-winning poet and professor of poetry.

Attribution

- This poem was originally published in *Dangerous Goods* (2013) and is used with CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 permission from Sean Hill and Milkweed Editions.

This page titled 5.13.17: Sean Hill's "Distance Between Desires" (2013) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **7.13: Hill, Sean. "Distance Between Desires" from Dangerous Goods (2013)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

5.13.18: Hieu Minh Nguyen's "The Study" and "White Boy Time Machine- Override" (2018)

The Study

For the longest time, the only memories I had
of that year were of Little Billy from the third floor,
floating
dead in the pool & how angry the rest of the tenants
were
when they drained & filled it with cement
& how that summer, the unbearable heat dragged its
endless skin
across our bones — memory is the funniest character in
this story:
when I think of that year, no one has a face — the first
memory
I had of being molested did not come until nine years
later.
At first I thought it was a dream, a movie, white noise
summoning a narrative through the static — if it's true
what they say about memory being a series of rooms
then behind some locked door: a wicked apothecary: her
fingers
trapped in jars, her hair growing like wild vines along
the walls.
Somewhere in this story I am nine years old
filling the loud hollows with cement to drown out the
ghost.
They say, *give us details*, so I give them my body.
They say, *give us proof*, so I give them my body.
If you cut me open, if you dissect me you will pull from
me:
a pair of handprints, a nine-year-old boy, fossilized.

White Boy Time Machine: Override

No matter where we go, there's a history
of white men describing a landscape
so they can claim it. I look out the window
& I don't see a sunset, I see a man's
pink tongue razing the horizon.
I once heard a man describe the village
in Vietnam where my family comes from.
It was beautiful
a poem I would gift my mother
but somewhere in the pastoral I am reminded
a child (recently) was blown apart
after stepping on a mine, a bulb, I guess
blooming forty years later—
maybe it was how the poet said *dirt*
or maybe it was how he used fire
to describe the trees.

Contributors and Attributions

- Hieu Minh Nguyen is an award-winning, "queer Vietnamese American poet based out of Minneapolis" ("About"). These poems originally appeared in *Not Here* (2018) and are used with permission and are licensed CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 by Hieu Minh Nguyen and Coffee House Press.

This page titled 5.13.18: Hieu Minh Nguyen's "The Study" and "White Boy Time Machine- Override" (2018) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **7.18: Nguyen, Hieu Minh. "The Study" and "White Boy Time Machine- Override" (2018)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

5.13.19: Athena Kashyap's "Partition Story" (2019)



"Partition Story"

For the hundreds of thousands of mothers who lost sons
and daughters during the partition of India in 1947.

I thought I lost you
after these thirty years of yearning
to see your face again, your brown eyes,
your hair falling across your forehead,
your smile. And, then this chance
to go to Lahore, to see the house.
Your father warns me not to raise my hopes;
it is not our house anymore. But, there I see it
on the street lined with the marigold trees,
bright orange flowers sailing in the wind like swallows
before falling. The house looks just the same.
The woman who opens the door is old like us.
We used to live here, your father says,
before the Partition.
She smiles and opens the door
I've been waiting for you, she says.

We walk into the house; the furniture is still the same—
mahogany table, green lime sofa with wood-carved crustings.
How grand-father had been so proud of them.
May I look around? Please, she steps aside.
This is your house. I walk to the kitchen—
my feet know this path well! Often in the apartment
back in Bombay, my feet traced this path in sleep
but instead of your room, this dining room
I woke up in the balcony and once even outside
the house. Your father made me promise to bolt
all doors lest my feet grapple empty space.
Here in the kitchen, my hands trace the air
like the paths that migratory birds know by heart

still knowing where I kept spices, lentils, rice, wheat
in the various cabinets. All the same ingredients
are here for this woman looks and eats like us
but I don't know her secret zoning.
The thought of you so close is overpowering.
Can we go to the bedrooms? Please, she repeats.
This is your house.

As I walk up the stairs, my palm resting on the stair-head,
it all comes back. The tension in the house so high
the air is trembling. Your father saying we have to leave
right away. The neighbor's child, sweet Sunil
was murdered in the market with his ayah. Three days ago,
the house down the street was scorched.
We'd heard the stories before—the news was full of it.
But, then they came to visit us, tap on our door,
envelop us in their horror, shaking rage.
We never thought it could happen to us.
Grandfather wandered about the house touching
everything: the walls, the furniture, even the floor.
He'd spent forty years of his life building this house.
Take nothing, your father repeats. Just cash,
jewelry, a change of clothes. I nod dumbly.
I wouldn't know where to begin to pack not knowing
where we are going, if we are ever coming back.
Only—
it breaks my heart to leave you behind.

I pass by our bedroom with its giant bed still
intact and walk into your room. Your bed is there
in the same place, by the window. But the walls
are bare, and you are gone.
Your father squeezes my hand.
All these years, the days turning into nights and back again
I could take with the thought of you in your room
of all your twelve years. And now, this?
My darling boy! My son!
My husband warned of this great awakening
but how to see the world torn asunder and still live?
The earth, one people, a mother torn from her son
My son! My world crumbles before me and I stumble
down the stairs as if I am dreaming, time and life
no longer a care. The woman entreats us to stay
have tea, share biscuits. Our plane is leaving soon,
your father says.

As we walk out the door, the woman grasps
my hand. She runs back and returns with a package
rolled in old newspapers, moldy string. I take it.
There are taxis at the end of the street, she tells us.
There were always taxis at the end of the street.
My feet crunch the flowers on the ground leaving
orange footsteps. My fingers struggle with the string,

your father helps get it open. I undo sheet after sheet
of old newspapers, the headlines still screaming.

> *THOUSANDS MURDERED IN RAWALPINDI*
> *TRAINS WITH MUTILATED BODIES ARRIVE*
> *REFUGEES COLLIDE IN RIVERS OF BLOOD*

I am mute to the news, and I let the newspapers
to the ground. Your father shakes his head
and picks up after me. There, at the very end
after I have unwrapped all the news is a canvas,
dry and safe after all these years, cocooned
in its horrific packaging. I slowly unroll…
the top of your head, your soft brown hair,
your brown eyes looking so curious and straight at me,
your nose, your mouth, your smile,
your small shoulders, your chest—still breathing!
I hold you up with both hands as I walk and I am smiling
and orange flowers are falling from the sky
raining on both of us.

Contributors and Attributions

Printed with permission from Athena Kashyap and Stephen F. Austin State University Press, Nagadoches, Texas. Cannot be shared without permission.

5.13.19: Athena Kashyap's "Partition Story" (2019) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: About Drama

Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, students will be able to:

- describe the elements of drama.
- identify drama-specific literary devices.
- perform drama-specific literary analysis.
- write a literary analysis essay on a play.

6.1: What is Drama?
6.2: Reading and Responding to Drama
6.3: Elements of Drama
6.4: Drama Discussion Questions, Assignments, and Supplemental Resources

This page titled 6: About Drama is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

6.1: What is Drama?

What is Drama?



Sarah Bernhardt performs as Hamlet, holding poor Yorick's skull (1899) - public domain

Drama as a Genre

Like fiction, **drama**—sometimes referred to as a **play**—features characters caught up in a **plot**, or series of events in a storyline. Just like in fiction, the plot is the trajectory of the story. Plays and novels are actually very similar in this way. In fact, some plays have been based on novels, and novels on plays. Yet, whereas the narrator of a novel can spend pages painting a picture of the story's circumstances for the reader, a play is restricted to the space of the stage and the time frame of a couple of hours. This adds unique considerations for a **playwright**—or author who writes plays—to consider. What strategies are available to the playwright to ensure that the play successfully conveys its intended effects and themes? And how can we most clearly settle upon one definition of drama, considering it manifests in different permutations across cultures?

African drama scholar Ruth Finnegan stressed that, when defining drama across cultures, "[m]ost important is the idea of enactment, of representation through actors who imitate persons and events" (486). In addition to this definition, plot, setting, dialogue, and action are probably the most clearly defining characteristics of drama as genre. These elements will be covered in greater detail in the Elements of Drama section.

A Brief History of Drama

Greece

Most historians agree Western drama originated in Greece as an evolution of religious ritual, probably around the 5th century BCE as an evolution of poetry and song (qtd. Miller 126-7). While more controversial, many scholars believe the first plays probably began when singers in a festival celebrating the Greek God Dionysus/Bacchus began acting out characters in worship songs (Miller 127). Eventually, this developed into increasingly elaborate productions, growing from one actor to several, incorporating props and costumes. By the 4th century BCE, drama had become a valued cultural practice in Greece and was in fact considered a civic duty that would help Greek society remain rational through the purgation of negative emotion, which Aristotle called **catharsis** (Scodel 40). By seeing actors acting out intense emotions and brutal acts, it meant Athenian citizens could vicariously experience those emotions, emptying themselves of such emotions so they could focus on their civic duties like voting. Eventually, Athenian citizens would gather every year to watch playwrights akin to celebrities compete against one another (Scodel 40). Many critics argue Greek drama was one of the heaviest influences on William Shakespeare's works, and most poets of the Western world.

India

Some scholars contend drama did not begin in Greece, as popularly assumed, but in India. Or perhaps that drama was not necessarily a spreading phenomena, but a simultaneous evolution in both India and Greece. Regardless, around the same time of the origins of Greek drama arose the Sanskrit Indian *prakarana* (Walker 7). Prakarana is a play in five acts. This *prakarana* theatre is widely regarded to have begun the spread of drama in the East in the same way Greek drama spread through the West.

Common Genres of Drama

- **Comedy**: probably the first drama subgenre, comedy traditionally features lower-class characters, emphasizes silly or bawdy themes, and often ends in marriage.
- **Tragedy**: what Aristotle considered the artistic height of drama, Tragedy depicts a protagonist's downfall due to his or her own tragic flaw, or **hamartia**. Readers can usually recognize a tragedy by its noble characters, elevated language (iambic pentameter), and scenes of suffering and death. They almost always feature death or many deaths and/or a funeral.
- **History**: recreates a historically significant event. May include elements of comedy, tragedy, or romance
- **Romance**: usually focuses on love between characters

Distinguishing Features of Drama

- Meant to be performed rather than read
- Emphasis on dialogue, character, and stage direction
- May include elements of music, dance, art, poetry, and prose
- Usually fictional, though may include nonfiction or be inspired by true stories or historical events

Supplemental Videos

- Crash Course Theatre #7: Ancient Sanskrit Theatre



Contributors and Attributions

Parts of this chapter adapted from *Writing and Literature: Composition as Inquiry, Learning, Thinking, and Communication* by Dr. Tanya Long Bennett of the University of North Georgia.

Works Cited

Finnegan, Ruth. "Drama." *Oral Literature in Africa*. 1st ed., vol. 1, Open Book Publishers, Cambridge, UK, 2012, pp. 485–502. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vjsmr. Accessed 11 October 2019.

Miller, N. P. "The Origins of Greek Drama. A Summary of the Evidence and a Comparison with Early English Drama." *Greece & Rome*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1961, pp. 126–137. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/641643.

Scodel, Ruth. *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cpid,uid&custid=s4302453&db=nlebk&AN=331330&site=eds-live.

Walker, Steven F. "The Invention of Theater: Recontextualizing the Vexing Question." *Comparative Literature*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1–22. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4122284.

This page titled 6.1: What is Drama? is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **8.1: What is Drama?** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

6.2: Reading and Responding to Drama

How to "Read" Drama

For reasons discussed in this chapter so far, drama comes with a unique set of benefits and challenges for readers. Beginning readers of drama often make the mistake of reading plays the same way they would a novel, becoming frustrated or lost as a result. Because it is meant to be performed and/or viewed as an audience member, audiences must infer a lot about the setting and characters' internal feelings through the dialogue. This takes a bit more work than a novel, which often offers this kind of description for the reader. While ideally readers could either act out the play or see a play live, this is not always an option. So what is the best way to "read" a play?

ACT IT OUT LOUD.

That's right: as silly as it may feel, reading the play out loud in character will help readers better grasp the meanings of the play which may be missed when read silently. To reiterate, plays are meant to be performed. To be heard. To be seen. When possible, students should pair up with fellow classmates to take turns reading and acting out the parts. This is what makes plays fun: they are the most collaborative genre of literature!

Other tips for reading plays:

- Watch film versions of the play
- Listen to audiobook verions
- Summarize each act in your own words as you read
- Takes notes on each character: Who are they? What is their role (protagonist, antagonist, or supporting role)? What are the characters' relationships with each other?

Special Considerations For Reading Shakespeare & Other "Old" Works of Literature

Diction

As if reading plays was not challenging enough, many students find Shakespeare's **diction** -- or vocabulary choices -- flummoxing. I use the term flummoxing here because it is a term that is not widely in circulation anymore. That is, it is archaic or antiquated. Or, to put it more simply, it's old. Shakespeare can be difficult to read for this reason: over time, like any language, English has evolved. Certain figures of speech, manners of speaking, and words commonly used in Elizabethan London (Shakespeare's time) are no longer used today. So if it feels like you are reading a foreign language when reading Shakespeare or his contemporaries, you kind of are: Early Modern English.

- Old English – 450 to 1066 A.D
- Middle English – 1150 to 1500
- Early Modern English – 1500 to 1690
- Modern English – 1700 to present

Early Modern English is actually much closer to our modern English than one would think. It is much easier to understand than Old English for this reason. Basically, to use a Pokemon simile, if Old English is Charmander, and contemporary English is Charizard, Early Modern English is like Chameleon. And it goes both ways: if I lost you with these Pokemon words you probably feel a lot like a speaker of Early Modern English would feel having to learn contemporary English!

The good news is, like learning a new language, there are helpful tools students can use to understand Shakespeare. Use the Oxford English Dictionary combined with context clues to learn what words meant in the time period. Some words mean the same thing. But other words have entirely different meanings. Try looking up how the words were used in the 1500s or 1600s to get a better understanding of how Shakespeare intended the word to be understood by his audiences.

Practicing Looking Up Diction

Let's try looking up a word which is difficult to understand in *Hamlet.*

> *BARNARDO: Well, good night.*
> *If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,*
> *The **rivals** of my watch, bid them make haste.*
>
> *(1.1.13 - **emphases mine**)*

In our modern understanding, "rival" means competitor. Like when playing Pokemon, you are introduced to a neighbor who also is given a Pokemon at the same time as you. As you raise your Pokemon, so does your rival, and you must continuously battle against your rival throughout the game. However, it seems like our modern understanding of this word does not quite work in the context of *Hamlet.* Why would Barnardo bid Horatio and Marcellus -- who seem not to be his competitors -- to make haste (AKA hurry up)? It seems like we are missing the definition of the word in Early Modern English.

So, let's use the Oxford English Dictionary to look up the word **"rival"** (1.1.13)

While there are a lot of definitions, many of them the same as the contemporary meaning, none quite fit as well as this one:

> *A person having the same objective as another, an associate. Obsolete. rare.*
>
> *1604 W. Shakespeare Hamlet i. i. 10 The riualls of my watch, bid them make hast.*
>
> *("rival, 3" Oxford English Dictionary)*

As you can see, this definition is literally from *Hamlet*. And, knowing this meaning, it makes much more sense: Horatio and Marcellus are not Barnardo's competitors: they are his associates, fellow castle guards, who share his objective of patrolling and protecting Elsinore. Knowing this, we can better understand the relationship dynamics between characters.

- **Pro-Tip #1: Use a Dictionary.** Keep the Oxford English Dictionary open while reading and be willing to look up words you do not understand.

Syntax and Iambic Pentameter

Another confusing aspect of Shakespearean language is due to a poetic structure called **iambic pentameter.** This is the meter of epic and tragic poetry, dating all the way back to Greek antiquity. Iambic pentameter is a poetic meter in which each line of poetry contains five sets of iambs, or about ten syllables. An iamb is essentially a two-syllable pairing of an unstressed and stressed syllable: think of it like da-dum, or "I am!" both of which would be examples of iambs. Since the word "pentameter" has the root of "penta" or five, we know then that the term means five sets of iambs. Take a look at the following first line of a popular Shakespeare poem (Sonnet 118) to see iambic pentameter in action, where each bolded portion represents a stressed syllable, and a non-bolded represents an unstressed syllable:

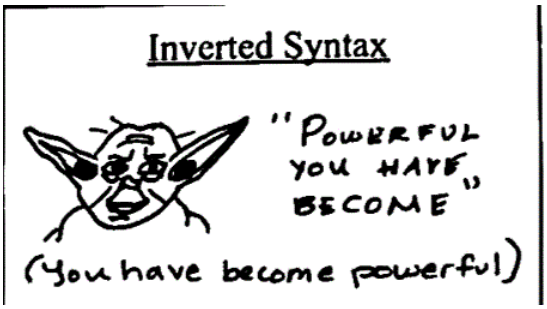
Shall **I** com**pare** thee **to** a **sum**mer's **day**?

Poets and playwrights often wrote in iambic pentameter as a means to signal to audiences the literary significance of their work, to indicate the class of the character speaking (iambic pentameter for the upper class, prose for a commoner), or just to make the play or poem sound euphonic. Whatever the purpose, writing a poem in iambic pentameter is difficult. Writing an entire play in iambic pentameter? And rhyming? Even more difficult, since ideas have to perform intense linguistic gymnastics just to conform to the structure.

In order to fit the iambic pentameter, writers sometimes mess with **syntax**, or the grammatical order of words. More specifically, this is called **inverted syntax.** This makes for some pretty sounding lines, but can be confusing at first. While contemporary English often goes subject-verb-object, Shakespeare's verse often switches this order around. This means it is easier to understand if you re-order the words to be in an order we are more comfortable with. So what can you do if you encounter words which seem out of order, to the point where you cannot understand what is being said?

Whenever you read a poem or play where the words seem out of normal order, think of Yoda. If it sounds like Yoda is saying it, it is probably a case of inverted syntax. Simply re-order the words to make them clearer.

Try the Yoda trick.



The Yoda Trick is essentially pretending it is Yoda who says the words in the play, and re-ordering the words to make more sense.

Re-Ordering Syntax Practice

Try the Yoda trick on the following line from *Hamlet*:

> *"To thine own self be true"*
> *(Hamlet 1.3.78)*

How would you re-order this to be more comprehensible?

"Be true to yourself."

- **Pro-Tip #2: The Yoda Trick.** Anytime you encounter words that seem out of order, try reordering words to help you make sense of them.

Zeitgeist

Zeitgeist is a German word meaning "spirit of the times." Aristotle might use a similar term called **Kairos,** or the temporal and cultural context of a piece of rhetoric. Whatever term you prefer, it basically means that any work of writing is, in some way, a product of the time in which it was written. This means that, like language has evolved since Shakespeare's time, so has culture. For example, while Shakespeare's audience would have understood the many references to the Bible, Greek Mythology, and contemporary political events, modern readers might not be as familiar with these references. This can be super confusing. But, believe it or not, you practice learning cultural context all

the time. For example, take a look at an excerpt from Tupac Shakur's song "Changes" (1992):

> *And still I see no changes can't a brother get a little peace*
> *It's war on the streets and the war in the Middle East*
> *Instead of war on poverty they got a war on drugs*
> *So the police can bother me*
> *And I ain't never did a crime I ain't have to do*
> *But now I'm back with the blacks givin' it back to you*
> *Don't let 'em jack you up, back you up,*
> *Crack you up and pimp smack you up*
> *You gotta learn to hold ya own*
> *They get jealous when they see ya with ya mobile phone*
> *But tell the cops they can't touch this*
> *I don't trust this when they try to rush I bust this*
> *That's the sound of my tool you say it ain't cool*
> *My mama didn't raise no fool*
> *And as long as I stay black I gotta stay strapped*
> *And I never get to lay back*
> *'Cause I always got to worry 'bout the pay backs*
> *Some buck that I roughed up way back*
> *Comin' back after all these years*
> *Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat that's the way it is uhh*

In this excerpt, there are several cultural reference points which are easily understood to most current readers, but would be completely lost to someone outside of the cultural context. The "war in the Middle East" is likely a reference to the Gulf War (1990-1991) which was taking place just before Tupac penned this song, so readers would understand the comparison to "war on the streets" (poor people of color confrontations with police) as a violent and unjust act of war on people because of their skin color. Similarly, the reference to the "war on drugs" is likely a reference to President Ronald Reagan's war on drugs which (starting in 1982) is widely understood to have disproportionately affected people of color (Human Rights Watch). And while Shakespeare would have no idea what a "mobile phone" might be, and the term might itself seem antiquated at the time of this textbook's publication (2019) when the term cell phone is more commonly used, the term is contemporary enough that we understand what Tupac means, and we understand the value of the object as a signifier of wealth, especially in 1992 when mobile phones were even more expensive to most people than they are now. Other terms, like "strapped" and "Rat-a-tat-tat-tat-tat" are references to guns as a means to defend oneself from the abusive police profiling and unjust aggression in addition to gang violence directed towards African Americans. Through understanding these cultural references (direct) and allusions (indirect), readers are able to understand the theme of the verse: expressing frustration with the oppressive force of racism which never seems to change, and the need for a person of color to always be prepared to defend themselves from violence.

So just like listening to a popular rap song using context-specific words and references might confuse an older audience, or my previous reference to Pokemon might confuse people who have never played Pokemon, or my reference to Yoda might confuse those who have never seen Star Wars, so too might Shakespeare's lingo be confusing to us because we miss the cultural reference points. The good news is that cultural context can be learned so that we can fully enjoy Shakespeare's words.

Practicing Learning Cultural Context

Take, for example, the following lines from *Hamlet*, wherein Hamlet compares his uncle Claudius with his deceased father Old Hamlet:

> *So excellent a king; that was, to this,*
>
> *Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother*
>
> *(1.2.139-140)*

1. Who or what was Hyperion?
2. Who or what is a satyr?
3. After looking up these references, what do you think Hamlet is insinuating about his uncle Claudius compared to his father, Old Hamlet?

Elizabethan Cultural Reference Point: Greek Mythology

In this case, a simple Google search of the terms will help elucidate cultural reference points we might not understand. A cursory search reveals these are important figures in Greek mythology: a satyr is a gross, sexually perverted crossbreed between a man and a goat. Hyperion was the glorious and dazzling God/Titan of the sun. So we can infer from this comparison that Hamlet is saying his dad was awesome and represented all things good and powerful, and his uncle is a nasty perverted animal. This tells us a lot about the plot and character dynamic between Claudius and Hamlet, and foreshadows, perhaps, that a confrontation will take place between the two of them.

Pro-Tip #3: Research Cultural Contexts. Use Google or your library's databases to do a little bit of research on cultural context to give you a deeper understanding of the play.

Other recommended resources for understanding drama (Shakespeare in particular):

- YouTube videos, like Crash Course Literature
- No Fear Shakespeare provides a translation of Shakespeare into modern English. Be wary of using this resource, though, as you may lose important literary aspects. Just like listening to a rap song in its original form and taking time to understand the cultural background, so too is it important to read a play in its original form.
- Folger's Shakespeare, which includes helpful annotations and footnotes to explain diction and cultural context
- Kenneth Branagh's film version of *Hamlet* (1996) contains every line from the play, and is probably the most accurate representation of the play. It can be rented for free from most libraries.

This page titled 6.2: Reading and Responding to Drama is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

6.3: Elements of Drama

Plot

As discussed in the Creative Nonfiction and Fiction chapters, plot is the most important element in a narrative. Similarly, it comprises arguably the most important element of a play. Plot is the events in the play and the order in which the events are told. There is no one correct way to structure a drama! However, the structure of a drama is only as effective as it is intentionally formed to elicit the desired response from its audience. A play usually has a beginning, middle, and end. It almost always has a character grow and develop over the course of the play. Let's look closely at one type of plot structure in order to see what plot might look like.

Case Study: Tragic Plot

According to Aristotle, an effective plot of a tragedy follows this order:

1. **Inciting incident: the background of the play that causes the central conflict.**
    1. **Example**: two brothers murder each other. Their uncle, the King, refuses to bury one of the brothers and makes a law against burying him. This puts the sister of the brothers in a bad place, because her religion requires her to bury them so they go to heaven.
2. **Rising Action**: **the conflict built through friction between characters**.
    1. **Example**: The sister defies her uncle the King and buries her brother against the king's orders and then refuses to apologize. The king then commands his soldiers to bury his niece alive for her defiance!
3. **Anagnorisis or Scene of Recognition: the protagonist realizes he has made an error that carries serious consequences.**
    1. **Example**: The King receives a warning from a wise elder that burying his niece is a terrible idea that has angered the gods. The king finally realizes he has been a stubborn bonehead (he has exhibited excessive pride, hubris) and has a serious character flaw (hamartia).
4. **Peripeteia or Reversal of Fortune: this is when the protagonist's luck runs out.**
    1. **Example**: the King's recognition of his error comes too late: just as he sends his soldiers to free the niece from her cave, she dies in her cave and the King's son—his niece's betrothed—has killed himself in sorrow.
5. **Scene of Suffering: a bunch of people suffer and/or die as a result of the protagonist's hamartia.**
    1. **Example**: Not only did the King's niece and son die, but a messenger tells him that his wife killed herself in grief. The heartbroken King leaves the city in self-imposed exile. The audience feels pity and fear watching the King suffer, and this helps purge their feelings of pity and fear.

Not all plays or even tragedies follow this structure exactly. That being said, it can be helpful to analyze the ways in which a plot's structure is formed, as this can reveal deeper meanings. For example, what would have happened if the above mentioned King had recognized his tragic flaw (hamartia) in time to save his niece? This would have been a very different play: perhaps even a romance if the niece and king's son married and lived happily ever after. As in this example (based on *Antigone* by Sophocles), the structure of a play can have profound effects on its meaning or even genre!

Structure

Whether tragedy, comedy, history, or romance, all plays generally follow the structure of **act, scene, and line.**

A play can be anywhere from a few minutes to several hours. Usually a play will be divided into anywhere from one to five **acts.** These acts usually hinge upon a central plot point. Between each act, the curtain will fall; perhaps in the middle of the play there might be an intermission for audiences to use the restroom or buy drinks. A lot of literary production is driven by economics, after all: playwrights gotta eat, too!

The acts are further divided into **scenes.** The scene is usually set in a particular moment in time and setting.

When reading the play, actors reference **lines**. The lines are the dialogue that they speak to one another. A long time ago, poems and plays were often written in verse such as iambic pentameter, so poems and plays shared the concept of line structure. However, in contemporary plays, dialogue may be written in prose. Usually it will still have some kind of numbering system so that actors, directors, and readers can find their place.

When writing about a play, you should try to reference act, scene, and line number in your parenthetical in-text citation. For example (1.3.186) means Act 1, Scene 3, Line 186. However, not all plays have line numbers, or even scenes. So you may need to just reference act and scene (1.3) or just the act (Act 3).

Setting

To provide the story's setting, a play requires sets. If you've ever been involved with a play, you know that the set can be made up of detailed backdrops, specifically designed props, strategic lighting, and sometimes even background noise. A set, along with the characters' subtle indications of the scene, can generate a full setting in the audience's imagination. For example, the play *Hamlet* starts its setting on a creepy, dark, foggy, cold night in the fictional Castle Elsinore on Denmark. The setting is often

established on a **stage**, or the physical space upon which actors move. In order for a play to take place, there must be **actors** (people performing the play), an **audience** (people viewing the play), and **action and/or dialogue** as performed by the actors.

Character

While in short stories or novels a reader must wait until a character appears to know who the important characters are, in a play they are often the first aspect of the text encountered by readers. The character list usually appears in the first pages of the play. This is because, as a play emphasizes action over narration, the actors must know their parts!

Usually, the most important characters are listed first. Think most spoken lines, protagonists, antagonists, etc. However, the order in which the characters appear on the character list does not necessarily dictate the order of appearance. Like in creative nonfiction or fiction, writers develop characters over the course of the play. Different characters serve different roles such as protagonist, antagonist, or foil. There are a few types of character archetypes unique to drama which are described below. Note that not all of them will be in every play!

- **Protagonist**: the hero of the play. Usually the main character or the character with the most spoken lines, or the character around whom all the other characters seem to orbit. Hamlet would be an example of a protagonist.
- **Antagonist**: the villain of the play, usually opposite the protagonist. Claudius would be an example of an antagonist.
- **Foil**: this is a character meant to define another character through juxtaposition or comparison. For example, in *Hamlet*, Old Hamlet and Old Fortinbras and Hamlet and Fortinbras are often considered foils of each other. Fortinbras and Hamlet are both on paths of vengeance, yet each goes about their vengeance in different ways. While Fortinbras uses military strength, Hamlet chooses to use his intellect. While Fortinbras is decisive, Hamlet seems paralyzed by indecision. By examining the ways in which these two characters are similar and different, we can learn a lot about each of them and their significance in the play.
- **Wise elder**: in most plays, there is a wise old man or figure of wisdom who guides the protagonist. In Hamlet, it might be the ghost of his father, or Polonius can be a silly inversion of this archetype. In Antigone, it is probably Tieresias.
- **Love interest**: again, in most plays, there is usually a love interest of the protagonist, though not always. For Hamlet, this is Ophelia (though some scholars have argued Horatio!)
- **Messenger**: a character who delivers news

Dialogue and Action

One of the main differences between fiction and drama is that usually a play's plot is primarily forwarded through **dialogue** and **action**. **Dialogue** is comprised of the words directly spoken by characters, while **actions** are the physical movements of the actors. In a novel, action is described in detail and dialogue is usually put in quotation marks. For example, consider the following example of **action** and **dialogue** from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde:

> *As the painter looked at the gracious and comely form he had so skilfully mirrored in his art, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed about to linger there. But he suddenly started up, and closing his eyes, placed his fingers upon the lids, as though he sought to imprison within his brain some curious dream from which he feared he might awake.*
> *"It is your best work, Basil, the best thing you have ever done," said Lord Henry languidly. "You must certainly send it next year to the Grosvenor. The Academy is too large and too vulgar. Whenever I have gone there, there have been either so many people that I have not been able to see the pictures, which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have not been able to see the people, which was worse. The Grosvenor is really the only place."*
> *"I don't think I shall send it anywhere," he answered, tossing his head back in that odd way that used to make his friends laugh at him at Oxford. "No, I won't send it anywhere."*

Distinct from the novel form of dialogue evidenced above, in a play, any words which come after the character's name will be considered dialogue. Action is usually not described in great depth, and actors are to interpret what actions to take based on the dialogue. Consider this example from *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare:

MARCELLUS: Holla, Bernardo!

BERNARDO: Say,

What, is Horatio there?

HORATIO: A piece of him.

BERNARDO: Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS: What, has this thing appear'd again tonight?

BERNARDO: I have seen nothing.

In the above excerpt from the beginning of the play (1.1), Marcellus, Bernardo, and Horatio (soldiers) greet each other as they patrol the castle. When Horatio says "a piece of him," we might imagine the fog is so thick or the night so dark that only pieces of each character can be seen. Horatio might be holding up his hand in the torchlight. We might imagine the characters wandering about in the dark speaking to each other, a bit rattled, worrying if the mysterious "thing" Marcellus references will reappear. We learn later in the dialogue that "thing" is an apparition (ghost). None of the characters' movements are described, so we must infer what their actions are through their dialogue.

Although a novel's narrator can describe in detail the thoughts and impressions of its characters, a play's effects depend much more heavily on what the characters say and do. A play is a performance, a spectacle, rather than words on paper. That is, drama is a story performed by actors. Some plays do include a narrator or a chorus, to introduce the scene or set the tone of the play, but the bulk of the production's effect is generated through the dialogue and its visual devices, and since the play's script dictates what the characters will say and often, through stage direction, its production strategies as well, the script is crucial to a successful performance.

Audience

While in other literary works the audience takes a more passive role, in plays the audience often becomes part of the show. When a character goes on an extended soliloquy, or extended speech when they are by themselves on the stage, they will often address the audience directly; the audience gets the insider view of their thoughts. Sometimes actors join audience members or extend the stage into the seats! Audiences in the old days also would get rowdy and interact with the actors and actresses, sometimes in outright chaotic ways. For example, during the first act of a play in 1883, actor John Ritchie was allegedly pelted by rotten eggs and tomatoes and "demoralized" ("AN ACTOR DEMORALIZED"). So when analyzing drama it's important to analyze how audience members might experience the play!

Works Cited

"AN ACTOR DEMORALIZED BY TOMATOES" *The New York Times*, 1883 https://www.nytimes.com/1883/10/28/a...-tomatoes.html

Contributors

- Adapted from material originally published in "Drama as a Genre" from *Writing and Literature: Composition as Inquiry, Learning, Thinking, and Communication* by Dr. Tanya Long Bennett of the University of North Georgia, CC BY-SA 4.0

This page titled 6.3: Elements of Drama is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **8.2: Elements of Drama** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

6.4: Drama Discussion Questions, Assignments, and Supplemental Resources

Drama Learning Activities

The following learning activities are meant to prompt discussion and/or writing projects. Consider them lenses through which to examine the plays more deeply.

Assignment: Literary Research Essay on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Consider the following questions:

1. **New Historicism:** What is the ghost that appears in Hamlet? Is it actually the ghost of Old Hamlet, a demon come to trick young Hamlet away to his doom, or a figment of Hamlet's madness? Justify your position with quotes/evidence from the play and/or any research you can find about how Elizabethans may have viewed ghosts, demons, or insanity.
2. **New Historicism:** Is Hamlet actually mad (insane), or just pretending to be insane? Justify your position with quotes from the play and/or any research you can find about madness/insanity as it was viewed in the Elizabethan period.



"Ophelia" by John Everett Millais (1852) in the public domain



"Ophelia" by Henrietta Rae (1890) in the public domain



"Ophelia" by John William Waterhouse (1894) in the public domain

   The character Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has captivated the imagination of writers and artists ever since her tragic appearance in the play, especially in the Victorian period. Why do you think this might be?

3. **Gender**: While many—including Hamlet himself—seem to view the women of the play as weak (Ophelia) and/or power-hungry co-conspirators in the plot to take over the Danish throne (Gertrude), some critics have argued the women in Hamlet are actually heroes, exercising the most agency they can given the limitations of gender roles in their cultural context. Consider one of the female characters in the play. Is Ophelia as weak and "mad" as Hamlet, or is she exercising the most agency she can given her position? Is Gertrude an active co-conspirator with Claudius, an innocent bystander, or a hero who attempts to save her son?
4. **Marxist/Formalism**: throughout the play, the form of dialogue often shifts between iambic pentameter and prose. Some critics have noted that nobles tend to speak in iambic pentameter, common people speak in prose, and Hamlet switches between the two depending on the context, but there are moments which do not neatly fit into these categories. Closely examine the switching between iambic pentameter and prose. Assuming it is intentional on the part of Shakespeare, why do you think this form shift occurs? What might the shift reveal about social class, or even madness?

Additional Supplemental Resources, Videos, & Readings

Videos

- Crash Course Literature: Hamlet (Part 1) (Part 2)
  - Part 1



  - Part 2



- Crash Course Literature: Macbeth (Part 1) (Part 2)
  - Part 1



  - Part 2



William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

- Bloom, Harold. Hamlet: Poem Unlimited.
- --- Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. Will in the World.
- --- Hamlet in Purgatory.

This page titled 6.4: Drama Discussion Questions, Assignments, and Supplemental Resources is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **8.5: Drama Discussion Questions, Assignments, and Supplemental Resources** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Drama Readings

Included Readings

7.1: Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra (1914)
7.2: Susan Glaspell's Trifles (1916)
7.3: Sophocles' Antigone (441 BC)
7.4: Langston Hughes and Zora Hurston's The Mule-Bone (1930)
7.5: Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House (1879)
7.6: Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (1895)
7.6.1: Critical Reviews of Film Version of The Importance of Being Earnest
7.7: Featured Playwright - William Shakespeare
7.7.1: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 1 (1623)
7.7.2: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 2 (1623)

Supplemental Readings

These plays by William Shakespeare are not included in this textbook due to copyright permissions and/or space constraints.

- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600)
- *Hamlet* (1603)
- *Othello* (1622)

This page titled 7: Drama Readings is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

7.1: Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra (1914)

Chitra

A one-act play

by Rabindranath Tagore

1914

The Characters

GODS:
MADANA (Eros).
VASANTA (Lycoris).

MORTALS:
CHITRA, daughter of the King of Manipur.
ARJUNA, a prince of the house of the Kurus. He is of the Kshatriya or "warrior caste," and during the action is living as a Hermit retired in the forest.

VILLAGERS from an outlying district of Manipur.

NOTE.—The dramatic poem "Chitra" has been performed in India without scenery—the actors being surrounded by the audience. Proposals for its production here having been made to him, he went through this translation and provided stage directions, but wished these omitted if it were printed as a book.

Scene I

Chitra

Art thou the god with the five darts, the Lord of Love?

Madana

I am he who was the first born in the heart of the Creator. I bind in bonds of pain and bliss the lives of men and women!

Chitra

I know, I know what that pain is and those bonds.—And who art thou, my lord?

Vasanta

I am his friend—Vasanta—the King of the Seasons. Death and decrepitude would wear the world to the bone but that I follow them and constantly attack them. I am Eternal Youth.

Chitra

I bow to thee, Lord Vasanta.

Madana

But what stern vow is thine, fair stranger? Why dost thou wither

thy fresh youth with penance and mortification? Such a sacrifice is not fit for the worship of love. Who art thou and what is thy prayer?

Chitra

I am Chitra, the daughter of the kingly house of Manipur. With godlike grace Lord Shiva promised to my royal grandsire an unbroken line of male descent. Nevertheless, the divine word proved powerless to change the spark of life in my mother's womb —so invincible was my nature, woman though I be.

Madana

I know, that is why thy father brings thee up as his son. He has taught thee the use of the bow and all the duties of a king.

Chitra

Yes, that is why I am dressed in man's attire and have left the seclusion of a woman's chamber. I know no feminine wiles for winning hearts. My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learnt Cupid's archery, the play of eyes.

Madana

That requires no schooling, fair one. The eye does its work untaught, and he knows how well, who is struck in the heart.

Chitra

One day in search of game I roved alone to the forest on the bank of the Purna river. Tying my horse to a tree trunk I entered a dense thicket on the track of a deer. I found a narrow sinuous path meandering through the dusk of the entangled boughs, the foliage vibrated with the chirping of crickets, when of a sudden I came upon a man lying on a bed of dried leaves, across my path. I asked him haughtily to move aside, but he heeded not. Then with the sharp end of my bow I pricked him in contempt. Instantly he leapt up with straight, tall limbs, like a sudden tongue of fire from a heap of ashes. An amused smile flickered round the corners of his mouth, perhaps at the sight of my boyish countenance. Then for the first time in my life I felt myself a woman, and knew that a man was before me.

Madana

At the auspicious hour I teach the man and the woman this supreme lesson to know themselves. What happened after that?

Chitra

With fear and wonder I asked him "Who are you?" "I am Arjuna," he said, "of the great Kuru clan." I stood petrified like a statue, and forgot to do him obeisance. Was this indeed Arjuna, the one great idol of my dreams! Yes, I had long ago heard how he had vowed a twelve-years' celibacy. Many a day my young ambition had

spurred me on to break my lance with him, to challenge him in disguise to single combat, and prove my skill in arms against him. Ah, foolish heart, whither fled thy presumption? Could I but exchange my youth with all its aspirations for the clod of earth under his feet, I should deem it a most precious grace. I know not in what whirlpool of thought I was lost, when suddenly I saw him vanish through the trees. O foolish woman, neither didst thou greet him, nor speak a word, nor beg forgiveness, but stoodest like a barbarian boor while he contemptuously walked away! . . . Next morning I laid aside my man's clothing. I donned bracelets, anklets, waist-chain, and a gown of purple red silk. The unaccustomed dress clung about my shrinking shame; but I hastened on my quest, and found Arjuna in the forest temple of Shiva.

Madana

Tell me the story to the end. I am the heart-born god, and I understand the mystery of these impulses.

Chitra

Only vaguely can I remember what things I said, and what answer I got. Do not ask me to tell you all. Shame fell on me like a thunderbolt, yet could not break me to pieces, so utterly hard, so like a man am I. His last words as I walked home pricked my ears like red hot needles. "I have taken the vow of celibacy. I am not fit to be thy husband!" Oh, the vow of a man! Surely thou knowest, thou god of love, that unnumbered saints and sages have surrendered the merits of their life-long penance at the feet of a woman. I broke my bow in two and burnt my arrows in the fire. I hated my strong, lithe arm, scored by drawing the bowstring. O Love, god Love, thou hast laid low in the dust the vain pride of my manlike strength; and all my man's training lies crushed under thy feet. Now teach me thy lessons; give me the power of the weak and the weapon of the unarmed hand.

Madana

I will be thy friend. I will bring the world-conquering Arjuna a captive before thee, to accept his rebellion's sentence at thy hand.

Chitra

Had I but the time needed, I could win his heart by slow degrees, and ask no help of the gods. I would stand by his side as a comrade, drive the fierce horses of his war-chariot, attend him in the pleasures of the chase, keep guard at night at the entrance of his tent, and help him in all the great duties of a Kshatriya, rescuing the weak, and meting out justice where it is due. Surely at last the day would have come for him to look at me and wonder, "What boy is this? Has one of my slaves in a former life followed me like my good deeds into this?" I am not the woman who nourishes her despair in lonely silence, feeding it

with nightly tears and covering it with the daily patient smile, a widow from her birth. The flower of my desire shall never drop into the dust before it has ripened to fruit. But it is the labour of a life time to make one's true self known and honoured. Therefore I have come to thy door, thou world-vanquishing Love, and thou, Vasanta, youthful Lord of the Seasons, take from my young body this primal injustice, an unattractive plainness. For a single day make me superbly beautiful, even as beautiful as was the sudden blooming of love in my heart. Give me but one brief day of perfect beauty, and I will answer for the days that follow.

Madana

Lady, I grant thy prayer.

Vasanta

Not for the short span of a day, but for one whole year the charm of spring blossoms shall nestle round thy limbs.

Scene II

Arjuna

WAS I dreaming or was what I saw by the lake truly there? Sitting on the mossy turf, I mused over bygone years in the sloping shadows of the evening, when slowly there came out from the folding darkness of foliage an apparition of beauty in the perfect form of a woman, and stood on a white slab of stone at the water's brink. It seemed that the heart of the earth must heave in joy under her bare white feet. Methought the vague veilings of her body should melt in ecstasy into air as the golden mist of dawn melts from off the snowy peak of the eastern hill. She bowed herself above the shining mirror of the lake and saw the reflection of her face. She started up in awe and stood still; then smiled, and with a careless sweep of her left arm unloosed her hair and let it trail on the earth at her feet. She bared her bosom and looked at her arms, so flawlessly modelled, and instinct with an exquisite caress. Bending her head she saw the sweet blossoming of her youth and the tender bloom and blush of her skin. She beamed with a glad surprise. So, if the white lotus bud on opening her eyes in the morning were to arch her neck and see her shadow in the water, would she wonder at herself the livelong day. But a moment after the smile passed from her face and a shade of sadness crept into her eyes. She bound up her tresses, drew her veil over her arms, and sighing slowly, walked away like a beauteous evening fading into the night. To me the supreme fulfilment of desire seemed to have been revealed in a flash and then to have vanished. . . . But who is it that pushes the door?

Enter CHITRA, dressed as a woman.

Ah! it is she. Quiet, my heart! . . . Fear me not, lady! I am a Kshatriya.

Chitra

Honoured sir, you are my guest. I live in this temple. I know not in what way I can show you hospitality.

Arjuna

Fair lady, the very sight of you is indeed the highest hospitality. If you will not take it amiss I would ask you a question.

Chitra

You have permission.

Arjuna

What stern vow keeps you immured in this solitary temple, depriving all mortals of a vision of so much loveliness?

Chitra

I harbour a secret desire in my heart, for the fulfilment of which I offer daily prayers to Lord Shiva.

Arjuna

Alas, what can you desire, you who are the desire of the whole world! From the easternmost hill on whose summit the morning sun first prints his fiery foot to the end of the sunset land have I travelled. I have seen whatever is most precious, beautiful and great on the earth. My knowledge shall be yours, only say for what or for whom you seek.

Chitra

He whom I seek is known to all.

Arjuna

Indeed! Who may this favourite of the gods be, whose fame has captured your heart?

Chitra

Sprung from the highest of all royal houses, the greatest of all heroes is he.

Arjuna

Lady, offer not such wealth of beauty as is yours on the altar of false reputation. Spurious fame spreads from tongue to tongue like the fog of the early dawn before the sun rises. Tell me who in the highest of kingly lines is the supreme hero?

Chitra

Hermit, you are jealous of other men's fame. Do you not know that all over the world the royal house of the Kurus is the most famous?

Arjuna

The house of the Kurus!

Chitra

And have you never heard of the greatest name of that far-famed house?

Arjuna

From your own lips let me hear it.

Chitra

Arjuna, the conqueror of the world. I have culled from the mouths of the multitude that imperishable name and hidden it with care in my maiden heart. Hermit, why do you look perturbed? Has that name only a deceitful glitter? Say so, and I will not hesitate to break this casket of my heart and throw the false gem to the dust.

Arjuna

Be his name and fame, his bravery and prowess false or true, for mercy's sake do not banish him from your heart—for he kneels at your feet even now.

Chitra

You, Arjuna!

Arjuna

Yes, I am he, the love-hungered guest at your door.

Chitra

Then it is not true that Arjuna has taken a vow of chastity for twelve long years?

Arjuna

But you have dissolved my vow even as the moon dissolves the night's vow of obscurity.

Chitra

Oh, shame upon you! What have you seen in me that makes you false to yourself? Whom do you seek in these dark eyes, in these milk-white arms, if you are ready to pay for her the price of your probity? Not my true self, I know. Surely this cannot be love, this is not man's highest homage to woman! Alas, that this

frail disguise, the body, should make one blind to the light of the deathless spirit! Yes, now indeed, I know, Arjuna, the fame of your heroic manhood is false.

Arjuna

Ah, I feel how vain is fame, the pride of prowess! Everything seems to me a dream. You alone are perfect; you are the wealth of the world, the end of all poverty, the goal of all efforts, the one woman! Others there are who can be but slowly known. While to see you for a moment is to see perfect completeness once and for ever.

Chitra

Alas, it is not I, not I, Arjuna! It is the deceit of a god.
Go, go, my hero, go. Woo not falsehood, offer not your great heart to an illusion. Go.

Scene III

Chitra

No, impossible. To face that fervent gaze that almost grasps you like clutching hands of the hungry spirit within; to feel his heart struggling to break its bounds urging its passionate cry through the entire body—and then to send him away like a beggar—no, impossible.

Enter MADANA and VASANTA.

Ah, god of love, what fearful flame is this with which thou hast enveloped me! I burn, and I burn whatever I touch.

Madana

I desire to know what happened last night.

Chitra

At evening I lay down on a grassy bed strewn with the petals of spring flowers, and recollected the wonderful praise of my beauty I had heard from Arjuna;—drinking drop by drop the honey that I had stored during the long day. The history of my past life like that of my former existences was forgotten. I felt like a flower, which has but a few fleeting hours to listen to all the humming flatteries and whispered murmurs of the woodlands and then must lower its eyes from the Sky, bend its head and at a breath give itself up to the dust without a cry, thus ending the short story of a perfect moment that has neither past nor future.

Vasanta

A limitless life of glory can bloom and spend itself in a morning.

Madana

Like an endless meaning in the narrow span of a song.

Chitra

The southern breeze caressed me to sleep. From the flowering Malati bower overhead silent kisses dropped over my body. On my hair, my breast, my feet, each flower chose a bed to die on. I slept. And, suddenly in the depth of my sleep, I felt as if some intense eager look, like tapering fingers of flame, touched my slumbering body. I started up and saw the Hermit standing before me. The moon had moved to the west, peering through the leaves to espy this wonder of divine art wrought in a fragile human frame. The air was heavy with perfume; the silence of the night was vocal with the chirping of crickets; the reflections of the trees hung motionless in the lake; and with his staff in his hand he stood, tall and straight and still, like a forest tree. It seemed to me that I had, on opening my eyes, died to all realities of life and undergone a dream birth into a shadow land. Shame slipped to my feet like loosened clothes. I heard his call—"Beloved, my most beloved!" And all my forgotten lives united as one and responded to it. I said, "Take me, take all I am!" And I stretched out my arms to him. The moon set behind the trees. One curtain of darkness covered all. Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merged together in an unbearable ecstasy. . . . With the first gleam of light, the first twitter of birds, I rose up and sat leaning on my left arm. He lay asleep with a vague smile about his lips like the crescent moon in the morning. The rosy red glow of the dawn fell upon his noble forehead. I sighed and stood up. I drew together the leafy lianas to screen the streaming sun from his face. I looked about me and saw the same old earth. I remembered what I used to be, and ran and ran like a deer afraid of her own shadow, through the forest path strewn with shephali flowers. I found a lonely nook, and sitting down covered my face with both hands, and tried to weep and cry. But no tears came to my eyes.

Madana

Alas, thou daughter of mortals! I stole from the divine Storehouse the fragrant wine of heaven, filled with it one earthly night to the brim, and placed it in thy hand to drink— yet still I hear this cry of anguish!

Chitra [bitterly]

Who drank it? The rarest completion of life's desire, the first union of love was proffered to me, but was wrested from my grasp? This borrowed beauty, this falsehood that enwraps me, will slip from me taking with it the only monument of that sweet union, as the petals fall from an overblown flower; and the woman ashamed of her naked poverty will sit weeping day and night. Lord Love, this cursed appearance companions me like a demon robbing me of

all the prizes of love—all the kisses for which my heart is athirst.

Madana

Alas, how vain thy single night had been! The barque of joy came in sight, but the waves would not let it touch the shore.

Chitra

Heaven came so close to my hand that I forgot for a moment that it had not reached me. But when I woke in the morning from my dream I found that my body had become my own rival. It is my hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him. O god, take back thy boon!

Madana

But if I take it from you how can you stand before your lover? To snatch away the cup from his lips when he has scarcely drained his first draught of pleasure, would not that be cruel? With what resentful anger he must regard thee then?

Chitra

That would be better far than this. I will reveal my true self to him, a nobler thing than this disguise. If he rejects it, if he spurns me and breaks my heart, I will bear even that in silence.

Vasanta

Listen to my advice. When with the advent of autumn the flowering season is over then comes the triumph of fruitage. A time will come of itself when the heat-cloyed bloom of the body will droop and Arjuna will gladly accept the abiding fruitful truth in thee. O child, go back to thy mad festival.

Scene IV

Chitra

Why do you watch me like that, my warrior?

Arjuna

I watch how you weave that garland. Skill and grace, the twin brother and sister, are dancing playfully on your finger tips. I am watching and thinking.

Chitra

What are you thinking, sir?

Arjuna

I am thinking that you, with this same lightness of touch and

sweetness, are weaving my days of exile into an immortal wreath, to crown me when I return home.

Chitra

Home! But this love is not for a home!

Arjuna

Not for a home?

Chitra

No. Never talk of that. Take to your home what is abiding and strong. Leave the little wild flower where it was born; leave it beautifully to die at the day's end among all fading blossoms and decaying leaves. Do not take it to your palace hall to fling it on the stony floor which knows no pity for things that fade and are forgotten.

Arjuna

Is ours that kind of love?

Chitra

Yes, no other! Why regret it? That which was meant for idle days should never outlive them. Joy turns into pain when the door by which it should depart is shut against it. Take it and keep it as long as it lasts. Let not the satiety of your evening claim more than the desire of your morning could earn. . . . The day is done. Put this garland on. I am tired. Take me in your arms, my love. Let all vain bickerings of discontent die away at the sweet meeting of our lips.

Arjuna

Hush! Listen, my beloved, the sound of prayer bells from the distant village temple steals upon the evening air across the silent trees!

Scene V

Vasanta

I cannot keep pace with thee, my friend! I am tired. It is a hard task to keep alive the fire thou hast kindled. Sleep overtakes me, the fan drops from my hand, and cold ashes cover the glow of the fire. I start up again from my slumber and with all my might rescue the weary flame. But this can go on no longer.

Madana

I know, thou art as fickle as a child. Ever restless is thy play in heaven and on earth. Things that thou for days buildest up with endless detail thou dost shatter in a moment without regret. But this work of ours is nearly finished. Pleasure-winged days

fly fast, and the year, almost at its end, swoons in rapturous bliss.

Scene VI

Arjuna

I woke in the morning and found that my dreams had distilled a gem. I have no casket to inclose it, no king's crown whereon to fix it, no chain from which to hang it, and yet have not the heart to throw it away. My Kshatriya's right arm, idly occupied in holding it, forgets its duties.

Enter CHITRA.

Chitra

Tell me your thoughts, sir!

Arjuna

My mind is busy with thoughts of hunting today. See, how the rain pours in torrents and fiercely beats upon the hillside. The dark shadow of the clouds hangs heavily over the forest, and the swollen stream, like reckless youth, overleaps all barriers with mocking laughter. On such rainy days we five brothers would go to the Chitraka forest to chase wild beasts. Those were glad times. Our hearts danced to the drumbeat of rumbling clouds. The woods resounded with the screams of peacocks. Timid deer could not hear our approaching steps for the patter of rain and the noise of waterfalls; the leopards would leave their tracks on the wet earth, betraying their lairs. Our sport over, we dared each other to swim across turbulent streams on our way back home. The restless spirit is on me. I long to go hunting.

Chitra

First run down the quarry you are now following. Are you quite certain that the enchanted deer you pursue must needs be caught? No, not yet. Like a dream the wild creature eludes you when it seems most nearly yours. Look how the wind is chased by the mad rain that discharges a thousand arrows after it. Yet it goes free and unconquered. Our sport is like that, my love! You give chase to the fleet-footed spirit of beauty, aiming at her every dart you have in your hands. Yet this magic deer runs ever free and untouched.

Arjuna

My love, have you no home where kind hearts are waiting for your return? A home which you once made sweet with your gentle service and whose light went out when you left it for this wilderness?

Chitra

Why these questions? Are the hours of unthinking pleasure over?

Do you not know that I am no more than what you see before you? For me there is no vista beyond. The dew that hangs on the tip of a Kinsuka petal has neither name nor destination. It offers no answer to any question. She whom you love is like that perfect bead of dew.

Arjuna

Has she no tie with the world? Can she be merely like a fragment of heaven dropped on the earth through the carelessness of a wanton god?

Chitra

Yes.

Arjuna

Ah, that is why I always seem about to lose you. My heart is unsatisfied, my mind knows no peace. Come closer to me, unattainable one! Surrender yourself to the bonds of name and home and parentage. Let my heart feel you on all sides and live with you in the peaceful security of love.

Chitra

Why this vain effort to catch and keep the tints of the clouds, the dance of the waves, the smell of the flowers?

Arjuna

Mistress mine, do not hope to pacify love with airy nothings. Give me something to clasp, something that can last longer than pleasure, that can endure even through suffering.

Chitra

Hero mine, the year is not yet full, and you are tired already! Now I know that it is Heaven's blessing that has made the flower's term of life short. Could this body of mine have drooped and died with the flowers of last spring it surely would have died with honour. Yet, its days are numbered, my love. Spare it not, press it dry of honey, for fear your beggar's heart come back to it again and again with unsated desire, like a thirsty bee when summer blossoms lie dead in the dust.

Scene VII

Madana

Tonight is thy last night.

Vasanta

The loveliness of your body will return tomorrow to the inexhaustible stores of the spring. The ruddy tint of thy lips freed from the memory of Arjuna's kisses, will bud anew as a pair

of fresh asoka leaves, and the soft, white glow of thy skin will be born again in a hundred fragrant jasmine flowers.

Chitra

O gods, grant me this my prayer! Tonight, in its last hour let my beauty flash its brightest, like the final flicker of a dying flame.

Madana

Thou shalt have thy wish.

Scene VIII

Villagers

Who will protect us now?

Arjuna

Why, by what danger are you threatened?

Villagers

The robbers are pouring from the northern hills like a mountain flood to devastate our village.

Arjuna

Have you in this kingdom no warden?

Villagers

Princess Chitra was the terror of all evil doers. While she was in this happy land we feared natural deaths, but had no other fears. Now she has gone on a pilgrimage, and none knows where to find her.

Arjuna

Is the warden of this country a woman?

Villagers

Yes, she is our father and mother in one.
[Exeunt.]

Enter CHITRA.

Chitra

Why are you sitting all alone?

Arjuna

I am trying to imagine what kind of woman Princess Chitra may be. I hear so many stories of her from all sorts of men.

Chitra

Ah, but she is not beautiful. She has no such lovely eyes as mine, dark as death. She can pierce any target she will, but not our hero's heart.

Arjuna

They say that in valour she is a man, and a woman in tenderness.

Chitra

That, indeed, is her greatest misfortune. When a woman is merely a woman; when she winds herself round and round men's hearts with her smiles and sobs and services and caressing endearments; then she is happy. Of what use to her are learning and great achievements? Could you have seen her only yesterday in the court of the Lord Shiva's temple by the forest path, you would have passed by without deigning to look at her. But have you grown so weary of woman's beauty that you seek in her for a man's strength?

With green leaves wet from the spray of the foaming waterfall, I have made our noonday bed in a cavern dark as night. There the cool of the soft green mosses thick on the black and dripping stone, kisses your eyes to sleep. Let me guide you thither.

Arjuna

Not today, beloved.

Chitra

Why not today?

Arjuna

I have heard that a horde of robbers has neared the plains. Needs must I go and prepare my weapons to protect the frightened villagers.

Chitra

You need have no fear for them. Before she started on her pilgrimage, Princess Chitra had set strong guards at all the frontier passes.

Arjuna

Yet permit me for a short while to set about a Kshatriya's work. With new glory will I ennoble this idle arm, and make of it a pillow more worthy of your head.

Chitra

What if I refuse to let you go, if I keep you entwined in my arms? Would you rudely snatch yourself free and leave me? Go then! But you must know that the liana, once broken in two, never joins again. Go, if your thirst is quenched. But, if not,

then remember that the goddess of pleasure is fickle, and waits for no man. Sit for a while, my lord! Tell me what uneasy thoughts tease you. Who occupied your mind today? Is it Chitra?

Arjuna

Yes, it is Chitra. I wonder in fulfilment of what vow she has gone on her pilgrimage. Of what could she stand in need?

Chitra

Her needs? Why, what has she ever had, the unfortunate creature? Her very qualities are as prison walls, shutting her woman's heart in a bare cell. She is obscured, she is unfulfilled. Her womanly love must content itself dressed in rags; beauty is denied her. She is like the spirit of a cheerless morning, sitting upon the stony mountain peak, all her light blotted out by dark clouds. Do not ask me of her life. It will never sound sweet to man's ear.

Arjuna

I am eager to learn all about her. I am like a traveller come to a strange city at midnight. Domes and towers and garden-trees look vague and shadowy, and the dull moan of the sea comes fitfully through the silence of sleep. Wistfully he waits for the morning to reveal to him all the strange wonders. Oh, tell me her story.

Chitra

What more is there to tell?

Arjuna

I seem to see her, in my mind's eye, riding on a white horse, proudly holding the reins in her left hand, and in her right a bow, and like the Goddess of Victory dispensing glad hope all round her. Like a watchful lioness she protects the litter at her dugs with a fierce love. Woman's arms, though adorned with naught but unfettered strength, are beautiful! My heart is restless, fair one, like a serpent reviving from his long winter's sleep. Come, let us both race on swift horses side by side, like twin orbs of light sweeping through space. Out from this slumbrous prison of green gloom, this dank, dense cover of perfumed intoxication, choking breath.

Chitra

Arjuna, tell me true, if, now at once, by some magic I could shake myself free from this voluptuous softness, this timid bloom of beauty shrinking from the rude and healthy touch of the world, and fling it from my body like borrowed clothes, would you be able to bear it? If I stand up straight and strong with the strength of a daring heart spurning the wiles and arts of twining weakness, if I hold my head high like a tall young mountain fir,

no longer trailing in the dust like a liana, shall I then appeal to man's eye? No, no, you could not endure it. It is better that I should keep spread about me all the dainty playthings of fugitive youth, and wait for you in patience. When it pleases you to return, I will smilingly pour out for you the wine of pleasure in the cup of this beauteous body. When you are tired and satiated with this wine, you can go to work or play; and when I grow old I will accept humbly and gratefully whatever corner is left for me. Would it please your heroic soul if the playmate of the night aspired to be the helpmeet of the day, if the left arm learnt to share the burden of the proud right arm?

Arjuna

I never seem to know you aright. You seem to me like a goddess hidden within a golden image. I cannot touch you, I cannot pay you my dues in return for your priceless gifts. Thus my love is incomplete. Sometimes in the enigmatic depth of your sad look, in your playful words mocking at their own meaning, I gain glimpses of a being trying to rend asunder the languorous grace of her body, to emerge in a chaste fire of pain through a vaporous veil of smiles. Illusion is the first appearance of Truth. She advances towards her lover in disguise. But a time comes when she throws off her ornaments and veils and stands clothed in naked dignity. I grope for that ultimate you, that bare simplicity of truth.

Why these tears, my love? Why cover your face with your hands? Have I pained you, my darling? Forget what I said. I will be content with the present. Let each separate moment of beauty come to me like a bird of mystery from its unseen nest in the dark bearing a message of music. Let me for ever sit with my hope on the brink of its realization, and thus end my days.

Scene IX

CHITRA and ARJUNA

Chitra [cloaked]

My lord, has the cup been drained to the last drop? Is this, indeed, the end? No, when all is done something still remains, and that is my last sacrifice at your feet.

I brought from the garden of heaven flowers of incomparable beauty with which to worship you, god of my heart. If the rites are over, if the flowers have faded, let me throw them out of the temple [unveiling in her original male attire]. Now, look at your worshipper with gracious eyes.

I am not beautifully perfect as the flowers with which I worshipped. I have many flaws and blemishes. I am a traveller in the great world-path, my garments are dirty, and my feet are bleeding with thorns. Where should I achieve

flower-beauty, the unsullied loveliness of a moment's life? The gift that I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman. Here have all pains and joys gathered, the hopes and fears and shames of a daughter of the dust; here love springs up struggling toward immortal life. Herein lies an imperfection which yet is noble and grand. If the flower-service is finished, my master, accept this as your servant for the days to come!

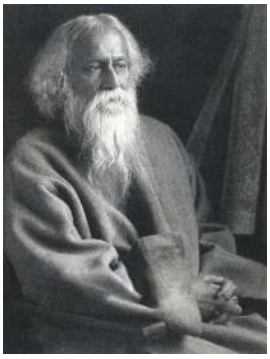
I am Chitra, the king's daughter. Perhaps you will remember the day when a woman came to you in the temple of Shiva, her body loaded with ornaments and finery. That shameless woman came to court you as though she were a man. You rejected her; you did well. My lord, I am that woman. She was my disguise. Then by the boon of gods I obtained for a year the most radiant form that a mortal ever wore, and wearied my hero's heart with the burden of that deceit. Most surely I am not that woman.

I am Chitra. No goddess to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self. If your babe, whom I am nourishing in my womb be born a son, I shall myself teach him to be a second Arjuna, and send him to you when the time comes, and then at last you will truly know me. Today I can only offer you Chitra, the daughter of a king.

Arjuna

Beloved, my life is full.

Biography



This photograph is in the public domain.

Rabindranath Tagore (7 May 1861–7 August 1941), born in Calcutta, was the first non-European winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature. In addition to being a masterful playwright, poet, and novelist, he was also a skilled artist. Tagore's impact on global literature cannot be understated. Several major writers—including William Butler Yeats, Pablo Neruda, and Salmon Rushdie—were inspired by the works of Tagore. Many statues and museums across the world are named in his honor.

This page titled 7.1: Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra (1914) is shared under a Public Domain license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **9.6: Tagore, Rabindranath. Chitra (1914)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed Public Domain.

7.2: Susan Glaspell's Trifles (1916)

Trifles

by Susan Glaspell

First performed by the Provincetown Players at the Wharf Theatre, Provincetown, Mass., August 8, 1916.

Characters

GEORGE HENDERSON (County Attorney)

HENRY PETERS (Sheriff)

LEWIS HALE, A neighboring farmer

MRS PETERS

MRS HALE

Scene 1

SCENE: *The kitchen is the now abandoned farmhouse of* JOHN WRIGHT, *a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table—other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens and the* SHERIFF *comes in followed by the* COUNTY ATTORNEY *and* HALE. *The* SHERIFF *and* HALE *are men in middle life, the* COUNTY ATTORNEY *is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women—the* SHERIFF*'s wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face.* MRS HALE *is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.*

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*rubbing his hands*) This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

MRS PETERS: (*after taking a step forward*) I'm not—cold.

SHERIFF: (*unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business*) Now, Mr Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

SHERIFF: (*looking about*) It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us—no use getting pneumonia with a big case on, but I told him not to touch anything except the stove—and you know Frank.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

SHERIFF: Oh—yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy—I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today and as long as I went over everything here myself—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Well, Mr Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

HALE: Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place and as I got here I said, I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone.' I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet—I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn't know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Let's talk about that later, Mr Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

HALE: I didn't hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say, 'Come in.' I wasn't sure, I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door—this door (*indicating the door by which the two women are still standing*) and there in that rocker—(*pointing to it*) sat Mrs Wright.

(*They all look at the rocker*.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: What—was she doing?

HALE: She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of—pleating it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And how did she—look?

HALE: Well, she looked queer.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: How do you mean—queer?

HALE: Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: How did she seem to feel about your coming?

HALE: Why, I don't think she minded—one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, 'How do, Mrs Wright it's cold, ain't it?' And she said, 'Is it?'—and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, 'I want to see John.' And then she—laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: 'Can't I see John?' 'No', she says, kind o' dull like. 'Ain't he home?' says I. 'Yes', says she, 'he's home'. 'Then why can't I see him?' I asked her, out of patience. "Cause he's dead', says she. *'Dead*?' says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. 'Why—where is he?' says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs—like that (*himself pointing to the room above*) I got up, with the idea of going up there. I walked from there to here—then I says, 'Why, what did he die of?' 'He died of a rope round his neck', says she, and just went on pleatin' at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might—need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin'—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I think I'd rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

HALE: Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked ... (*stops, his face twitches*) ... but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, 'No, he's dead all right, and we'd better not touch anything.' So we went back down stairs. She was still sitting that same way. 'Has anybody been notified?' I asked. 'No', says she unconcerned. 'Who did this, Mrs Wright?' said Harry. He said it business-like—and she stopped pleatin' of her apron. 'I don't know', she says. 'You don't *know*?' says Harry. 'No', says she. 'Weren't you sleepin' in the bed with him?' says Harry. 'Yes', says she, 'but I was on the inside'. 'Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn't wake up?' says Harry. 'I didn't wake up', she said after him. We must 'a looked as if we didn't see how that could be, for after a minute she said, 'I sleep sound'. Harry was going to ask her more questions but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers' place, where there's a telephone.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And what did Mrs Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?

HALE: She moved from that chair to this one over here (*pointing to a small chair in the corner*) and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me—scared, (*the* COUNTY ATTORNEY, *who has had his notebook out, makes a note*) I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr Lloyd came, and you, Mr Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*looking around*) I guess we'll go upstairs first—and then out to the barn and around there, (*to the* SHERIFF) You're convinced that there was nothing important here—nothing that would point to any motive.

SHERIFF: Nothing here but kitchen things.

(*The* COUNTY ATTORNEY, *after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky*.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Here's a nice mess.

(*The women draw nearer*.)

MRS PETERS: (*to the other woman*) Oh, her fruit; it did freeze, (*to the* LAWYER) She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

SHERIFF: Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

HALE: Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

(*The two women move a little closer together*.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*with the gallantry of a young politician*) And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? (*the women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place*) Dirty towels! (*kicks his foot against the pans under the sink*) Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

MRS HALE: (*stiffly*) There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: To be sure. And yet (*with a little bow to her*) I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels. (*He gives it a pull to expose its length again*.)

MRS HALE: Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

MRS HALE: (*shaking her head*) I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house—it's more than a year.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And why was that? You didn't like her?

MRS HALE: I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr Henderson. And then—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Yes—?

MRS HALE: (*looking about*) It never seemed a very cheerful place.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: No—it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct.

MRS HALE: Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: You mean that they didn't get on very well?

MRS HALE: No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now. (*He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door*.)

SHERIFF: I suppose anything Mrs Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

MRS PETERS: Yes, Mr Henderson.

(*The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen*.)

MRS HALE: I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticising.

(*She arranges the pans under sink which the* LAWYER *had shoved out of place*.)

MRS PETERS: Of course it's no more than their duty.

MRS HALE: Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. (*gives the roller towel a pull*) Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

MRS PETERS: (*who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted one end of a towel that covers a pan*) She had bread set. (*Stands still*.)

MRS HALE: (*eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it*) She was going to put this in there, (*picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things*) It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. (*gets up on the chair and looks*) I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs Peters. Yes—here; (*holding it toward the window*) this is cherries, too. (*looking again*) I declare I believe that's the only one. (*gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside*) She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

(*She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room. With a sigh, is about to sit down in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth*.)

MRS PETERS: Well, I must get those things from the front room closet, (*she goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back*) You coming with me, Mrs Hale? You could help me carry them.

(*They go in the other room; reappear,* MRS PETERS *carrying a dress and skirt,* MRS HALE *following with a pair of shoes.*)

MRS PETERS: My, it's cold in there.

(*She puts the clothes on the big table, and hurries to the stove.*)

MRS HALE: (*examining the skirt*) Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that—oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take in?

MRS PETERS: She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. (*opens stair door and looks*) Yes, here it is.

(*Quickly shuts door leading upstairs.*)

MRS HALE: (*abruptly moving toward her*) Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Yes, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: Do you think she did it?

MRS PETERS: (*in a frightened voice*) Oh, I don't know.

MRS HALE: Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

MRS PETERS: (*starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice*) Mr Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

MRS HALE: Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

MRS PETERS: No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a—funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

MRS HALE: That's just what Mr Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.

MRS PETERS: Mr Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or—sudden feeling.

MRS HALE: (*who is standing by the table*) Well, I don't see any signs of anger around here, (*she puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy*) It's wiped to here, (*makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the breadbox. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things.*) Wonder how they are finding things upstairs. I hope she had it a little more red-up up there. You know, it seems kind of sneaking. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

MRS PETERS: But Mrs Hale, the law is the law.

MRS HALE: I s'pose 'tis, (*unbuttoning her coat*) Better loosen up your things, Mrs Peters. You won't feel them when you go out.

(MRS PETERS *takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.*)

MRS PETERS: She was piecing a quilt. (*She brings the large sewing basket and they look at the bright pieces.*)

MRS HALE: It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?

(*Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs*. The SHERIFF enters followed by HALE and the COUNTY ATTORNEY.)

SHERIFF: They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it! (*The men laugh, the women look abashed.*)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*rubbing his hands over the stove*) Frank's fire didn't do much up there, did it? Well, let's go out to the barn and get that cleared up. (*The men go outside.*)

MRS HALE: (*resentfully*) I don't know as there's anything so strange, our takin' up our time with little things while we're waiting for them to get the evidence. (*she sits down at the big table smoothing out a block with decision*) I don't see as it's anything to laugh

about.

MRS PETERS: (*apologetically*) Of course they've got awful important things on their minds.

(*Pulls up a chair and joins MRS HALE at the table*.)

MRS HALE: (*examining another block*) Mrs Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!

(*After she has said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door. After an instant* MRS HALE *has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing*.)

MRS PETERS: Oh, what are you doing, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: (*mildly*) Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. (*threading a needle*) Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

MRS PETERS: (nervously) I don't think we ought to touch things.

MRS HALE: I'll just finish up this end. (*suddenly stopping and leaning forward*) Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Yes, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

MRS PETERS: Oh—I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. (MRS HALE *starts to say something, looks at* MRS PETERS, *then goes on sewing*) Well I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think, (*putting apron and other things together*) I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

MRS HALE: In that cupboard, maybe.

MRS PETERS: (*looking in cupboard*) Why, here's a bird-cage, (*holds it up*) Did she have a bird, Mrs Hale?

MRS HALE: Why, I don't know whether she did or not—I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

MRS PETERS: (*glancing around*) Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it.

MRS HALE: I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

MRS PETERS: No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats—being afraid of them. My cat got in her room and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

MRS HALE: My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

MRS PETERS: (*examining the cage*) Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

MRS HALE: (*looking too*) Looks as if someone must have been rough with it.

MRS PETERS: Why, yes.

(*She brings the cage forward and puts it on the table*.)

MRS HALE: I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

MRS PETERS: But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

MRS HALE: It would, wouldn't it? (*dropping her sewing*) But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when *she* was here. I—(*looking around the room*)—wish I had.

MRS PETERS: But of course you were awful busy, Mrs Hale—your house and your children.

MRS HALE: I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful—and that's why I ought to have come. I—I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now—(*shakes her head*)

MRS PETERS: Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until—something comes up.

MRS HALE: Not having children makes less work—but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

MRS HALE: Yes—good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him—(*shivers*) Like a raw wind that gets to the bone, (*pauses, her eye falling on the cage*) I should think she would 'a wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

MRS PETERS: I don't know, unless it got sick and died.

(*She reaches over and swings the broken door, swings it again, both women watch it.*)

MRS HALE: You weren't raised round here, were you? (*MRS PETERS shakes her head*) You didn't know—her?

MRS PETERS: Not till they brought her yesterday.

MRS HALE: She—come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself—real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and—fluttery. How—she—did—change. (*silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to everyday things*) Tell you what, Mrs Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

MRS PETERS: Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs Hale. There couldn't possibly be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here—and her things.

(*They look in the sewing basket.*)

MRS HALE: Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in it. (*brings out a fancy box*) What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give you. Maybe her scissors are in here. (*Opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose*) Why—(MRS PETERS *bends nearer, then turns her face away*) There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

MRS PETERS: Why, this isn't her scissors.

MRS HALE: (*lifting the silk*) Oh, Mrs Peters—it's—

(MRS PETERS *bends closer*.)

MRS PETERS: It's the bird.

MRS HALE: (*jumping up*) But, Mrs Peters—look at it! It's neck! Look at its neck!

It's all—other side *to*.

MRS PETERS: Somebody—wrung—its—neck.

(*Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension, of horror. Steps are heard outside*. MRS HALE *slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair. Enter* SHERIFF *and* COUNTY ATTORNEY. MRS PETERS *rises*.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*as one turning from serious things to little pleasantries*) Well ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

MRS PETERS: We think she was going to—knot it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. (*seeing the birdcage*) Has the bird flown?

MRS HALE: (*putting more quilt pieces over the box*) We think the—cat got it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*preoccupied*) Is there a cat?

(MRS HALE *glances in a quick covert way at* MRS PETERS.)

MRS PETERS: Well, not now. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*to* SHERIFF PETERS, *continuing an interrupted conversation*) No sign at all of anyone having come from the outside. Their own rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece. (*they start upstairs*) It would have to have been someone who knew just the—

(MRS PETERS *sits down. The two women sit there not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they can not help saying it.*)

MRS HALE: She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

MRS PETERS: (*in a whisper*) When I was a girl—my kitten—there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes—and before I could get there—(*covers her face an instant*) If they hadn't held me back I would have—(*catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly*)—hurt him.

MRS HALE: (*with a slow look around her*) I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around, (*pause*) No, Wright wouldn't like the bird—a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

MRS PETERS: (*moving uneasily*) We don't know who killed the bird.

MRS HALE: I knew John Wright.

MRS PETERS: It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

MRS HALE: His neck. Choked the life out of him.

(*Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage*.)

MRS PETERS: (*with rising voice*) We don't know who killed him. We don't *know*.

MRS HALE: (*her own feeling not interrupted*) If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful—still, after the bird was still.

MRS PETERS: (*something within her speaking*) I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then—

MRS HALE: (*moving*) How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for the evidence?

MRS PETERS: I know what stillness is. (*pulling herself back*) The law has got to punish crime, Mrs Hale.

MRS HALE: (*not as if answering that*) I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. (*a look around the room*) Oh, I *wish* I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

MRS PETERS: (*looking upstairs*) We mustn't—take on.

MRS HALE: I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be—for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it's all just a different kind of the same thing, (*brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it*) If I was you, I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it *ain't*. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She—she may never know whether it was broke or not.

MRS PETERS: (*takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice*) My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a—dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with—with—wouldn't they *laugh*!

(*The men are heard coming down stairs*.)

MRS HALE: (*under her breath*) Maybe they would—maybe they wouldn't.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show—something to make a story about—a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it—

(*The women's eyes meet for an instant. Enter HALE from outer door*.)

HALE: Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: I'm going to stay here a while by myself, (*to the* SHERIFF) You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

SHERIFF: Do you want to see what Mrs Peters is going to take in?

(*The* LAWYER *goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs*.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. (*Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back*) No, Mrs Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs Peters?

MRS PETERS: Not—just that way.

SHERIFF: (*chuckling*) Married to the law. (*moves toward the other room*) I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*scoffingly*) Oh, windows!

SHERIFF: We'll be right out, Mr Hale.

(HALE *goes outside. The* SHERIFF *follows the* COUNTY ATTORNEY *into the other room. Then* MRS HALE *rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at* MRS PETERS, *whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting* MRS HALE's. *A moment* MRS HALE *holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly* MRS PETERS *throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room.* MRS HALE *snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter* COUNTY ATTORNEY *and* SHERIFF.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*facetiously*) Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to—what is it you call it, ladies?

MRS HALE: (*her hand against her pocket*) We call it—knot it, Mr Henderson.

(CURTAIN)

This page titled 7.2: Susan Glaspell's Trifles (1916) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

7.3: Sophocles' Antigone (441 BC)

Synopsis

Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, the late king of Thebes, in defiance of Creon who rules in his stead, resolves to bury her brother Polyneices, slain in his attack on Thebes. She is caught in the act by Creon's watchmen and brought before the king. She justifies her action, asserting that she was bound to obey the eternal laws of right and wrong in spite of any human ordinance. Creon, unrelenting, condemns her to be immured in a rock-hewn chamber. His son Haemon, to whom Antigone is betrothed, pleads in vain for her life and threatens to die with her. Warned by the seer Teiresias Creon repents him and hurries to release Antigone from her rocky prison. But he is too late: he finds lying side by side Antigone who had hanged herself and Haemon who also has perished by his own hand. Returning to the palace he sees within the dead body of his queen who on learning of her son's death has stabbed herself to the heart.



Antigone and the body of Polynieces (public domain)

Dramatis Personae (Characters)

ANTIGONE and ISMENE—daughters of Oedipus and sisters of Polyneices and Eteocles.

CREON, King of Thebes.

HAEMON, Son of Creon, betrothed to Antigone.

EURYDICE, wife of Creon.

TEIRESIAS, the prophet.

CHORUS, of Theban elders.

A WATCHMAN

A MESSENGER

A SECOND MESSENGER

The Play

ANTIGONE and ISMENE before the Palace gates.

ANTIGONE

Ismene, sister of my blood and heart,

See'st thou how Zeus would in our lives fulfill

The weird of Oedipus, a world of woes!

For what of pain, affliction, outrage, shame,

Is lacking in our fortunes, thine and mine?

And now this proclamation of today

Made by our Captain-General to the State,

What can its purport be? Didst hear and heed,

Or art thou deaf when friends are banned as foes?

ISMENE

To me, Antigone, no word of friends

Has come, or glad or grievous, since we twain

Were reft of our two brethren in one day

By double fratricide; and since i' the night

Our Argive leaguers fled, no later news

Has reached me, to inspirit or deject.

ANTIGONE

I know 'twas so, and therefore summoned thee

Beyond the gates to breathe it in thine ear.

ISMENE

What is it? Some dark secret stirs thy breast.

ANTIGONE

What but the thought of our two brothers dead,

The one by Creon graced with funeral rites,

The other disappointed? Eteocles

He hath consigned to earth (as fame reports)

With obsequies that use and wont ordain,

So gracing him among the dead below.

But Polyneices, a dishonored corse,

(So by report the royal edict runs)

No man may bury him or make lament—

Must leave him tombless and unwept, a feast

For kites to scent afar and swoop upon.

Such is the edict (if report speak true)

Of Creon, our most noble Creon, aimed

At thee and me, aye me too; and anon
He will be here to promulgate, for such
As have not heard, his mandate; 'tis in sooth
No passing humor, for the edict says
Whoe'er transgresses shall be stoned to death.
So stands it with us; now 'tis thine to show
If thou art worthy of thy blood or base.

ISMENE

But how, my rash, fond sister, in such case
Can I do anything to make or mar?

ANTIGONE

Say, wilt thou aid me and abet? Decide.

ISMENE

In what bold venture? What is in thy thought?

ANTIGONE

Lend me a hand to bear the corpse away.

ISMENE

What, bury him despite the interdict?

ANTIGONE

My brother, and, though thou deny him, thine
No man shall say that I betrayed a brother.

ISMENE

Wilt thou persist, though Creon has forbid?

ANTIGONE

What right has he to keep me from my own?

ISMENE

Bethink thee, sister, of our father's fate,
Abhorred, dishonored, self-convinced of sin,
Blinded, himself his executioner.
Think of his mother-wife (ill sorted names)
Done by a noose herself had twined to death
And last, our hapless brethren in one day,
Both in a mutual destiny involved,
Self-slaughtered, both the slayer and the slain.
Bethink thee, sister, we are left alone;
Shall we not perish wretchedest of all,
If in defiance of the law we cross
A monarch's will?—weak women, think of that,

Not framed by nature to contend with men.

Remember this too that the stronger rules;

We must obey his orders, these or worse.

Therefore I plead compulsion and entreat

The dead to pardon. I perforce obey

The powers that be. 'Tis foolishness, I ween,

To overstep in aught the golden mean.

ANTIGONE

I urge no more; nay, wert thou willing still,

I would not welcome such a fellowship.

Go thine own way; myself will bury him.

How sweet to die in such employ, to rest,—

Sister and brother linked in love's embrace—

A sinless sinner, banned awhile on earth,

But by the dead commended; and with them

I shall abide for ever. As for thee,

Scorn, if thou wilt, the eternal laws of Heaven.

ISMENE

I scorn them not, but to defy the State

Or break her ordinance I have no skill.

ANTIGONE

A specious pretext. I will go alone

To lap my dearest brother in the grave.

ISMENE

My poor, fond sister, how I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE

O waste no fears on me; look to thyself.

ISMENE

At least let no man know of thine intent,

But keep it close and secret, as will I.

ANTIGONE

O tell it, sister; I shall hate thee more

If thou proclaim it not to all the town.

ISMENE

Thou hast a fiery soul for numbing work.

ANTIGONE

I pleasure those whom I would liefest please.

ISMENE

If thou succeed; but thou art doomed to fail.

ANTIGONE

When strength shall fail me, yes, but not before.

ISMENE

But, if the venture's hopeless, why essay?

ANTIGONE

Sister, forbear, or I shall hate thee soon,

And the dead man will hate thee too, with cause.

Say I am mad and give my madness rein

To wreck itself; the worst that can befall

Is but to die an honorable death.

ISMENE

Have thine own way then; 'tis a mad endeavor,

Yet to thy lovers thou art dear as ever.

[Exeunt]

CHORUS

(Str. 1)

Sunbeam, of all that ever dawn upon

Our seven-gated Thebes the brightest ray,

O eye of golden day,

How fair thy light o'er Dirce's fountain shone,

Speeding upon their headlong homeward course,

Far quicker than they came, the Argive force;

Putting to flight

The argent shields, the host with scutcheons white.

Against our land the proud invader came

To vindicate fell Polyneices' claim.

Like to an eagle swooping low,

On pinions white as new fall'n snow.

With clanging scream, a horsetail plume his crest,

The aspiring lord of Argos onward pressed.

(Ant. 1)

Hovering around our city walls he waits,

His spearmen raven at our seven gates.

But ere a torch our crown of towers could burn,

Ere they had tasted of our blood, they turn

Forced by the Dragon; in their rear

The din of Ares panic-struck they hear.

For Zeus who hates the braggart's boast
Beheld that gold-bespangled host;
As at the goal the paean they upraise,
He struck them with his forked lightning blaze.
(Str. 2)
To earthy from earth rebounding, down he crashed;
The fire-brand from his impious hand was dashed,
As like a Bacchic reveler on he came,
Outbreathing hate and flame,
And tottered. Elsewhere in the field,
Here, there, great Area like a war-horse wheeled;
Beneath his car down thrust
Our foemen bit the dust.
Seven captains at our seven gates
Thundered; for each a champion waits,
Each left behind his armor bright,
Trophy for Zeus who turns the fight;
Save two alone, that ill-starred pair
One mother to one father bare,
Who lance in rest, one 'gainst the other
Drave, and both perished, brother slain by brother.
(Ant. 2)
Now Victory to Thebes returns again
And smiles upon her chariot-circled plain.
Now let feast and festal should
Memories of war blot out.
Let us to the temples throng,
Dance and sing the live night long.
God of Thebes, lead thou the round.
Bacchus, shaker of the ground!
Let us end our revels here;
Lo! Creon our new lord draws near,
Crowned by this strange chance, our king.
What, I marvel, pondering?
Why this summons? Wherefore call
Us, his elders, one and all,
Bidding us with him debate,
On some grave concern of State?

[Enter CREON]

CREON

Elders, the gods have righted one again
Our storm-tossed ship of state, now safe in port.
But you by special summons I convened
As my most trusted councilors; first, because
I knew you loyal to Laius of old;
Again, when Oedipus restored our State,
Both while he ruled and when his rule was o'er,
Ye still were constant to the royal line.
Now that his two sons perished in one day,
Brother by brother murderously slain,
By right of kinship to the Princes dead,
I claim and hold the throne and sovereignty.
Yet 'tis no easy matter to discern
The temper of a man, his mind and will,
Till he be proved by exercise of power;
And in my case, if one who reigns supreme
Swerve from the highest policy, tongue-tied
By fear of consequence, that man I hold,
And ever held, the basest of the base.
And I contemn the man who sets his friend
Before his country. For myself, I call
To witness Zeus, whose eyes are everywhere,
If I perceive some mischievous design
To sap the State, I will not hold my tongue;
Nor would I reckon as my private friend
A public foe, well knowing that the State
Is the good ship that holds our fortunes all:
Farewell to friendship, if she suffers wreck.
Such is the policy by which I seek
To serve the Commons and conformably
I have proclaimed an edict as concerns
The sons of Oedipus; Eteocles
Who in his country's battle fought and fell,
The foremost champion—duly bury him
With all observances and ceremonies
That are the guerdon of the heroic dead.

But for the miscreant exile who returned
Minded in flames and ashes to blot out
His father's city and his father's gods,
And glut his vengeance with his kinsmen's blood,
Or drag them captive at his chariot wheels—
For Polyneices 'tis ordained that none
Shall give him burial or make mourn for him,
But leave his corpse unburied, to be meat
For dogs and carrion crows, a ghastly sight.
So am I purposed; never by my will
Shall miscreants take precedence of true men,
But all good patriots, alive or dead,
Shall be by me preferred and honored.

CHORUS

Son of Menoeceus, thus thou will'st to deal
With him who loathed and him who loved our State.
Thy word is law; thou canst dispose of us
The living, as thou will'st, as of the dead.

CREON

See then ye execute what I ordain.

CHORUS

On younger shoulders lay this grievous charge.

CREON

Fear not, I've posted guards to watch the corpse.

CHORUS

What further duty would'st thou lay on us?

CREON

Not to connive at disobedience.

CHORUS

No man is mad enough to court his death.

CREON

The penalty is death: yet hope of gain
Hath lured men to their ruin oftentimes.

[Enter GUARD]

GUARD

My lord, I will not make pretense to pant
And puff as some light-footed messenger.
In sooth my soul beneath its pack of thought

Made many a halt and turned and turned again;
For conscience plied her spur and curb by turns.
"Why hurry headlong to thy fate, poor fool?"
She whispered. Then again, "If Creon learn
This from another, thou wilt rue it worse."
Thus leisurely I hastened on my road;
Much thought extends a furlong to a league.
But in the end the forward voice prevailed,
To face thee. I will speak though I say nothing.
For plucking courage from despair methought,
'Let the worst hap, thou canst but meet thy fate.'

CREON

What is thy news? Why this despondency?

GUARD

Let me premise a word about myself?
I neither did the deed nor saw it done,
Nor were it just that I should come to harm.

CREON

Thou art good at parry, and canst fence about
Some matter of grave import, as is plain.

GUARD

The bearer of dread tidings needs must quake.

CREON

Then, sirrah, shoot thy bolt and get thee gone.

GUARD

Well, it must out; the corpse is buried; someone
E'en now besprinkled it with thirsty dust,
Performed the proper ritual—and was gone.

CREON

What say'st thou? Who hath dared to do this thing?

GUARD

I cannot tell, for there was ne'er a trace
Of pick or mattock—hard unbroken ground,
Without a scratch or rut of chariot wheels,
No sign that human hands had been at work.
When the first sentry of the morning watch
Gave the alarm, we all were terror-stricken.
The corpse had vanished, not interred in earth,

But strewn with dust, as if by one who sought
To avert the curse that haunts the unburied dead:
Of hound or ravening jackal, not a sign.
Thereat arose an angry war of words;
Guard railed at guard and blows were like to end it,
For none was there to part us, each in turn
Suspected, but the guilt brought home to none,
From lack of evidence. We challenged each
The ordeal, or to handle red-hot iron,
Or pass through fire, affirming on our oath
Our innocence—we neither did the deed
Ourselves, nor know who did or compassed it.
Our quest was at a standstill, when one spake
And bowed us all to earth like quivering reeds,
For there was no gainsaying him nor way
To escape perdition: Ye are bound to tell
The King, ye cannot hide it; so he spake.
And he convinced us all; so lots were cast,
And I, unlucky scapegoat, drew the prize.
So here I am unwilling and withal
Unwelcome; no man cares to hear ill news.

CHORUS

I had misgivings from the first, my liege,
Of something more than natural at work.

CREON

O cease, you vex me with your babblement;
I am like to think you dote in your old age.
Is it not arrant folly to pretend
That gods would have a thought for this dead man?
Did they forsooth award him special grace,
And as some benefactor bury him,
Who came to fire their hallowed sanctuaries,
To sack their shrines, to desolate their land,
And scout their ordinances? Or perchance
The gods bestow their favors on the bad.
No! no! I have long noted malcontents
Who wagged their heads, and kicked against the yoke,
Misliking these my orders, and my rule.

'Tis they, I warrant, who suborned my guards
By bribes. Of evils current upon earth
The worst is money. Money 'tis that sacks
Cities, and drives men forth from hearth and home;
Warps and seduces native innocence,
And breeds a habit of dishonesty.
But they who sold themselves shall find their greed
Out-shot the mark, and rue it soon or late.
Yea, as I still revere the dread of Zeus,
By Zeus I swear, except ye find and bring
Before my presence here the very man
Who carried out this lawless burial,
Death for your punishment shall not suffice.
Hanged on a cross, alive ye first shall make
Confession of this outrage. This will teach you
What practices are like to serve your turn.
There are some villainies that bring no gain.
For by dishonesty the few may thrive,
The many come to ruin and disgrace.

GUARD

May I not speak, or must I turn and go
Without a word?—

CREON

Begone! canst thou not see
That e'en this question irks me?

GUARD

Where, my lord?
Is it thy ears that suffer, or thy heart?

CREON

Why seek to probe and find the seat of pain?

GUARD

I gall thine ears—this miscreant thy mind.

CREON

What an inveterate babbler! get thee gone!

GUARD

Babbler perchance, but innocent of the crime.

CREON

Twice guilty, having sold thy soul for gain.

GUARD

Alas! how sad when reasoners reason wrong.

CREON

Go, quibble with thy reason. If thou fail'st

To find these malefactors, thou shalt own

The wages of ill-gotten gains is death.

[Exit CREON]

GUARD

I pray he may be found. But caught or not

(And fortune must determine that) thou never

Shalt see me here returning; that is sure.

For past all hope or thought I have escaped,

And for my safety owe the gods much thanks.

CHORUS

(Str. 1)

Many wonders there be, but naught more wondrous than man;

Over the surging sea, with a whitening south wind wan,

Through the foam of the firth, man makes his perilous way;

And the eldest of deities Earth that knows not toil nor decay

Ever he furrows and scores, as his team, year in year out,

With breed of the yoked horse, the ploughshare turneth about.

(Ant. 1)

The light-witted birds of the air, the beasts of the weald and the wood

He traps with his woven snare, and the brood of the briny flood.

Master of cunning he: the savage bull, and the hart

Who roams the mountain free, are tamed by his infinite art;

And the shaggy rough-maned steed is broken to bear the bit.

(Str. 2)

Speech and the wind-swift speed of counsel and civic wit,

He hath learnt for himself all these; and the arrowy rain to fly

And the nipping airs that freeze, 'neath the open winter sky.

He hath provision for all: fell plague he hath learnt to endure;

Safe whate'er may befall: yet for death he hath found no cure.

(Ant. 2)

Passing the wildest flight thought are the cunning and skill,

That guide man now to the light, but now to counsels of ill.

If he honors the laws of the land, and reveres the Gods of the State

Proudly his city shall stand; but a cityless outcast I rate

Whoso bold in his pride from the path of right doth depart;

Ne'er may I sit by his side, or share the thoughts of his heart.

What strange vision meets my eyes,

Fills me with a wild surprise?

Sure I know her, sure 'tis she,

The maid Antigone.

Hapless child of hapless sire,

Didst thou recklessly conspire,

Madly brave the King's decree?

Therefore are they haling thee?

[Enter GUARD bringing ANTIGONE]

GUARD

Here is the culprit taken in the act

Of giving burial. But where's the King?

CHORUS

There from the palace he returns in time.

[Enter CREON]

CREON

Why is my presence timely? What has chanced?

GUARD

No man, my lord, should make a vow, for if

He ever swears he will not do a thing,

His afterthoughts belie his first resolve.

When from the hail-storm of thy threats I fled

I sware thou wouldst not see me here again;

But the wild rapture of a glad surprise

Intoxicates, and so I'm here forsworn.

And here's my prisoner, caught in the very act,

Decking the grave. No lottery this time;

This prize is mine by right of treasure-trove.

So take her, judge her, rack her, if thou wilt.

She's thine, my liege; but I may rightly claim

Hence to depart well quit of all these ills.

CREON

Say, how didst thou arrest the maid, and where?

GUARD

Burying the man. There's nothing more to tell.

CREON

Hast thou thy wits? Or know'st thou what thou say'st?

GUARD

I saw this woman burying the corpse

Against thy orders. Is that clear and plain?

CREON

But how was she surprised and caught in the act?

GUARD

It happened thus. No sooner had we come,

Driven from thy presence by those awful threats,

Than straight we swept away all trace of dust,

And bared the clammy body. Then we sat

High on the ridge to windward of the stench,

While each man kept he fellow alert and rated

Roundly the sluggard if he chanced to nap.

So all night long we watched, until the sun

Stood high in heaven, and his blazing beams

Smote us. A sudden whirlwind then upraised

A cloud of dust that blotted out the sky,

And swept the plain, and stripped the woodlands bare,

And shook the firmament. We closed our eyes

And waited till the heaven-sent plague should pass.

At last it ceased, and lo! there stood this maid.

A piercing cry she uttered, sad and shrill,

As when the mother bird beholds her nest

Robbed of its nestlings; even so the maid

Wailed as she saw the body stripped and bare,

And cursed the ruffians who had done this deed.

Anon she gathered handfuls of dry dust,

Then, holding high a well-wrought brazen urn,

Thrice on the dead she poured a lustral stream.

We at the sight swooped down on her and seized

Our quarry. Undismayed she stood, and when

We taxed her with the former crime and this,

She disowned nothing. I was glad—and grieved;

For 'tis most sweet to 'scape oneself scot-free,

And yet to bring disaster to a friend

Is grievous. Take it all in all, I deem

A man's first duty is to serve himself.

CREON

Speak, girl, with head bent low and downcast eyes,

Does thou plead guilty or deny the deed?

ANTIGONE

Guilty. I did it, I deny it not.

CREON *(to GUARD)*

Sirrah, begone whither thou wilt, and thank

Thy luck that thou hast 'scaped a heavy charge.

(To ANTIGONE)

Now answer this plain question, yes or no,

Wast thou acquainted with the interdict?

ANTIGONE

I knew, all knew; how should I fail to know?

CREON

And yet wert bold enough to break the law?

ANTIGONE

Yea, for these laws were not ordained of Zeus,

And she who sits enthroned with gods below,

Justice, enacted not these human laws.

Nor did I deem that thou, a mortal man,

Could'st by a breath annul and override

The immutable unwritten laws of Heaven.

They were not born today nor yesterday;

They die not; and none knoweth whence they sprang.

I was not like, who feared no mortal's frown,

To disobey these laws and so provoke

The wrath of Heaven. I knew that I must die,

E'en hadst thou not proclaimed it; and if death

Is thereby hastened, I shall count it gain.

For death is gain to him whose life, like mine,

Is full of misery. Thus my lot appears

Not sad, but blissful; for had I endured

To leave my mother's son unburied there,

I should have grieved with reason, but not now.

And if in this thou judgest me a fool,

Methinks the judge of folly's not acquit.

CHORUS

A stubborn daughter of a stubborn sire,

This ill-starred maiden kicks against the pricks.

CREON

Well, let her know the stubbornest of wills

Are soonest bended, as the hardest iron,

O'er-heated in the fire to brittleness,

Flies soonest into fragments, shivered through.

A snaffle curbs the fieriest steed, and he

Who in subjection lives must needs be meek.

But this proud girl, in insolence well-schooled,

First overstepped the established law, and then—

A second and worse act of insolence—

She boasts and glories in her wickedness.

Now if she thus can flout authority

Unpunished, I am woman, she the man.

But though she be my sister's child or nearer

Of kin than all who worship at my hearth,

Nor she nor yet her sister shall escape

The utmost penalty, for both I hold,

As arch-conspirators, of equal guilt.

Bring forth the older; even now I saw her

Within the palace, frenzied and distraught.

The workings of the mind discover oft

Dark deeds in darkness schemed, before the act.

More hateful still the miscreant who seeks

When caught, to make a virtue of a crime.

ANTIGONE

Would'st thou do more than slay thy prisoner?

CREON

Not I, thy life is mine, and that's enough.

ANTIGONE

Why dally then? To me no word of thine

Is pleasant: God forbid it e'er should please;

Nor am I more acceptable to thee.

And yet how otherwise had I achieved

A name so glorious as by burying

A brother? so my townsmen all would say,

Where they not gagged by terror, Manifold

A king's prerogatives, and not the least

That all his acts and all his words are law.

CREON

Of all these Thebans none so deems but thou.

ANTIGONE

These think as I, but bate their breath to thee.

CREON

Hast thou no shame to differ from all these?

ANTIGONE

To reverence kith and kin can bring no shame.

CREON

Was his dead foeman not thy kinsman too?

ANTIGONE

One mother bare them and the self-same sire.

CREON

Why cast a slur on one by honoring one?

ANTIGONE

The dead man will not bear thee out in this.

CREON

Surely, if good and evil fare alive.

ANTIGONE

The slain man was no villain but a brother.

CREON

The patriot perished by the outlaw's brand.

ANTIGONE

Nathless the realms below these rites require.

CREON

Not that the base should fare as do the brave.

ANTIGONE

Who knows if this world's crimes are virtues there?

CREON

Not even death can make a foe a friend.

ANTIGONE

My nature is for mutual love, not hate.

CREON

Die then, and love the dead if thou must;

No woman shall be the master while I live.

[Enter ISMENE]

CHORUS

Lo from out the palace gate,

Weeping o'er her sister's fate,

Comes Ismene; see her brow,

Once serene, beclouded now,

See her beauteous face o'erspread

With a flush of angry red.

CREON

Woman, who like a viper unperceived

Didst harbor in my house and drain my blood,

Two plagues I nurtured blindly, so it proved,

To sap my throne. Say, didst thou too abet

This crime, or dost abjure all privity?

ISMENE

I did the deed, if she will have it so,

And with my sister claim to share the guilt.

ANTIGONE

That were unjust. Thou would'st not act with me

At first, and I refused thy partnership.

ISMENE

But now thy bark is stranded, I am bold

To claim my share as partner in the loss.

ANTIGONE

Who did the deed the under-world knows well:

A friend in word is never friend of mine.

ISMENE

O sister, scorn me not, let me but share

Thy work of piety, and with thee die.

ANTIGONE

Claim not a work in which thou hadst no hand;

One death sufficeth. Wherefore should'st thou die?

ISMENE

What would life profit me bereft of thee?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon, he's thy kinsman and best friend.

ISMENE

Why taunt me? Find'st thou pleasure in these gibes?

ANTIGONE

'Tis a sad mockery, if indeed I mock.

ISMENE

O say if I can help thee even now.

ANTIGONE

No, save thyself; I grudge not thy escape.

ISMENE

Is e'en this boon denied, to share thy lot?

ANTIGONE

Yea, for thou chosed'st life, and I to die.

ISMENE

Thou canst not say that I did not protest.

ANTIGONE

Well, some approved thy wisdom, others mine.

ISMENE

But now we stand convicted, both alike.

ANTIGONE

Fear not; thou livest, I died long ago

Then when I gave my life to save the dead.

CREON

Both maids, methinks, are crazed. One suddenly

Has lost her wits, the other was born mad.

ISMENE

Yea, so it falls, sire, when misfortune comes,

The wisest even lose their mother wit.

CREON

I' faith thy wit forsook thee when thou mad'st

Thy choice with evil-doers to do ill.

ISMENE

What life for me without my sister here?

CREON

Say not thy sister here: thy sister's dead.

ISMENE

What, wilt thou slay thy own son's plighted bride?

CREON

Aye, let him raise him seed from other fields.

ISMENE

No new espousal can be like the old.

CREON

A plague on trulls who court and woo our sons.

ANTIGONE

O Haemon, how thy sire dishonors thee!

CREON

A plague on thee and thy accursed bride!

CHORUS

What, wilt thou rob thine own son of his bride?

CREON

'Tis death that bars this marriage, not his sire.

CHORUS

So her death-warrant, it would seem, is sealed.

CREON

By you, as first by me; off with them, guards,

And keep them close. Henceforward let them learn

To live as women use, not roam at large.

For e'en the bravest spirits run away

When they perceive death pressing on life's heels.

CHORUS

(Str. 1)

Thrice blest are they who never tasted pain!

If once the curse of Heaven attaint a race,

The infection lingers on and speeds apace,

Age after age, and each the cup must drain.

So when Etesian blasts from Thrace downpour

Sweep o'er the blackening main and whirl to land

From Ocean's cavernous depths his ooze and sand,

Billow on billow thunders on the shore.

(Ant. 1)

On the Labdacidae I see descending

Woe upon woe; from days of old some god

Laid on the race a malison, and his rod

Scourges each age with sorrows never ending.

The light that dawned upon its last born son

Is vanished, and the bloody axe of Fate

Has felled the goodly tree that blossomed late.

O Oedipus, by reckless pride undone!

(Str. 2)

Thy might, O Zeus, what mortal power can quell?

Not sleep that lays all else beneath its spell,

Nor moons that never tire: untouched by Time,

Throned in the dazzling light

That crowns Olympus' height,

Thou reignest King, omnipotent, sublime.

Past, present, and to be,

All bow to thy decree,

All that exceeds the mean by Fate

Is punished, Love or Hate.

(Ant. 2)

Hope flits about never-wearying wings;

Profit to some, to some light loves she brings,

But no man knoweth how her gifts may turn,

Till 'neath his feet the treacherous ashes burn.

Sure 'twas a sage inspired that spake this word;

If evil good appear

To any, Fate is near;

And brief the respite from her flaming sword.

Hither comes in angry mood

Haemon, latest of thy brood;

Is it for his bride he's grieved,

Or her marriage-bed deceived,

Doth he make his mourn for thee,

Maid forlorn, Antigone?

[Enter HAEMON]

CREON

Soon shall we know, better than seer can tell.

Learning may fixed decree anent thy bride,

Thou mean'st not, son, to rave against thy sire?

Know'st not whate'er we do is done in love?

HAEMON

O father, I am thine, and I will take

Thy wisdom as the helm to steer withal.

Therefore no wedlock shall by me be held

More precious than thy loving goverance.

CREON

Well spoken: so right-minded sons should feel,

In all deferring to a father's will.

For 'tis the hope of parents they may rear

A brood of sons submissive, keen to avenge
Their father's wrongs, and count his friends their own.
But who begets unprofitable sons,
He verily breeds trouble for himself,
And for his foes much laughter. Son, be warned
And let no woman fool away thy wits.
Ill fares the husband mated with a shrew,
And her embraces very soon wax cold.
For what can wound so surely to the quick
As a false friend? So spue and cast her off,
Bid her go find a husband with the dead.
For since I caught her openly rebelling,
Of all my subjects the one malcontent,
I will not prove a traitor to the State.
She surely dies. Go, let her, if she will,
Appeal to Zeus the God of Kindred, for
If thus I nurse rebellion in my house,
Shall not I foster mutiny without?
For whoso rules his household worthily,
Will prove in civic matters no less wise.
But he who overbears the laws, or thinks
To overrule his rulers, such as one
I never will allow. Whome'er the State
Appoints must be obeyed in everything,
But small and great, just and unjust alike.
I warrant such a one in either case
Would shine, as King or subject; such a man
Would in the storm of battle stand his ground,
A comrade leal and true; but Anarchy—
What evils are not wrought by Anarchy!
She ruins States, and overthrows the home,
She dissipates and routs the embattled host;
While discipline preserves the ordered ranks.
Therefore we must maintain authority
And yield to title to a woman's will.
Better, if needs be, men should cast us out
Than hear it said, a woman proved his match.
CHORUS

To me, unless old age have dulled wits,
Thy words appear both reasonable and wise.
HAEMON
Father, the gods implant in mortal men
Reason, the choicest gift bestowed by heaven.
'Tis not for me to say thou errest, nor
Would I arraign thy wisdom, if I could;
And yet wise thoughts may come to other men
And, as thy son, it falls to me to mark
The acts, the words, the comments of the crowd.
The commons stand in terror of thy frown,
And dare not utter aught that might offend,
But I can overhear their muttered plaints,
Know how the people mourn this maiden doomed
For noblest deeds to die the worst of deaths.
When her own brother slain in battle lay
Unsepulchered, she suffered not his corse
To lie for carrion birds and dogs to maul:
Should not her name (they cry) be writ in gold?
Such the low murmurings that reach my ear.
O father, nothing is by me more prized
Than thy well-being, for what higher good
Can children covet than their sire's fair fame,
As fathers too take pride in glorious sons?
Therefore, my father, cling not to one mood,
And deemed not thou art right, all others wrong.
For whoso thinks that wisdom dwells with him,
That he alone can speak or think aright,
Such oracles are empty breath when tried.
The wisest man will let himself be swayed
By others' wisdom and relax in time.
See how the trees beside a stream in flood
Save, if they yield to force, each spray unharmed,
But by resisting perish root and branch.
The mariner who keeps his mainsheet taut,
And will not slacken in the gale, is like
To sail with thwarts reversed, keel uppermost.
Relent then and repent thee of thy wrath;

For, if one young in years may claim some sense,

I'll say 'tis best of all to be endowed

With absolute wisdom; but, if that's denied,

(And nature takes not readily that ply)

Next wise is he who lists to sage advice.

CHORUS

If he says aught in season, heed him, King.

(To HAEMON)

Heed thou thy sire too; both have spoken well.

CREON

What, would you have us at our age be schooled,

Lessoned in prudence by a beardless boy?

HAEMON

I plead for justice, father, nothing more.

Weigh me upon my merit, not my years.

CREON

Strange merit this to sanction lawlessness!

HAEMON

For evil-doers I would urge no plea.

CREON

Is not this maid an arrant law-breaker?

HAEMON

The Theban commons with one voice say, No.

CREON

What, shall the mob dictate my policy?

HAEMON

'Tis thou, methinks, who speakest like a boy.

CREON

Am I to rule for others, or myself?

HAEMON

A State for one man is no State at all.

CREON

The State is his who rules it, so 'tis held.

HAEMON

As monarch of a desert thou wouldst shine.

CREON

This boy, methinks, maintains the woman's cause.

HAEMON

If thou be'st woman, yes. My thought's for thee.

CREON

O reprobate, would'st wrangle with thy sire?

HAEMON

Because I see thee wrongfully perverse.

CREON

And am I wrong, if I maintain my rights?

HAEMON

Talk not of rights; thou spurn'st the due of Heaven

CREON

O heart corrupt, a woman's minion thou!

HAEMON

Slave to dishonor thou wilt never find me.

CREON

Thy speech at least was all a plea for her.

HAEMON

And thee and me, and for the gods below.

CREON

Living the maid shall never be thy bride.

HAEMON

So she shall die, but one will die with her.

CREON

Hast come to such a pass as threaten me?

HAEMON

What threat is this, vain counsels to reprove?

CREON

Vain fool to instruct thy betters; thou shall rue it.

HAEMON

Wert not my father, I had said thou err'st.

CREON

Play not the spaniel, thou a woman's slave.

HAEMON

When thou dost speak, must no man make reply?

CREON

This passes bounds. By heaven, thou shalt not rate

And jeer and flout me with impunity.

Off with the hateful thing that she may die

At once, beside her bridegroom, in his sight.

HAEMON

Think not that in my sight the maid shall die,

Or by my side; never shalt thou again

Behold my face hereafter. Go, consort

With friends who like a madman for their mate.

[Exit HAEMON]

CHORUS

Thy son has gone, my liege, in angry haste.

Fell is the wrath of youth beneath a smart.

CREON

Let him go vent his fury like a fiend:

These sisters twain he shall not save from death.

CHORUS

Surely, thou meanest not to slay them both?

CREON

I stand corrected; only her who touched

The body.

CHORUS

And what death is she to die?

CREON

She shall be taken to some desert place

By man untrod, and in a rock-hewn cave,

With food no more than to avoid the taint

That homicide might bring on all the State,

Buried alive. There let her call in aid

The King of Death, the one god she reveres,

Or learn too late a lesson learnt at last:

'Tis labor lost, to reverence the dead.

CHORUS

(Str.)

Love resistless in fight, all yield at a glance of thine eye,

Love who pillowed all night on a maiden's cheek dost lie,

Over the upland holds. Shall mortals not yield to thee?

(Ant).

Mad are thy subjects all, and even the wisest heart

Straight to folly will fall, at a touch of thy poisoned dart.

Thou didst kindle the strife, this feud of kinsman with kin,

By the eyes of a winsome wife, and the yearning her heart to win.

For as her consort still, enthroned with Justice above,

Thou bendest man to thy will, O all invincible Love.

Lo I myself am borne aside,

From Justice, as I view this bride.

(O sight an eye in tears to drown)

Antigone, so young, so fair,

Thus hurried down

Death's bower with the dead to share.

ANTIGONE

(Str. 1)

Friends, countrymen, my last farewell I make;

My journey's done.

One last fond, lingering, longing look I take

At the bright sun.

For Death who puts to sleep both young and old

Hales my young life,

And beckons me to Acheron's dark fold,

An unwed wife.

No youths have sung the marriage song for me,

My bridal bed

No maids have strewn with flowers from the lea,

'Tis Death I wed.

CHORUS

But bethink thee, thou art sped,

Great and glorious, to the dead.

Thou the sword's edge hast not tasted,

No disease thy frame hath wasted.

Freely thou alone shalt go

Living to the dead below.

ANTIGONE

(Ant. 1)

Nay, but the piteous tale I've heard men tell

Of Tantalus' doomed child,

Chained upon Siphylus' high rocky fell,

That clung like ivy wild,

Drenched by the pelting rain and whirling snow,

Left there to pine,

While on her frozen breast the tears aye flow—

Her fate is mine.

CHORUS

She was sprung of gods, divine,

Mortals we of mortal line.

Like renown with gods to gain

Recompenses all thy pain.

Take this solace to thy tomb

Hers in life and death thy doom.

ANTIGONE

(Str. 2)

Alack, alack! Ye mock me. Is it meet

Thus to insult me living, to my face?

Cease, by our country's altars I entreat,

Ye lordly rulers of a lordly race.

O fount of Dirce, wood-embowered plain

Where Theban chariots to victory speed,

Mark ye the cruel laws that now have wrought my bane,

The friends who show no pity in my need!

Was ever fate like mine? O monstrous doom,

Within a rock-built prison sepulchered,

To fade and wither in a living tomb,

And alien midst the living and the dead.

CHORUS

(Str. 3)

In thy boldness over-rash

Madly thou thy foot didst dash

'Gainst high Justice' altar stair.

Thou a father's guild dost bear.

ANTIGONE

(Ant. 2)

At this thou touchest my most poignant pain,

My ill-starred father's piteous disgrace,

The taint of blood, the hereditary stain,

That clings to all of Labdacus' famed race.

Woe worth the monstrous marriage-bed where lay

A mother with the son her womb had borne,

Therein I was conceived, woe worth the day,

Fruit of incestuous sheets, a maid forlorn,

And now I pass, accursed and unwed,

To meet them as an alien there below;

And thee, O brother, in marriage ill-bestead,

'Twas thy dead hand that dealt me this death-blow.

CHORUS

Religion has her chains, 'tis true,

Let rite be paid when rites are due.

Yet is it ill to disobey

The powers who hold by might the sway.

Thou hast withstood authority,

A self-willed rebel, thou must die.

ANTIGONE

Unwept, unwed, unfriended, hence I go,

No longer may I see the day's bright eye;

Not one friend left to share my bitter woe,

And o'er my ashes heave one passing sigh.

CREON

If wail and lamentation aught availed

To stave off death, I trow they'd never end.

Away with her, and having walled her up

In a rock-vaulted tomb, as I ordained,

Leave her alone at liberty to die,

Or, if she choose, to live in solitude,

The tomb her dwelling. We in either case

Are guiltless as concerns this maiden's blood,

Only on earth no lodging shall she find.

ANTIGONE

O grave, O bridal bower, O prison house

Hewn from the rock, my everlasting home,

Whither I go to join the mighty host

Of kinsfolk, Persephassa's guests long dead,

The last of all, of all more miserable,

I pass, my destined span of years cut short.

And yet good hope is mine that I shall find

A welcome from my sire, a welcome too,

From thee, my mother, and my brother dear;

From with these hands, I laved and decked your limbs

In death, and poured libations on your grave.

And last, my Polyneices, unto thee
I paid due rites, and this my recompense!
Yet am I justified in wisdom's eyes.
For even had it been some child of mine,
Or husband mouldering in death's decay,
I had not wrought this deed despite the State.
What is the law I call in aid? 'Tis thus
I argue. Had it been a husband dead
I might have wed another, and have borne
Another child, to take the dead child's place.
But, now my sire and mother both are dead,
No second brother can be born for me.
Thus by the law of conscience I was led
To honor thee, dear brother, and was judged
By Creon guilty of a heinous crime.
And now he drags me like a criminal,
A bride unwed, amerced of marriage-song
And marriage-bed and joys of motherhood,
By friends deserted to a living grave.
What ordinance of heaven have I transgressed?
Hereafter can I look to any god
For succor, call on any man for help?
Alas, my piety is impious deemed.
Well, if such justice is approved of heaven,
I shall be taught by suffering my sin;
But if the sin is theirs, O may they suffer
No worse ills than the wrongs they do to me.

CHORUS

The same ungovernable will
Drives like a gale the maiden still.

CREON

Therefore, my guards who let her stay
Shall smart full sore for their delay.

ANTIGONE

Ah, woe is me! This word I hear
Brings death most near.

CHORUS

I have no comfort. What he saith,

Portends no other thing than death.

ANTIGONE

My fatherland, city of Thebes divine,

Ye gods of Thebes whence sprang my line,

Look, puissant lords of Thebes, on me;

The last of all your royal house ye see.

Martyred by men of sin, undone.

Such meed my piety hath won.

[Exit ANTIGONE]

CHORUS

(Str. 1)

Like to thee that maiden bright,

Danae, in her brass-bound tower,

Once exchanged the glad sunlight

For a cell, her bridal bower.

And yet she sprang of royal line,

My child, like thine,

And nursed the seed

By her conceived

Of Zeus descending in a golden shower.

Strange are the ways of Fate, her power

Nor wealth, nor arms withstand, nor tower;

Nor brass-prowed ships, that breast the sea

From Fate can flee.

(Ant. 1)

Thus Dryas' child, the rash Edonian King,

For words of high disdain

Did Bacchus to a rocky dungeon bring,

To cool the madness of a fevered brain.

His frenzy passed,

He learnt at last

'Twas madness gibes against a god to fling.

For once he fain had quenched the Maenad's fire;

And of the tuneful Nine provoked the ire.

(Str. 2)

By the Iron Rocks that guard the double main,

On Bosporus' lone strand,

Where stretcheth Salmydessus' plain

In the wild Thracian land,

There on his borders Ares witnessed

The vengeance by a jealous step-dame ta'en

The gore that trickled from a spindle red,

The sightless orbits of her step-sons twain.

(Ant. 2)

Wasting away they mourned their piteous doom,

The blasted issue of their mother's womb.

But she her lineage could trace

To great Erecththeus' race;

Daughter of Boreas in her sire's vast caves

Reared, where the tempest raves,

Swift as his horses o'er the hills she sped;

A child of gods; yet she, my child, like thee,

By Destiny

That knows not death nor age—she too was vanquished.

[Enter TEIRESIAS and BOY]

TEIRESIAS

Princes of Thebes, two wayfarers as one,

Having betwixt us eyes for one, we are here.

The blind man cannot move without a guide.

CREON

Why tidings, old Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS

I will tell thee;

And when thou hearest thou must heed the seer.

CREON

Thus far I ne'er have disobeyed thy rede.

TEIRESIAS

So hast thou steered the ship of State aright.

CREON

I know it, and I gladly own my debt.

TEIRESIAS

Bethink thee that thou treadest once again

The razor edge of peril.

CREON

What is this?

Thy words inspire a dread presentiment.

TEIRESIAS

The divination of my arts shall tell.

Sitting upon my throne of augury,

As is my wont, where every fowl of heaven

Find harborage, upon mine ears was borne

A jargon strange of twitterings, hoots, and screams;

So knew I that each bird at the other tare

With bloody talons, for the whirr of wings

Could signify naught else. Perturbed in soul,

I straight essayed the sacrifice by fire

On blazing altars, but the God of Fire

Came not in flame, and from the thigh bones dripped

And sputtered in the ashes a foul ooze;

Gall-bladders cracked and spurted up: the fat

Melted and fell and left the thigh bones bare.

Such are the signs, taught by this lad, I read—

As I guide others, so the boy guides me—

The frustrate signs of oracles grown dumb.

O King, thy willful temper ails the State,

For all our shrines and altars are profaned

By what has filled the maw of dogs and crows,

The flesh of Oedipus' unburied son.

Therefore the angry gods abominate

Our litanies and our burnt offerings;

Therefore no birds trill out a happy note,

Gorged with the carnival of human gore.

O ponder this, my son. To err is common

To all men, but the man who having erred

Hugs not his errors, but repents and seeks

The cure, is not a wastrel nor unwise.

No fool, the saw goes, like the obstinate fool.

Let death disarm thy vengeance. O forbear

To vex the dead. What glory wilt thou win

By slaying twice the slain? I mean thee well;

Counsel's most welcome if I promise gain.

CREON

Old man, ye all let fly at me your shafts

Like anchors at a target; yea, ye set

Your soothsayer on me. Peddlers are ye all

And I the merchandise ye buy and sell.

Go to, and make your profit where ye will,

Silver of Sardis change for gold of Ind;

Ye will not purchase this man's burial,

Not though the winged ministers of Zeus

Should bear him in their talons to his throne;

Not e'en in awe of prodigy so dire

Would I permit his burial, for I know

No human soilure can assail the gods;

This too I know, Teiresias, dire's the fall

Of craft and cunning when it tries to gloss

Foul treachery with fair words for filthy gain.

TEIRESIAS

Alas! doth any know and lay to heart—

CREON

Is this the prelude to some hackneyed saw?

TEIRESIAS

How far good counsel is the best of goods?

CREON

True, as unwisdom is the worst of ills.

TEIRESIAS

Thou art infected with that ill thyself.

CREON

I will not bandy insults with thee, seer.

TEIRESIAS

And yet thou say'st my prophesies are frauds.

CREON

Prophets are all a money-getting tribe.

TEIRESIAS

And kings are all a lucre-loving race.

CREON

Dost know at whom thou glancest, me thy lord?

TEIRESIAS

Lord of the State and savior, thanks to me.

CREON

Skilled prophet art thou, but to wrong inclined.

TEIRESIAS

Take heed, thou wilt provoke me to reveal

The mystery deep hidden in my breast.

CREON

Say on, but see it be not said for gain.

TEIRESIAS

Such thou, methinks, till now hast judged my words.

CREON

Be sure thou wilt not traffic on my wits.

TEIRESIAS

Know then for sure, the coursers of the sun

Not many times shall run their race, before

Thou shalt have given the fruit of thine own loins

In quittance of thy murder, life for life;

For that thou hast entombed a living soul,

And sent below a denizen of earth,

And wronged the nether gods by leaving here

A corpse unlaved, unwept, unsepulchered.

Herein thou hast no part, nor e'en the gods

In heaven; and thou usurp'st a power not thine.

For this the avenging spirits of Heaven and Hell

Who dog the steps of sin are on thy trail:

What these have suffered thou shalt suffer too.

And now, consider whether bought by gold

I prophesy. For, yet a little while,

And sound of lamentation shall be heard,

Of men and women through thy desolate halls;

And all thy neighbor States are leagues to avenge

Their mangled warriors who have found a grave

I' the maw of wolf or hound, or winged bird

That flying homewards taints their city's air.

These are the shafts, that like a bowman I

Provoked to anger, loosen at thy breast,

Unerring, and their smart thou shalt not shun.

Boy, lead me home, that he may vent his spleen

On younger men, and learn to curb his tongue

With gentler manners than his present mood.

[Exit TEIRESIAS]

CHORUS

My liege, that man hath gone, foretelling woe.

And, O believe me, since these grizzled locks

Were like the raven, never have I known

The prophet's warning to the State to fail.

CREON

I know it too, and it perplexes me.

To yield is grievous, but the obstinate soul

That fights with Fate, is smitten grievously.

CHORUS

Son of Menoeceus, list to good advice.

CHORUS

What should I do. Advise me. I will heed.

CHORUS

Go, free the maiden from her rocky cell;

And for the unburied outlaw build a tomb.

CREON

Is that your counsel? You would have me yield?

CHORUS

Yea, king, this instant. Vengeance of the gods

Is swift to overtake the impenitent.

CREON

Ah! what a wrench it is to sacrifice

My heart's resolve; but Fate is ill to fight.

CHORUS

Go, trust not others. Do it quick thyself.

CREON

I go hot-foot. Bestir ye one and all,

My henchmen! Get ye axes! Speed away

To yonder eminence! I too will go,

For all my resolution this way sways.

'Twas I that bound, I too will set her free.

Almost I am persuaded it is best

To keep through life the law ordained of old.

[Exit CREON]

CHORUS

(Str. 1)

Thou by many names adored,

Child of Zeus the God of thunder,

Of a Theban bride the wonder,

Fair Italia's guardian lord;

In the deep-embosomed glades

Of the Eleusinian Queen

Haunt of revelers, men and maids,

Dionysus, thou art seen.

Where Ismenus rolls his waters,

Where the Dragon's teeth were sown,

Where the Bacchanals thy daughters

Round thee roam,

There thy home;

Thebes, O Bacchus, is thine own.

(Ant. 1)

Thee on the two-crested rock

Lurid-flaming torches see;

Where Corisian maidens flock,

Thee the springs of Castaly.

By Nysa's bastion ivy-clad,

By shores with clustered vineyards glad,

There to thee the hymn rings out,

And through our streets we Thebans shout,

All hall to thee

Evoe, Evoe!

(Str. 2)

Oh, as thou lov'st this city best of all,

To thee, and to thy Mother levin-stricken,

In our dire need we call;

Thou see'st with what a plague our townsfolk sicken.

Thy ready help we crave,

Whether adown Parnassian heights descending,

Or o'er the roaring straits thy swift was wending,

Save us, O save!

(Ant. 2)

Brightest of all the orbs that breathe forth light,

Authentic son of Zeus, immortal king,

Leader of all the voices of the night,

Come, and thy train of Thyiads with thee bring,

Thy maddened rout

Who dance before thee all night long, and shout,

Thy handmaids we,

Evoe, Evoe!

[Enter MESSENGER]

MESSENGER

Attend all ye who dwell beside the halls

Of Cadmus and Amphion. No man's life

As of one tenor would I praise or blame,

For Fortune with a constant ebb and rise

Casts down and raises high and low alike,

And none can read a mortal's horoscope.

Take Creon; he, methought, if any man,

Was enviable. He had saved this land

Of Cadmus from our enemies and attained

A monarch's powers and ruled the state supreme,

While a right noble issue crowned his bliss.

Now all is gone and wasted, for a life

Without life's joys I count a living death.

You'll tell me he has ample store of wealth,

The pomp and circumstance of kings; but if

These give no pleasure, all the rest I count

The shadow of a shade, nor would I weigh

His wealth and power 'gainst a dram of joy.

CHORUS

What fresh woes bring'st thou to the royal house?

MESSENGER

Both dead, and they who live deserve to die.

CHORUS

Who is the slayer, who the victim? speak.

MESSENGER

Haemon; his blood shed by no stranger hand.

CHORUS

What mean ye? by his father's or his own?

MESSENGER

His own; in anger for his father's crime.

CHORUS

O prophet, what thou spakest comes to pass.

MESSENGER

So stands the case; now 'tis for you to act.

CHORUS

Lo! from the palace gates I see approaching

Creon's unhappy wife, Eurydice.

Comes she by chance or learning her son's fate?

[Enter EURYDICE]

EURYDICE

Ye men of Thebes, I overheard your talk.

As I passed out to offer up my prayer

To Pallas, and was drawing back the bar

To open wide the door, upon my ears

There broke a wail that told of household woe

Stricken with terror in my handmaids' arms

I fell and fainted. But repeat your tale

To one not unacquaint with misery.

MESSENGER

Dear mistress, I was there and will relate

The perfect truth, omitting not one word.

Why should we gloze and flatter, to be proved

Liars hereafter? Truth is ever best.

Well, in attendance on my liege, your lord,

I crossed the plain to its utmost margin, where

The corse of Polyneices, gnawn and mauled,

Was lying yet. We offered first a prayer

To Pluto and the goddess of cross-ways,

With contrite hearts, to deprecate their ire.

Then laved with lustral waves the mangled corse,

Laid it on fresh-lopped branches, lit a pyre,

And to his memory piled a mighty mound

Of mother earth. Then to the caverned rock,

The bridal chamber of the maid and Death,

We sped, about to enter. But a guard

Heard from that godless shrine a far shrill wail,

And ran back to our lord to tell the news.

But as he nearer drew a hollow sound

Of lamentation to the King was borne.

He groaned and uttered then this bitter plaint:

"Am I a prophet? miserable me!

Is this the saddest path I ever trod?
'Tis my son's voice that calls me. On press on,
My henchmen, haste with double speed to the tomb
Where rocks down-torn have made a gap, look in
And tell me if in truth I recognize
The voice of Haemon or am heaven-deceived."
So at the bidding of our distraught lord
We looked, and in the craven's vaulted gloom
I saw the maiden lying strangled there,
A noose of linen twined about her neck;
And hard beside her, clasping her cold form,
Her lover lay bewailing his dead bride
Death-wedded, and his father's cruelty.
When the King saw him, with a terrible groan
He moved towards him, crying, "O my son
What hast thou done? What ailed thee? What mischance
Has reft thee of thy reason? O come forth,
Come forth, my son; thy father supplicates."
But the son glared at him with tiger eyes,
Spat in his face, and then, without a word,
Drew his two-hilted sword and smote, but missed
His father flying backwards. Then the boy,
Wroth with himself, poor wretch, incontinent
Fell on his sword and drove it through his side
Home, but yet breathing clasped in his lax arms
The maid, her pallid cheek incarnadined
With his expiring gasps. So there they lay
Two corpses, one in death. His marriage rites
Are consummated in the halls of Death:
A witness that of ills whate'er befall
Mortals' unwisdom is the worst of all.
[Exit EURYDICE]
CHORUS
What makest thou of this? The Queen has gone
Without a word importing good or ill.
MESSENGER
I marvel too, but entertain good hope.
'Tis that she shrinks in public to lament

Her son's sad ending, and in privacy

Would with her maidens mourn a private loss.

Trust me, she is discreet and will not err.

CHORUS

I know not, but strained silence, so I deem,

Is no less ominous than excessive grief.

MESSENGER

Well, let us to the house and solve our doubts,

Whether the tumult of her heart conceals

Some fell design. It may be thou art right:

Unnatural silence signifies no good.

CHORUS

Lo! the King himself appears.

Evidence he with him bears

'Gainst himself (ah me! I quake

'Gainst a king such charge to make)

But all must own,

The guilt is his and his alone.

CREON

(Str. 1)

Woe for sin of minds perverse,

Deadly fraught with mortal curse.

Behold us slain and slayers, all akin.

Woe for my counsel dire, conceived in sin.

Alas, my son,

Life scarce begun,

Thou wast undone.

The fault was mine, mine only, O my son!

CHORUS

Too late thou seemest to perceive the truth.

CREON

(Str. 2)

By sorrow schooled. Heavy the hand of God,

Thorny and rough the paths my feet have trod,

Humbled my pride, my pleasure turned to pain;

Poor mortals, how we labor all in vain!

[Enter SECOND MESSENGER]

SECOND MESSENGER

Sorrows are thine, my lord, and more to come,

One lying at thy feet, another yet

More grievous waits thee, when thou comest home.

CREON

What woe is lacking to my tale of woes?

SECOND MESSENGER

Thy wife, the mother of thy dead son here,

Lies stricken by a fresh inflicted blow.

CREON

(Ant. 1)

How bottomless the pit!

Does claim me too, O Death?

What is this word he saith,

This woeful messenger? Say, is it fit

To slay anew a man already slain?

Is Death at work again,

Stroke upon stroke, first son, then mother slain?

CHORUS

Look for thyself. She lies for all to view.

CREON

(Ant. 2)

Alas! another added woe I see.

What more remains to crown my agony?

A minute past I clasped a lifeless son,

And now another victim Death hath won.

Unhappy mother, most unhappy son!

SECOND MESSENGER

Beside the altar on a keen-edged sword

She fell and closed her eyes in night, but erst

She mourned for Megareus who nobly died

Long since, then for her son; with her last breath

She cursed thee, the slayer of her child.

CREON

(Str. 3)

I shudder with affright

O for a two-edged sword to slay outright

A wretch like me,

Made one with misery.

SECOND MESSENGER

'Tis true that thou wert charged by the dead Queen

As author of both deaths, hers and her son's.

CREON

In what wise was her self-destruction wrought?

SECOND MESSENGER

Hearing the loud lament above her son

With her own hand she stabbed herself to the heart.

CREON

(Str. 4)

I am the guilty cause. I did the deed,

Thy murderer. Yea, I guilty plead.

My henchmen, lead me hence, away, away,

A cipher, less than nothing; no delay!

CHORUS

Well said, if in disaster aught is well

His past endure demand the speediest cure.

CREON

(Ant. 3)

Come, Fate, a friend at need,

Come with all speed!

Come, my best friend,

And speed my end!

Away, away!

Let me not look upon another day!

CHORUS

This for the morrow; to us are present needs

That they whom it concerns must take in hand.

CREON

I join your prayer that echoes my desire.

CHORUS

O pray not, prayers are idle; from the doom

Of fate for mortals refuge is there none.

CREON

(Ant. 4)

Away with me, a worthless wretch who slew

Unwitting thee, my son, thy mother too.

Whither to turn I know now; every way

Leads but astray,

And on my head I feel the heavy weight

Of crushing Fate.

CHORUS

Of happiness the chiefest part

Is a wise heart:

And to defraud the gods in aught

With peril's fraught.

Swelling words of high-flown might

Mightily the gods do smite.

Chastisement for errors past

Wisdom brings to age at last.

This page titled 7.3: Sophocles' Antigone (441 BC) is shared under a Public Domain license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

7.4: Langston Hughes and Zora Hurston's The Mule-Bone (1930)

THE MULE-BONE

A COMEDY OF NEGRO LIFE IN

THREE ACTS

BY
LANGSTON HUGHES and ZORA HURSTON

CHARACTERS

JIM WESTON: Guitarist, Methodist, slightly arrogant, agressive, somewhat self-important, ready with his tongue.

DAVE CARTER: Dancer, Baptist, soft, happy-go-lucky character, slightly dumb and unable to talk rapidly and wittily.

DAISY TAYLOR: Methodist, domestic servant, plump, dark and sexy, self-conscious of clothes and appeal, fickle.

JOE CLARK: The Mayor, storekeeper and postmaster, arrogant, ignorant and powerful in a self-assertive way, large, fat man, Methodist.

ELDER SIMMS: Methodist minister, newcomer in town, ambitious,
small and fly, but not very intelligent.

ELDER CHILDERS: Big, loose-jointed, slow spoken but not dumb. Long
resident in the town, calm and sure of himself.

KATIE CARTER: Dave's aunt, little old wizened dried-up lady.

MRS. HATTIE CLARK: The Mayor's wife, fat and flabby mulatto high-pitched voice.

THE MRS. REV. SIMMS: Large and agressive.

THE MRS. REV. Just a wife who thinks of details.
CHILDERS:

LUM BOGER: Young town marshall about twenty, tall, gangly,
with big flat feet, liked to show off in public.

TEET MILLER: Village vamp who is jealous of DAISY.

LIGE MOSELY: A village wag.

WALTER THOMAS: Another village wag.

ADA LEWIS: A promiscuous lover.

DELLA LEWIS: Baptist, poor housekeeper, mother of ADA.

BOOTSIE PITTS: A local vamp.

MRS. DILCIE ANDERSON: Village housewife, Methodist.

WILLIE NIXON: Methodist, short runt.

ACT I

SETTING: The raised porch of JOE CLARK'S Store and the street in front. Porch stretches almost completely across the stage, with a plank bench at either end. At the center of the porch three steps leading from street. Rear of porch, center, door to the store. On either side are single windows on which signs, at left, "POST OFFICE", and at right, "GENERAL STORE" are painted. Soap boxes, axe handles, small kegs, etc., on porch on which townspeople sit and lounge during action. Above the roof of the porch the "false front", or imitation second story of the shop is seen with large sign painted across it "JOE CLARK'S GENERAL STORE". Large kerosine street lamp on post at right in front of porch.

Saturday afternoon and the villagers are gathered around the store. Several men sitting on boxes at edge of porch chewing sugar cane, spitting tobacco juice, arguing, some whittling, others eating peanuts. During the act the women all dressed up in starched

dresses parade in and out of store. People buying groceries, kids playing in the street, etc. General noise of conversation, laughter and children shouting. But when the curtain rises there is momentary lull for cane-chewing. At left of porch four men are playing cards on a soap box, and seated on the edge of the porch at extreme right two children are engaged in a checker game, with the board on the floor between them.

When the curtain goes up the following characters are discovered on the porch: MAYOR JOE CLARK, the storekeeper; DEACON HAMBO; DEACON GOODWIN; Old Man MATT BRAZZLE; WILL CODY; SYKES JONES; LUM BOGER, the young town marshall; LIGE MOSELY and WALTER THOMAS, two village wags; TOM NIXON and SAM MOSELY, and several others, seated on boxes, kegs, benches and floor of the porch. TONY TAYLOR is sitting on steps of porch with empty basket. MRS. TAYLOR comes out with her arms full of groceries, empties them into basket and goes back in store. All the men are chewing sugar cane earnestly with varying facial expressions. The noise of the breaking and sucking of cane can be clearly heard in the silence. Occasionally the laughter and shouting of children is heard nearby off stage.

HAMBO: (To BRAZZLE) Say, Matt, gimme a jint or two of dat green cane—dis ribbon cane is hard.

LIGE: Yeah, and you ain't got de chears in yo' parlor you useter have.

HAMBO: Dat's all right, Lige, but I betcha right now wid dese few teeth I got I kin eat up more cane'n you kin grow.

LIGE: I know you kin and that's de reason I ain't going to tempt you. But youse gettin' old in lots of ways—look at dat bald-head—just as clean as my hand. (Exposes his palm).

HAMBO: Don't keer if it tis—I don't want nothin'—not even hair—between me and God. (General laughter—LIGE joins in as well. Cane chewing keeps up. Silence for a moment.)

(Off stage a high shrill voice can be heard calling:)

VOICE: Sister Mosely, Oh, Sister Mosely! (A pause) Miz Mosely! (Very irritated) Oh, Sister Mattie! You hear me out here—you just won't answer!

VOICE OF MRS. MOSELY: Whoo-ee … somebody calling me?

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: (Angrily) Never mind now—you couldn't come when I called you. I don't want yo' lil ole weasley turnip greens. (Silence)

MATT BRAZZLE: Sister Roberts is en town agin! If she was mine, I'll be hen-fired if I wouldn't break her down in de lines (loins)—good as dat man is to her!

HAMBO: I wish she was mine jes' one day—de first time she open her mouf to beg *anybody*, I'd lam her wid lightning.

JOE CLARK: I God, Jake Roberts buys mo' rations out dis store than any man in dis town. I don't see to my Maker whut she do wid it all…. Here she come….

(ENTER MRS. JAKE ROBERTS, a heavy light brown woman with a basket on her arm. A boy about ten walks beside her carrying a small child about a year old straddle of his back. Her skirts are sweeping the ground. She walks up to the step, puts one foot upon the steps and looks forlornly at all the men, then fixes her look on JOE CLARK.)

MRS. ROBERTS: Evenin', Brother Mayor.

CLARK: Howdy do, Mrs. Roberts. How's yo' husband?

MRS. ROBERTS: (Beginning her professional whine): He ain't much and I ain't much and my chillun is poly. We ain't got 'nough to eat! Lawd, Mr. Clark, gimme a lil piece of side meat to cook us a pot of greens.

CLARK: Aw gwan, Sister Roberts. You got plenty bacon home. Last week
Jake bought….

MRS. ROBERTS: (Frantically) Lawd, Mist' Clark, how long you think dat lil piece of meat last me an' my chillun? Lawd, me and my chillun is *hongry*! God knows, Jake don't fee-eed me!

(MR. CLARK sits unmoved. MRS. ROBERTS advances upon him)

Mist' Clark!

CLARK: I God, woman, don't keep on after me! Every time I look, youse round here beggin' for everything you see.

LIGE: And whut she don't see she whoops for it just de same.

MRS. ROBERTS: (In dramatic begging pose) Mist' Clark! Ain't you boin' do nuthin' for me? And you see me and my poor chillun is starvin'….

CLARK: (Exasperated rises) I God, woman, a man can't git no peace wid somebody like you in town. (He goes angrily into the store followed by MRS. ROBERTS. The boy sits down on the edge of the porch sucking the baby's thumb.)

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: A piece 'bout dis wide….

VOICE OF CLARK: I God, naw! Yo' husband done bought you plenty meat, nohow.

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: (In great anguish) Ow! Mist' Clark! Don't you cut dat lil tee-ninchy piece of meat for me and my chillun! (Sound of running feet inside the store.) I ain't a going to tetch it!

VOICE OF CLARK: Well, don't touch it then. That's all you'll git outa me.

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: (Calmer) Well, hand it chear den. Lawd, me and my chillun is *so* hongry…. Jake don't fee-eed me. (She re-enters by door of store with the slab of meat in her hand and an outraged look on her face. She gazes all about her for sympathy.) Lawd, me and my poor chillun is *so* hongry … and some folks has _every_thing and they's so *stingy* and gripin'…. Lawd knows, Jake don't fee-eed me! (She exits right on this line followed by the boy with the baby on his back.)

(All the men gaze behind her, then at each other and shake their heads.)

HAMBO: Poor Jak…. I'm really sorry for dat man. If she was mine I'd beat her till her ears hung down like a Georgy mule.

WALTER THOMAS: I'd beat her till she smell like onions.

LIGE: I'd romp on her till she slack like lime.

NIXON: I'd stomp her till she rope like okra.

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: (Off stage right) Lawd, Miz Lewis, you goin' give me dat lil han'ful of greens for me and my chillun. Why dat ain't a eye-full. I ought not to take 'em … but me and my chillun is *so* hongry…. Some folks is so stingy and gripin'! Lawd knows, Tony don't *feed* me!

(The noise of cane-chewing is heard again. Enter JOE LINDSAY left with a gun over his shoulder and the large leg bone of a mule in the other hand. He approaches the step wearily.)

HAMBO: Well, did you git any partridges, Joe?

JOE: (Resting his gun and seating himself) Nope, but I made de feathers fly.

HAMBO: I don't see no birds.

JOE: Oh, the feathers flew off on de birds.

LIGE: I don't see nothin' but dat bone. Look lak you done kilt a cow and et 'im raw out in de woods.

JOE: Don't y'all know dat hock-bone?

WALTER: How you reckon we gointer know every hock-bone in Orange
County sight unseen?

JOE: (Standing the bone up on the floor of the porch) Dis is a hock-bone of Brazzle's ole yaller mule.

(General pleased interest. Everybody wants to touch it.)

BRAZZLE: (Coming forward) Well, sir! (Takes bone in both hands and looks up and down the length of it) If 'tain't my ole mule! This sho was one hell of a mule, too. He'd fight every inch in front of de plow … he'd turn over de mowing machine … run away wid de wagon … and you better not look like you wanter *ride* 'im!

LINDSAY: (Laughing) Yeah, I 'member seein' you comin' down de road just so … (He limps wid one hand on his buttocks) one day.

BRAZZLE: Dis mule was so evil he used to try to bite and kick when I'd go in de stable to feed 'im.

WALTER: He was too mean to git fat. He was so skinny you could do a week's washing on his ribs for a washboard and hang 'em up on his hip-bones to dry.

LIGE: I ‘member one day, Brazzle, you sent yo’ boy to Winter Park after some groceries wid a basket. So here he went down de road ridin’ dis mule wid dis basket on his arm…. Whut you reckon dat ole contrary mule done when he got to dat crooked place in de road going round Park Lake? He turnt right round and went through de handle of dat basket … wid de boy still up on his back. (General laughter)

BRAZZLE: Yeah, he up and died one Sat’day just for spite … but he was too contrary to lay down on his side like a mule orter and die decent. Naw, he made out to lay down on his narrer contracted back and die wid his feets sticking straight up in de air just so. (He gets down on his back and illustrates.) We drug him out to de swamp wid ‘im dat way, didn’t we, Hambo?

JOE CLARK: I God, Brazzle, we all seen it. Didn’t we all go to de draggin’ out? More folks went to yo’ mule’s draggin’ out than went to last school closing…. Bet there ain’t been a thing right in mule-hell for four years.

HAMBO: Been dat long since he been dead?

CLARK: I God, yes. He died de week after I started to cutting’ dat new ground.

(The bone is passing from hand to hand. At last a boy about twelve takes it. He has just walked up and is proudly handling the bone when a woman’s voice is heard off stage right.)

VOICE: Senator! Senator!! Oh, you Senator?

BOY: (Turning displeased mutters) Aw, shux. (Loudly) Ma’m?

VOICE: If you don’t come here you better!

SENATOR: Yes ma’am. (He drops bone on ground down stage and trots off frowning.) Soon as we men git to doing something dese wimmen…. (Exits, right.)

(Enter TEET and BOOTSIE left, clean and primped in voile dresses just alike. They speak diffidently and enter store. The men admire them casually.)

LIGE: Them girls done turned out to be right good-looking.

WALTER: Teet ain’t as pretty now as she was a few years back. She used to be fat as a butter ball wid legs just like two whiskey-kegs. She’s too skinny since she got her growth.

CODY: Ain’t none of ’em pretty as dat Miss Daisy. God! She’s pretty as a speckled pup.

LIGE: But she was sho nuff ugly when she was little … little ole hard black knot. She sho has changed since she been away up North. If she ain’t pretty now, there ain’t a hound dog in Georgy.

(Re-enter SENATOR BAILEY and stops on the steps. He addresses JOE CLARK.)

SENATOR: Mist’ Clark….

HAMBO: (To Senator) Ain’t you got no manners? We all didn’t sleep wid you last night.

SENATOR: (Embarrassed) Good evening, everybody.

ALL THE MEN: Good evening, son, boy, Senator, etc.

SENATOR: Mist’ Clark, mama said is Daisy been here dis evenin’?

JOE CLARK: Ain’t laid my eyes on her. Ain’t she working over in Maitland?

SENATOR: Yessuh … but she’s off today and mama sent her down here to get de groceries.

JOE CLARK: Well, tell yo’ ma I ain’t seen her.

SENATOR: Well, she say to tell you when she come, to tell her ma say she better git home and dat quick.

JOE CLARK: I will. (Exit BOY right.)

LIGE: Bet she’s off somewhere wid Dave or Jim.

WALTER: I don’t bet it … I know it. She’s got them two in de go-long.

(Re-enter TEET and BOOTSIE from store. TEET has a letter and BOOTSIE two or three small parcels. The men look up with interest as they come out on the porch.)

WALTER: (Winking) Whut's dat you got, Teet … letter from Dave?

TEET: (Flouncing) Naw indeed! It's a letter from my B-I-T-sweetie!
(Rolls her eyes and hips.)

WALTER: (Winking) Well, ain't Dave yo' B-I-T-sweetie? I thought y'all was 'bout to git married. Everywhere I looked dis summer 'twas you and Dave, Bootsie and Jim. I thought all of y'all would've done jumped over de broomstick by now.

TEET: (Flourishing letter) Don't tell it to me … tell it to the ever-loving Mr. Albert Johnson way over in Apopka.

BOOTSIE: (Rolling her eyes) Oh, tell 'em 'bout the ever-loving Mr.
Jimmy Cox from Altamont. Oh, I can't stand to see my baby lose.

HAMBO: It's lucky y'all girls done got some more fellers, cause look like Daisy done treed both Jim and Dave at once, or they done treed here one.

TEET: Let her have 'em … nobody don't keer. They don't handle de "In
God we trust" lak my Johnson. He's head bellman at de hotel.

BOOTSIE: Mr. Cox got money's grandma and old grandpa change. (The girls exit huffily.)

LINDSAY: (To HAMBO, pseudo-seriously) You oughtn't tease dem gals lak dat.

HAMBO: Oh, I laks to see gals all mad. But dem boys is crazy sho nuff.
Before Daisy come back here they both had a good-looking gal a piece.
Now they 'bout to fall out and fight over half a gal a piece. Neither
one won't give over and let de other one have her.

LIGE: And she ain't thinking too much 'bout no one man. (Looks off left.) Here she come now. God! She got a mean walk on her!

WALTER: Yeah, man. She handles a lot of traffic! Oh, mama, throw it in de river … papa'll come git it!

LINDSAY: Aw, shut up, you married men!

LIGE: Man don't go blind cause he gits married, do he? (Enter DAISY hurriedly. Stops at step a moment. She is dressed in sheer organdie, white shoes and stockings.)

DAISY: Good evening, everybody. (Walks up on the porch.)

ALL THE MEN: (Very pleasantly) Good evening, Miss Daisy.

DAISY: (To CLARK) Mama sent me after some meal and flour and some bacon and sausage oil.

CLARK: Senator been here long time ago hunting you.

DAISY: (Frightened) Did he? Oo … Mist' Clark, hurry up and fix it for me. (She starts on in the store.)

LINDSAY: (Giving her his seat) You better wait here, Daisy.

(WALTER kicks LIGE to call his attention to LINDSAY'S attitude)

It's powerful hot in dat store. Lemme run fetch 'em out to you.

LIGE: (To LINDSAY) *Run!* Joe Lindsay, you ain't been able to run since de big bell rung. Look at dat gray beard.

LINDSAY: Thank God, I ain't gray all over. I'm just as good a man right now as any of you young 'uns. (He hurries on into the store.)

WALTER: Daisy, where's yo' two body guards? It don't look natural to see you thout nary one of 'em.

DAISY: (Archly) I ain't got no body guards. I don't know what you talkin' about.

LIGE: Aw, don' try to come dat over us, Daisy. You know who we talkin' 'bout all right … but if you want me to come out flat footed … where's Jim and Dave?

DAISY: Ain't they playin' somewhere for de white folks?

LIGE: (To WALTER) Will you listen at dis gal, Walter? (To DAISY) When I ain't been long seen you and Dave going down to de Lake.

DAISY: (Frightened) Don't y'all run tell mama where I been.

WALTER: Well, you tell us which one you laks de best and we'll wipe our mouf (Gesture) and say nothin'. Dem boys been de best of friends all they life, till both of 'em took after you … then good-bye, Katy bar de door!

DAISY: (Affected innocence) Ain't they still playin' and dancin' together?

LIGE: Yeah, but that's 'bout all they do 'gree on these days. That's de way it is wid men, young and old…. I don't keer how long they been friends and how thick they been … a woman kin come between 'em. David and Jonather never would have been friends so long if Jonather had of been any great hand wid de wimmen. You ain't never seen no two roosters that likes one another.

DAISY: I ain't tried to break 'em up.

WALTER: Course you ain't. You don't have to. All two boys need to do is to git stuck on de same girl and they done broke up … *right now*! Wimmen is something can't be divided equal.

(Re-enter JOE LINDSAY and CLARK with the groceries. DAISY jumps up and grabs the packages.)

LIGE: (To DAISY) Want some of us … me … to go long and tote yo' things for you?

DAISY: (Nervously) Naw, mama is riding her high horse today. Long as I been gone it wouldn't do for me to come walking up wid nobody. (She exits hurriedly right.)

(All the men watch her out of sight in silence.)

CLARK: (Sighing) I God, know whut Daisy puts me in de mind of?

HAMBO: No, what? (They all lean together.)

CLARK: I God, a great big mango … a sweet smell, you know, Th a strong flavor, but not something you could mash up like a strawberry. Something with a body to it.

(General laughter, but not obscene.)

HAMBO: (Admiringly) Joe Clark! I didn't know you had it in you!

(MRS. CLARK enters from store door and they all straighten up guiltily)

CLARK: (Angrily to his wife) Now whut do you want? I God, the minute I set down, here you come….

MRS. CLARK: Somebody want a stamp, Jody. You know you don't 'low me to bove wid de post office. (HE rises sullenly and goes inside the store.)

BRAZZLE: Say, Hambo, I didn't see you at our Sunday School picnic.

HAMBO: (Slicing some plug-cut tobacco) Nope, wan't there dis time.

WALTER: Looka here, Hambo. Y'all Baptist carry dis close-communion business too far. If a person ain't half drownded in de lake and half et up by alligators, y'all think he ain't baptized, so you can't take communion wid him. Now I reckon you can't even drink lemonade and eat chicken perlow wid us.

HAMBO: My Lord, boy, youse just *full* of words. Now, in de first place, if this year's picnic was lak de one y'all had last year … you ain't had no lemonade for us Baptists to turn down. You had a big ole barrel of rain water wid about a pound of sugar in it and one lemon cut up over de top of it.

LIGE: Man, you sho kin mold 'em!

WALTER: Well, I went to de Baptist picnic wid my mouf all set to eat chicken, when lo and behold y'all had chitlings! Do Jesus!

LINDSAY: Hold on there a minute. There was plenty chicken at dat picnic, which I do know is right.

WALTER: Only chicken I seen was half a chicken yo' pastor musta tried to swaller whole cause he was choked stiff as a board when I come long … wid de whole deacon's board beating him in de back, trying to knock it out his throat.

LIGE: Say, dat puts me in de mind of a Baptist brother that was crazy 'bout de preachers and de preacher was crazy 'bout feeding his face. So his son got tired of trying to beat dese stump-knockers to de grub on the table, so one day he throwed out some slams

’bout dese preachers. Dat made his old man mad, so he tole his son to git out. He boy ast him “Where must I go, papa?” He says, “Go on to hell I reckon … I don’t keer where you go.”

So de boy left and was gone seven years. He come back one cold, windy night and rapped on de door. “Who dat?” de old man ast him “It’s me, Jack.” De old man opened de door, so glad to see his son agin, and tole Jack to come in. He did and looked all round de place. Seven or eight preachers was sitting round de fire eatin’ and drinkin’.

“Where you been all dis time, Jack?” de old man ast him.

“I been to hell,” Jack tole him.

“Tell us how it is down there, Jack.”

“Well,” he says, “It’s just like it is here … you cain’t git to de fire for de preachers.”

HAMBO: Boy, you kin lie just like de cross-ties from Jacksonville to Key West. De presidin’ elder must come round on his circuit teaching y’all how to tell ’em, cause you couldn’t lie dat good just natural.

WALTER: Can’t nobody beat Baptist folks lying … and I ain’t never found out how come you think youse so important.

LINDSAY: Ain’t we got de finest and de biggest church? Macedonia
Baptist will hold more folks than any two buildings in town.

LIGE: Thass right, y’all got a heap more church than you got members to go in it.

HAMBO: Thass all right … y’all ain’t got neither de church nor de members. Everything that’s had in this town got to be held in our church.

(Re-enter JOE CLARK.)

CLARK: What you-all talkin’?

HAMBO: Come on out, Tush Hawg, lemme beat you some checkers. I’m tired of fending and proving wid dese boys ain’t got no hair on they chest yet.

CLARK: I God, you mean you gointer get beat. You can’t handle me …
I’m a tush hawg.

HAMBO: Well, I’m going to draw dem tushes right now. (To two small boys using checker board on edge of porch.) Here you chilluns, let de Mayor and me have that board. Go on out an’ play an’ give us grown folks a little peace. (The children go down stage and call out:)

SMALL BOY: Hey, Senator. Hey, Marthy. Come on let’s play chick-me, chick-me, cranie-crow.

CHILD’S VOICE: (Off stage) All right! Come on, Jessie! (Enter several children, led by SENATOR, and a game begins in front of the store as JOE CLARK and HAMBO play checkers.)

JOE CLARK: I God! Hambo, you can’t play no checkers.

HAMBO: (As they seat themselves at the check board) Aw, man, if you wasn’t de Mayor I’d beat you all de time.

(The children get louder and louder, drowning out the men’s voices.)

SMALL GIRL: I’m gointer be de hen.

BOY: And I’m gointer be de hawk. Lemme git maself a stick to mark wid.

(The boy who is the hawk squats center stage with a short twig in his hand. The largest girl lines up the other children behind her.)

GIRL: (Mother Hen) (Looking back over her flock): Y’all ketch holt of one ‘Nother’s clothes so de hawk can’t git yuh. (They do.) You all straight now?

CHILDREN: Yeah. (The march around the hawk commences.)

HEN AND CHICKS:
Chick mah chick mah craney crow
Went to de well to wash ma toe
When I come back ma chick was gone
What time, ole witch?

HAWK: (Making a tally on the ground) One!

HEN AND CHICKS: (Repeat song and march.)

HAWK: (Scoring again) Two!

(Can be repeated any number of times.)

HAWK: Four. (He rises and imitates a hawk flying and trying to catch a chicken. Calling in a high voice:) Chickee.

HEN: (Flapping wings to protect her young) My chickens sleep.

HAWK: Chickee. (During all this the hawk is feinting and darting in his efforts to catch a chicken, and the chickens are dancing defensively, the hen trying to protect them.)

HEN: My chicken's sleep.

HAWK: I shall have a chick.

HEN: You shan't have a chick.

HAWK: I'm goin' home. (Flies off)

HEN: Dere's de road.

HAWK: My pot's a boilin'.

HEN: Let it boil.

HAWK: My guts a growlin'.

HEN: Let 'em growl.

HAWK: I must have a chick.

HEN: You shan't have n'airn.

HAWK: My mama's sick.

HEN: Let her die.

HAWK: Chickie!

HEN: My chicken's sleep.

(HAWK darts quickly around the hen and grabs a chicken and leads him off and places his captive on his knees at the store porch. After a brief bit of dancing he catches another, then a third, etc.)

HAMBO: (At the checker board, his voice rising above the noise of the playing children, slapping his sides jubilantly) Ha! Ha! I got you now. Go ahead on and move, Joe Clark … jus' go ahead on and move.

LOUNGERS: (Standing around two checker players) Ol' Deacon's got you now.

ANOTHER VOICE: Don't see how he can beat the Mayor like that.

ANOTHER VOICE: Got him in the Louisville loop. (These remarks are drowned by the laughter of the playing children directly in front of the porch. MAYOR JOE CLARK disturbed in his concentration on the checkers and peeved at being beaten suddenly turns toward the children, throwing up his hands.)

CLARK: Get on 'way from here, you limbs of Satan, making all that racket so a man can't hear his ears. Go on, go on!

(THE MAYOR looks about excitedly for the town marshall. Seeing him playing cards on the other side of porch, he bellows:)

Lum Boger, whyn't you git these kids away from here! What kind of a marshall is you? All this passle of young'uns around here under grown people's feet, creatin' disorder in front of my store.

(LUM BOGER puts his cards down lazily, comes down stage and scatters the children away. One saucy little girl refuses to move.)

LUM BOGER: Why'nt you go on away from here, Matilda? Didn't you hear me tell you-all to move?

LITTLE MATILDA: (Defiantly) I ain't goin' nowhere. You ain't none of my mama. (Jerking herself free from him as LUM touches her.) My mama in the store and she told me to wait out here. So take that, ol' Lum.

LUM BOGER: You impudent little huzzy, you! You must smell yourself … youse so fresh.

MATILDA: The wind musta changed and you smell your own top lip.

LUM BOGER: Don't make me have to grab you and take you down a buttonhole lower.

MATILDA: (Switching her little head) Go ahead on and grab me. You sho can't kill me, and if you kill me, you sho can't eat me. (She marches into the store.)

SENATOR: (Derisively from behind stump) Ol' dumb Lum! Hey! Hey!

(LITTLE BOY at edge of stage thumbs his nose at the marshall.)

(LUM lumbers after the small boy. Both exit.)

HAMBO: (To CLARK who has been thinking all this while what move to make) You ain't got but one move … go ahead on and make it. What's de matter, Mayor?

CLARK: (Moving his checker) Aw, here.

HAMBO: (Triumphant) Now! Look at him, boys. I'm gonna laugh in notes. (Laughing to the scale and jumping a checker each time) Do, sol, fa, me, lo … one! (Jumping another checker) La, sol, fa, me, do … two! (Another jump.) Do sol, re, me, lo … three! (Jumping a third.) Lo sol, fa, me, re … four! (The crowd begins to roar with laughter. LUM BOGER returns, looking on. Children come drifting back again playing chick-me-chick-me-cranie crow.)

VOICE: Oh, ha! Done got the ol' tush hog.

ANOTHER VOICE: Thought you couldn't be beat, Brother Mayor?

CLARK: (Peeved, gets up and goes into the store mumbling) Oh, I coulda beat you if I didn't have this store on my mind. Saturday afternoon and I got work to do. Lum, ain't I told you to keep them kids from playin' right in front of this store?

(LUM makes a pass at the nearest half-grown boy. The kids dart around him teasingly.)

ANOTHER VOICE: Eh, heh…. Hambo done run him on his store … done run the ol' coon in his hole.

ANOTHER VOICE: That ain't good politics, Hambo, beatin' the Mayor.

ANOTHER VOICE: Well, Hambo, you don't got to be so hard at checkers, come on let's see what you can do with de cards. Lum Boger there got his hands full nursin' the chilluns.

ANOTHER VOICE: (At the table) We ain't playin' for money, nohow,
Deacon. We just playin' a little Florida Flip.

HAMBO: Ya all can't play no Florida Flip. When I was a sinner there wasn't a man in this state could beat me playin' that game. But I'm a deacon in Macedonia Baptist now and I don't bother with the cards no more.

VOICE AT CARD TABLE: All right, then, come on here Tony (To man with basket on steps.) let me catch your jack.

TAYLOR: (Looking toward door) I don't reckon I got time. I guess my wife gonna get through buying out that store some time or other and want to go home.

OLD MAN: (On opposite side of porch from card game) I bet my wife would know better than expect me to sit around and wait for her with a basket. Whyn't you tell her to tote it on home herself?

TAYLOR: (Sighing and shaking his head.) Eh, Lawd!

VOICE AT CARD TABLE: Look like we can't get nobody to come into this game. Seem like everybody's scared a us. Come on back here, Lum, and take your hand. (LUM makes a final futile gesture at the children.)

LUM: Ain't I tole you little haitians to stay away from here?

(CHILDREN scatter teasingly only to return to their play in front of the store later on. LUM comes up on the porch and re-joins the card game. Just as he gets seated, MRS. CLARK comes to the door of the store and calls him.)

MRS. CLARK: (Drawlingly) Columbus!

LUM: (Wearily) Ma'am?

MRS. CLARK: De Mayor say for you to go round in de back yard and tie up old lady Jackson's mule what's trampin' aup all de tomatoes in my garden.

LUM: All right. (Leaving card game.) Wait till I come back, folkses.

LIGE: Oh, hum! (Yawning and putting down the deck of cards) Lum's sho a busy marshall. Say, ain't Dave and Jim been round here yet? I feel kinder like hearin' a little music 'bout now.

BOY: Naw, they ain't been here today. You-all know they ain't so thick nohow as they was since Daisy Bailey come back and they started runnin' after her.

WOMAN: You mean since she started runnin' after them, the young hussy.

MRS. CLARK: (In doorway) She don't mean 'em no good.

WALTER: That's a shame, ain't it now? (Enter LUM from around back of store. He jumps on the porch and takes his place at the card box.)

LUM: (To the waiting players) All right, boys! Turn it on and let the bad luck happen.

LIGE: My deal. (He begins shuffling the cards with an elaborate fan-shape movement.)

VOICE AT TABLE: Look out there, Lige, you shuffling mighty lot. Don't carry the cub to us.

LIGE: Aw, we ain't gonna cheat you … we gonna beat you. (He slams down the cards for LUM BOGER to cut.) Wanta cut 'em?

LUM: No, ain't no need of cutting a rabbit out when you can twist him out. Deal 'em. (LIGE deals out the cards.)

CLARK'S VOICE: (Inside the store) You, Mattie! (MRS. CLARK, who has been standing in the DOE, quickly turns and goes inside.)

LIGE: Y-e-e-e! Spades! (The game is started.)

LUM: Didn't snatch that jack, did you?

LIGE: Aw, no, ain't snatched no jack. Play.

WALTER: (LUM'S partner) Well, here it is, partner. What you want me to play for you?

LUM: Play jus' like I'm in New York, partner. But we gotta try to catch that jack.

LIGE: (Threateningly) Stick out your hand and draw back a nub.

(WALTER THOMAS plays.)

WALTER: I'm playin' a diamond for you, partner.

LUM: I done tole you you ain't got no partner.

LIGE: Heh, Heh! Partner, we got 'em. Pull off wid your king. Dey got to play 'em. (When that trick is turned, triumphantly:) Didn't I tell you, partner? (Stands on his feet and slams down with his ace violently) Now, come up under this ace. Aw, hah, look at ol' low, partner. I knew I was gonna catch 'em. (When LUM plays) Ho, ho, there goes the queen…. Now, the jack's a gentleman…. Now, I'm playin' my knots. (Everybody plays and the hand is ended.) Partner, high, low, jack and the game and four.

WALTER: Give me them cards. I believe you-all done give me the cub that time. Look at me … this is Booker T Washington dealing these cards. (Shuffles cards grandly and gives them to LIGE to cut.) Wanta cut 'em?

LIGE: Yeah, cut 'em and shoot 'em. I'd cut behind my ma. (He cuts the cards.)

WALTER: (Turning to player at left, FRANK, LIGE'S partner) What you saying, Frank?

FRANK: I'm beggin'. (LIGE is trying to peep at cards.)

WALTER: (Turning to LIGE) Stop peepin' at them cards, Lige. (To FRANK)
Did you say you was beggin' or standin'?

FRANK: I'm beggin'.

WALTER: Get up off your knees. Go ahead and tell 'em I sent you.

FRANK: Well, that makes us four.

WALTER: I don't care if you is. (Pulls a quarter out of his pocket and lays it down on the box.) Twenty-five cents says I know the best one. Let's go. (Everybody puts down a quarter.)

FRANK: What you want me to play for you partner?

LIGE: Play me a club. (The play goes around to dealer, WALTER, who gets up and takes the card off the top of the deck and slams it down on the table.)

WALTER: Get up ol' deuce of deamonds and gallop off with your load.
(TO LUM) Partner, how many times you seen the deck?

LUM: Two times.

WALTER: Well, then I'm gonna pull off, partner. Watch this ol' queen. (Everyone plays) Ha! Ha! Wash day and no soap. (Takes the jack of diamonds and sticks him up on his forehead. Stands up on his feet.) Partner, I'm dumping to you … play your king. (When it comes to his play LUM, too, stands up. The others get up and they, too, excitedly slam their cards down.) Now, come on in this kitchen and let me splice that cabbage! (He slams down the ace of diamonds. Pats the jack on his for head, sings:) Hey, hey, back up, jenny, get your load. (Talking) Dump to that jack, boys, dump to it. High, low, jack and the game and four. One to go. We're four wid you, boys.

LIGE: Yeah, but you-all playin' catch-up.

FRANK: Gimme them cards … lemme deal some.

LIGE: Frank, now you really got responsibility on you. They's got one game on us.

FRANK: Aw, man, I'm gonna deal 'em up a mess. This deal's in the White House. (He shuffles and puts the cards down for WALTER to cut.) Cut 'em.

WALTER: Nope, I never cut green timber. (FRANK deals and turns the card up.)

FRANK: Hearts, boys. (He turns up an ace.)

LUM: Aw, you snatched that ace, nigger.

WALTER: Yeah, they done carried the cub to us, partner.

LIGE: Oh, he didn't do no such a thing. That ace was turned fair. We jus' too hard for you … we eats our dinner out a the blacksmith shop.

WALTER: Aw, you all cheatin'. You know it wasn't fair.

FRANK: Aw, shut up, you all jus' whoopin' and hollerin' for nothin'. Tryin' to bully the game. (FRANK and LIGE rise and shake hands grandly.)

LIGE: Mr. Hoover, you sho is a noble president. We done stuck these niggers full of cobs. They done got scared to play us.

LIGE (?) Scared to play you? Get back down to this table, let me spread my mess.

LOUNGER: Yonder comes Elder Simms. You all better squat that rabbit.
They'll be having you all up in the church for playin' cards.

(FRANK grabs up the cards and puts them in his pocket quickly. Everybody picks up the money and looks unconcerned as the preacher enters. Enter ELDER SIMMS with his two prim-looking little children by the hand.)

ELDER SIMMS: How do, children. Right warm for this time in November, ain't it?

VOICE: Yes sir, Reverend, sho is. How's Sister Simms?

SIMMS: She's feelin' kinda po'ly today. (Goes on in store with his children)

VOICE: (Whispering loudly) Don't see how that great big ole powerful woman could be sick. Look like she could go bear huntin' with her fist.

ANOTHER VOICE: She look jus' as good as you-all's Baptist pastor's wife. Pshaw, you ain't seen no big woman, nohow, man. I seen one once so big she went to whip her little boy and he run up under her belly and hid six months 'fore she could find him.

ANOTHER VOICE: Well, I knowed a woman so little that she had to get up on a soap box to look over a grain of sand.

(REV. SIMMS comes out of store, each child behind him sucking a stick of candy.)

SIMMS: (To his children) Run on home to your mother and don't get dirty on the way. (The two children start primly off down the street but just out of sight one of them utters a loud cry.)

SIMMS'S CHILD: (Off stage) Papa, papa. Nunkie's trying to lick my candy.

SIMMS: I told you to go on and leave them other children alone.

VOICE ON PORCH: (Kidding) Lum, whyn't you tend to your business.

(TOWN MARSHALL rises and shoos the children off again.)

LUM: You all varmints leave them nice chillun alone.

LIGE: (Continuing the lying on porch) Well, you all done seen so much, but I bet you ain't never seen a snake as big as the one I saw when I was a boy up in middle Georgia. He was so big couldn't hardly move his self. He laid in one spot so long he growed moss on him and everybody thought he was a log, till one day I set down on him and went to sleep, and when I woke up that snake done crawled to Florida. (Loud laughter.)

FRANK: (Seriously) Layin' all jokes aside though now, you all remember that rattlesnake I killed last year was almost as big as that Georgia snake.

VOICE: How big, you say it was, Frank?

FRANK: Maybe not quite as big as that, but jus' about fourteen feet.

VOICE: (Derisively) Gimme that lyin' snake. That snake wasn't but four foot long when you killed him last year and you done growed him ten feet in a year.

ANOTHER VOICE: Well, I don't know about that. Some of the snakes around here is powerful long. I went out in my front yard yesterday right after the rain and killed a great big ol' cottonmouth.

SIMMS: This sho is a snake town. I certainly can't raise no chickens for 'em. They kill my little biddies jus' as fast as they hatch out. And yes … if I hadn't cut them weeds out of the street in front of my parsonage, me or some of my folks woulda been snake-bit right at our front door. (To whole crowd) Whyn't you all cut down these weeds and clean up these streets?

HAMBO: Well, the Mayor ain't said nothin' 'bout it.

SIMMS: When the folks misbehaves in this town I think they oughta lock 'em up in a jail and make 'em work their fine out on the streets, then these weeds would be cut down.

VOICE: How we gonna do that when we ain't got no jail?

SIMMS: Well, you sho needs a jail … you-all needs a whole lot of improvements round this town. I ain't never pastored no town so way-back as this one here.

CLARK: (Who has lately emerged from the store, fanning himself, overhears this last remark and bristles up) What's that you say 'bout this town?

SIMMS: I say we needs some improvements here in this town … that's what.

CLARK: (In a powerful voice) And what improvements you figgers we needs?

SIMMS: A whole heap. Now, for one thing we really does need a jail, Mayor. We oughta stop runnin' these people out of town that misbehaves, and lock 'em up. Others towns has jails, everytown I ever pastored had a jail. Don't see how come we can't have one.

CLARK: (Towering angrily above the preacher) Now, wait a minute, Simms. Don't you reckon the man who knows how to start a town knows how to run it? I paid two hundred dollars out of this right hand for this land and walked out here and started this town befo' you was born. I ain't like some of you new niggers, come here when grapes' ripe. I was here to cut new ground, and I been Mayor ever since.

SIMMS: Well, there ain't no sense in no one man stayin' Mayor all the time.

CLARK: Well, it's my town and I can be mayor jus' as long as I want to. It was me that put this town on the map.

SIMMS: What map you put it on, Joe Clark? I ain't seen it on no map.

CLARK: (Indignant) I God! Listen here, Elder Simms. If you don't like the way I run this town, just' take your flat feets right on out and git yonder crost the woods. You ain't been here long enough to say nothin' nohow.

HAMBO: (From a nail keg) Yeah, you Methodist niggers always telling people how to run things.

TAYLOR: (Practically unheard by the others) We do so know how to run things, don't we? Ain't Brother Mayor a Methodist, and ain't the school-teacher a …? (His remarks are drowned out by the others.)

SIMMS: No, we don't like the way you're runnin' things. Now looka here, (Pointing at the Marshall) You got that lazy Lum Boger here for marshall and he ain't old enough to be dry behind his ears yet … and all these able-bodied means in this town! You won't 'low nobody else to run a store 'ceptin' you. And looka yonder (happening to notice the street light) only street lamp in town, you got in front of your place. (Indignantly) We pay the taxes and you got the lamp.

VILLAGER: Don't you-all fuss now. How come you two always yam-yamming at each other?

CLARK: How come this fly-by-night Methodist preacher over here … ain't been here three months … tries to stand up on my store porch and tries to tell me how to run my town? (MATTIE CLARK, the Mayor's wife, comes timidly to the door, wiping her hands on her apron.) Ain't no man gonna tell me how to run my town. I God, I 'lected myself in and I'm gonna run it. (Turns and sees wife standing in door. Commandingly.) I God, Mattie, git on back in there and wait on that store!

MATTIE: (Timidly) Jody, somebody else wantin' stamps.

CLARK: I God, woman, what good is you? Gwan, git in. Look like between women and preachers a man can't have no peace. (Exit CLARK.)

SIMMS: (Continuing his argument) Now, when I pastored in Jacksonville you oughta see what kinda jails they got there….

LOUNGER: White folks needs jails. We colored folks don't need no jail.

ANOTHER VILLAGER: Yes, we do, too. Elder Simms is right….

(The argument becomes a hubbub of voices.)

TAYLOR: (Putting down his basket) Now, I tell you a jail….

MRS. TAYLOR: (Emerging from the store door, arms full of groceries, looking at her husband) Yeah, and if you don't shut up and git these rations home I'm gonna be worse on you than a jail and six judges. Pickup that basket and let's go. (TONY meekly picks up the basket and he and his wife exit as the sound of an approaching guitar is heard off stage.)

(Two carelessly dressed, happy-go-lucky fellows enter together. One is fingering a guitar without playing any particular tune, and the other has his hat cocked over his eyes in a burlesque, dude-like manner. There are casual greetings.)

WALTER: Hey, there, bums, how's tricks?

LIGE: What yo' sayin', boys?

HAMBO: Good evenin' sons.

LIGE: How did you-all make out this evenin', boys?

JIM: Oh, them white folks at the party shelled out right well. Kept
Dave busy pickin' it up. How much did we make today, Dave?

DAVE: (Striking his pocket) I don't know, boy, but feels right heavy here. Kept me pickin' up money just like this…. (As JIM picks a few dance chords, Dave gives a dance imitation of how he picked up the coins from the ground as the white folks threw them.) We count it after while. Woulda divided up with you already if you hadn't left me when you seen Daisy comin' by. Let's sit down on the porch and rest now.

LIGE: She sho is lookin' stylish and pretty since she come back with her white folks from up North. Wearin' the swellest clothes. And that coal-black hair of hers jus' won't quit.

MATTIE CLARK: (In doorway) I don't see what the mens always hanging after Daisy Taylor for.

CLARK: (Turning around on the porch) I God, you back here again. Who's tendin' that store? (MATTIE disappears inside.)

DAVE: Well, she always did look like new money to me when she was here before.

JIM: Well, that's all you ever did get was a look.

DAVE: That's all you know! I bet I get more than that now.

JIM: You might git it but I'm the man to use it. I'm a bottom fish.

DAVE: Aw, man. You musta been walking round here fast asleep when
Daisy was in this county last. You ain't seen de go I had with her.

JIM: No, I ain't seen it. Bet you didn't have no letter from her while she been away.

DAVE: Bet you didn't neither.

JIM: Well, it's just cause she can't write. If she knew how to scratch with a pencil I'd had a ton of 'em.

DAVE: Shaw, man! I'd had a post office full of 'em.

OLD WOMAN: You-all ought to be shame, carrying on over a brazen heifer like Daisy Taylor. Jus' cause she's been up North and come back, I reckon you cutting de fool sho 'nough now. She ain't studying none of you-all nohow. All she wants is what you got in your pocket.

JIM: I likes her but she won't git nothin' outa me. She never did. I wouldn't give a poor consumpted cripple crab a crutch to cross the River Jurdon.

DAVE: I know I ain't gonna give no woman nothin'. I wouldn't give a dog a doughnut if he treed a terrapin.

LIGE: Youse a cottontail dispute … both of you. You'd give her anything you got. You'd give her Georgia with a fence 'round it.

OLD MAN: Yeah, and she'd take it, too.

LINDSAY: Don't distriminate the woman like that. That ain't nothing but hogism. Ain't nothin' the matter with Daisy, she's all right.

(Enter TEETS and BOOTSIE tittering coyly and switching themselves.)

BOOTSIE: Is you seen my mama?

OLD WOMAN: You know you ain't lookin' for no mama. Jus' come back down here to show your shape and fan around awhile. (BOOTSIE and TEETS going into the store.)

BOOTSIE & TEETS: No, we ain't. We'se come to get our mail.

OLD WOMAN: (After girls enter store) Why don't you all keep up some attention to these nice girls here, Bootsie and Teets. They wants to marry.

DAVE: Aw, who thinkin' 'bout marryin' now? They better stay home and eat their own pa's rations. I gotta buy myself some shoes.

JIM: The woman I'm gonna marry ain't born yet and her maw is dead.

(GIRLS come out giggling and exit.) (JIM begins to strum his guitar lightly at first as the talk goes on.)

CLARK: (To DAVE and JIM) Two of the finest gals that ever lived and friendly jus' like you-all is. You two boys better take 'em back and stop them shiftless ways.

HAMBO: Yeah, hurry up and do somethin'! I wants to taste a piece yo' weddin' cake.

JIM: (Embarrassed but trying to be jocular) Whut you trying to rush me up so fast?… Look at Will Cody here (Pointing to little man on porch) he been promising to bring his already wife down for two months … and nair one of us ain't seen her yet.

DAVE: Yeah, how you speck me to haul in a brand new wife when he can't lead a wagon-broke wife eighteen miles? Me, I'm going git one soon's Cody show me his'n. (General sly laughter at CODY'S expense.)

WALTER: (Snaps his fingers and pretends to remember something) Thass right, Cody. I been intending to tell you…. I know where you kin buy a ready-built house for you and yo' wife. (Calls into the store.) Hey, Clark, cime on out here and tell Cody 'bout dat Bradley house. (To CODY.) I know you wants to git a place of yo' own so you kin settle down.

HAMBO: He done moved so much since he been here till every time he walk out in his back yeard his chickens lay down and cross they legs.

LINDSAY: Cody, I thought you tole us you was going up to Sanford to bring dat 'oman down here last Sat'day.

LIGE: That ain't de way he tole me 'bout it. Look, fellers, (Getting up and putting one hand on his hips and one finger of the other hand against his chin coquettishly) Where you reckon I'll be next Sat'day night?… Sittin' up side of Miz Cody. (Great burst of laughter.)

SYKES JONES: (Laughing) Know what de folks tole me in Sanford? Dat was another man's wife. (Guffaws.)

CODY: (Feebly) Aw, you don't know whut you talkin' bout.

JONES: Naw, I don't know, but de folks in Sanford does. (Laughing) Dey tell me when dat lady's husband come home Sat'day night, ole Cody jumped out de window. De man grabbed his old repeater and run out in de yard to head him off. When Cody seen him come round de corner de house (Gesture) he flopped his wings and flew up on de fence. De man thowed dat shotgun dead on him. (Laughs) Den, man! Cody flopped his wings lak a buzzard (Gesture) and sailed on off. De man dropped to his knees lak dis (Gesture of kneeling on one knee and taking aim) Die! die! die! (Supposedly sound of shots as the gun is moved in a circle following the course of Cody's supposed flight) Cody just flew right on off and lit on a hill two miles off. Then, man! (Gesture of swift flight) In ten minutes he was back here in Eatonville and in he bed.

WALTER: I passed there and seen his house shakin', but I didn't know how come.

HAMBO: Aw, leave de boy alone…. If you don't look out some of y'all going to have to break his record.

LIGE: I'm prepared to break it now. (General laughter.)

JIM: Well, anyhow, I don't want to marry and leave Dave … yet awhile. (Picking a chord.)

DAVE: And I ain't gonna leave Jim. We been palling around together ever since we hollered titty mama, ain't we, boy?

JIM: Sho is. (Music of the guitar increases in volume. DAVE shuffles a few steps and the two begin to sing.)

JIM:
Rabbit on the log.
I ain't got no dog.
How am I gonna git him?
God knows.

DAVE:
Rabbit on the log.
Ain't got no dog.
Shoot him with my rifle
Bam! Bam!

(Some of the villagers join in song and others get up and march around the porch in time with the music. BOOTSIE and TEETS re-enter, TEETS sticking her letter down the neck of her blouse. JOE LINDSAY grabs TEETS and WALTER THOMAS grabs BOOTSIE. There is dancing, treating and general jollification. Little children dance the parse-me-la. The music fills the air just as the sun begins to go down. Enter DAISY TAYLOR coming down the road toward the store.)

CLARK: (Bawls out from the store porch) I God, there's Daisy again.

(Most of the dancing stops, the music slows down and then stops completely. DAVE and JIM greet DAISY casually as she approaches the porch.)

JIM: Well, Daisy, we knows you, too.

DAVE: Gal, youse jus' as pretty as a speckled pup.

DAISY: (Giggling) I see you two boys always playin' and singin' together. That music sounded right good floating down the road.

JIM: Yeah, child, we'se been playin' for the white folks all week.
We'se playin' for the colored now.

DAVE: (Showing off, twirling his dancing feet) Yeah, we're standin' on our abstract and livin' on our income.

OLD MAN: Um-ump, but they ain't never workin'. Just round here playing as usual.

JIM: Some folks think you ain't workin' lessen you smellin' a mule. (He sits back down on box and picks at his guitar.) Think you gotta be beatin' a man to his barn every mornin'.

VOICE: Glad to be round home with we-all again, ain't you Daisy?

DAISY: Is I glad? I jus' got off special early this evenin' to come over here and see everybody. I was kinda 'fraid sundown would catch me 'fore I got round that lake. Don't know how I'm gonna walk back to my workin' place in the dark by muself.

DAVE: Don't no girl as good-lookin' as you is have to go home by herself tonight.

JIM: No, cause I'm here.

DAVE: (To DAISY) Don't you trust yourself round that like wid all them 'gators and moccasins with that nigger there, Daisy (Pointing at JIM) He's jus' full of rabbit blood. What you need is a real man … with good feet. (Cutting a dance step.)

DAISY: I ain't thinking 'bout goin' home yet. I'm goin' in the store.

JIM: What you want in the store?

DAISY: I want some gum.

DAVE: (Starting toward door) Girl, you don't have to go in there to git no gum. I'll go in there and buy you a carload of gum. What kind you want?

DAISY: Bubble gum. (DAVE goes in the store with his hand in his pocket. The sun is setting and the twilight deepens.)

JIM: (Pulling package out of his pocket and laughing) Here your gum, baby. What it takes to please the ladies, I totes it. I don't have to go get it, like Dave. What you gimme for it?

DAISY: A bushel and a peck, and a hug around the neck. (She embraces JIM playfully. He hands her the gum, patting his shoulder as he sits on box.) Oh, thank you. Youse a ready man.

JIM: Yeah, there's a lot of good parts to me. You can have West Tampa if you want it.

DAISY: You always was a nice quiet boy, Jim.

DAVE: (Emerging from the store with a package of gum) Here's your gum,
Daisy.

JIM: Oh, youse late. She's done got gum now. Chaw that yourself.

DAVE: (Slightly peeved and surprised) Hunh, you mighty fast here now with Daisy but you wasn't that fast gettin' out of that white man's chicken house last week.

JIM: Who you talkin' 'bout?

DAVE: Hoo-oo? (Facetiously) You ain't no owl. Your feet don't fit no limb.

JIM: Aw, nigger, hush.

DAVE: Aw, hush, yourself. (He walks away for a minute as DAISY turns to meet some newcomers. DAVE throws his package of gum down on the ground. It breaks and several children scramble for the pieces. An old man, very drunk, carrying an empty jug enters on left and staggers tipsily across stage.) (MAYOR JOE CLARK emerges from the store and looks about for his marshall.)

CLARK: (Bellowing) Lum Boger!

LUM BOGER: (Eating a stalk of cane) Yessir!

CLARK: I God, Lum, take your lazy self off that keg and go light that town lamp. All summer long you eatin' up my melon, and all winter long you chawin' up my cane. What you think this town is payin' you for? Laying round here doin' nothin'? Can't you see it's gettin' dark?

(LUM BOGER rises lazily and takes the soap box down stage, stands on it to light the lamp, discovers no oil in it and goes in store. In a few moments he comes out of store, fills the lamp and lights it.)

DAISY: (Coming back toward JIM) Ain't you all gonna play and sing a little somethin' for me? I ain't heard your all's music much for so long.

JIM: Play anything you want, Daisy. Don't make no difference what 'tis I can pick it. Where's that old coon, Dave? (Looking around for his partner.)

LIGE: (Calling Dave, who is leaning against post at opposite end of porch) Come here, an' get warmed up for Daisy.

DAVE: Aw, ma throat's tired.

JIM: Leave the baby be.

DAISY: Come on, sing a little, Dave.

DAVE: (Going back toward Jim) Well, seeing who's asking … all right.
What song yo like, Daisy?

DAISY: Um-m. Lemme think.

VOICE ON PORCH: "Got on the train, didn't have no fare".

DAISY: (Gaily) Yes, that one. That's a good one.

JIM: (Begins to tune up. DAVE touches Daisy's hand.)

VOICE: (In fun) Hunh, you all wouldn't play at the hall last week when we asked you.

VOICE OF SPITEFUL OLD WOMAN: Daisy wasn't here then.

ANOTHER VOICE: (Teasingly) All you got to do to some men is to shake a skirt tail in their face and they goes off their head.

DAVE: (To JIM who is still tuning up) Come if you're comin' boy, let's go if you gwine. (The full melody of the guitar comes out in a lively, old-fashioned tune.)

VOICE: All right now, boys, do it for Daisy jus' as good as you do for dem white folks over in Maitland.

DAVE & JIM: (Beginning to sing)
Got on the train,
Didn't have no fare,
But I rode some,
I rode some.
Got on the train,
Didn't have no fare,
But I rode some,
But I rode some.
Got on the train,
Didn't have no fare,
Conductor asked me what I'm doin' there,
But I rode some!

Grabbed me by the neck
And led me to the door.
But I rode some,
But I rode some.
Grabbed me by the neck
And led me to the door.
But I rode some,
But I rode some.
Grabbed me by the neck,
And led me to the door.
Rapped me cross the head with a forty-four,
But I rode some.

First thing I saw in jail
Was a pot of peas.
But I rode some,
But I rode some.
First thing I saw in jail
Was a pot of peas.
But I rode some,

But I rode some.
The peas was good,
The meat was fat,
Fell in love with the chain gang jus' for that,
But I rode some.

(DAVE acts out the song in dancing pantomime and when it ends there are shouts and general exclamations of approval from the crowd.)

VOICES: I don't blame them white folks for goin' crazy 'bout that….

OLD MAN: Oh, when I was a young boy I used to swing the gals round on that piece.

DAISY: (TO JIM) Seem like your playin' gits better and better.

DAVE: (Quickly) And how 'bout my singin'? (Everybody laughs.)

VOICES IN THE CROWD: Ha! Ha! Ol' Dave's gittin' jealous when she speaks o' Jim.

JIM: (To DAVE, in fun) Ain't nothin' to it but my playin'. You ain't got no singin' voice. If that's singin', God's a gopher.

DAVE: (Half-seriously) My singin' is a whole lot better'n your playin'. You jus' go along and fram. The reason why the white folks gives us money is cause I'm singin'.

JIM: Yeah?

DAVE: And you can't dance.

VOICE IN THE CROWD: You oughta dance. Big as your feet is, Dave.

DAISY: (Diplomatically) Both of you all is wonderful and I would like to see Dave dance a little.

DAVE: There now, I told you. What did I tell you. (To JIM) Stop woofing and pick a little tune there so that I can show Daisy somethin'.

JIM: Pick a tune? I bet if you fool with me I'll pick your bones jus' like a buzzard did the rabbit. You can't sing and now you wants to dance.

DAVE: Yeah, and I'll lam your head. Come on and play, good-for-nothing.

JIM: All right, then. You say you can dance … show these people what you can do. But don't bring that little stuff I been seein' you doin' all these years. (JIM plays and DAVE dances, various members of the crowd keep time with their hands and feet, DAISY looks on enjoying herself immensely.)

DAISY: (As DAVE cuts a very fancy step) I ain't seen nothin' like this up North. Dave you sho hot.

(As DAVE cuts a more complicated step the crowd applauds, but just as the show begins to get good, suddenly JIM stops playing.)

DAVE: (Surprised) What's the matter, buddy?

JIM: (Envious of the attention DAVE has been getting from DAISY, disgustedly) Oh, nigger, I'm tired of seein' you cut the fool. 'Sides that, I been playin' all afternoon for the white folks.

DAISY: But I though you was playin' for me now, Jim.

JIM: Yeah, I'd play all night long for you, but I'm gettin' sick of Dave round here showin' off. Let him git somethin' and play for himself if he can. (An OLD MAN with a lighted lantern enters.)

DAISY: (Coyly) Well, honey, play some more for me, then, and don't mind Dave. I reckon he done danced enough. Play me "Shake That Thing".

OLD MAN WITH LANTERN: Sho, you ain't stopped, is you, boy? Music sound mighty good floatin' down that dark road.

OLD WOMAN: Yeah, Jim, go on play a little more. Don't get to acting so niggerish this evening.

DAVE: Aw, let the ol' darky alone. Nobody don't want to hear him play, nohow. I know I don't.

JIM: Well, I'm gonna play. (And he begins to pick "Shake That Thing".
TEETS and BOOTSIE begin to dance with LIGE MOSELY and FRANK WARRICK.

As the tune gets good, DAVE cannot resist the music either.)

DAVE: Old nigger's eveil but he sho can play. (He begins to do a few steps by himself, then twirls around in front of DAISY and approaches her. DAISY, overcome by the music, begins to step rhythmically toward DAVE and together they dance unobserved by JIM, absorbed in picking his guitar.)

DAISY: Look here, baby, at this new step I learned up North.

DAVE: You can show me anything, sugar lump.

DAISY: Hold me tight now. (But just as they begin the new movement JIM notices DAISY and DAVE. He stops playing again and lays his guitar down.)

VOICES IN THE CROWD: (Disgustedly) Aw, come on, Jim…. You must be jealous….

JIM: No, I ain't jealous. I jus' get tired of seein' that ol' nigger clownin' all the time.

DAVE: (Laughing and pointing to JIM on porch) Look at that mad baby. Take that lip up off the ground. Got your mouth stuck out jus' because some one is enjoying themselves. (He comes up and pushes JIM playfully.)

JIM: You better go head and let me alone. (TO DAISY) Come here,
Daisy!

LIGE: That's just what I say. Niggers can't have no fun without someone getting mad … specially over a woman.

JIM: I ain't mad…. Daisy, 'scuse me, honey, but that fool, Dave….

DAVE: I ain't mad neither…. Jim always tryin' to throw off on me.
But you can't joke him.

DAISY: (Soothingly) Aw, now, now!

JIM: You ain't jokin'. You means that, nigger. And if you tryin' to get hot, first thing, you can pull of my blue shirt you put on this morning.

DAVE: Youse a got that wrong. I ain't got on no shirt of yours.

JIM: Yes, you is got on my shirt, too. Don't tell me you ain't got on my shirt.

DAVE: Well, even if I is, you can just lift your big plantations out of my shoes. You can just foot it home barefooted.

JIM: You try to take any shoes offa me!

LIGE: (Pacifying them) Aw, there ain't no use of all that. What you all want to start this quarreling for over a little jokin'.

JIM: Nobody's quarreling…. I'm just playin' a little for Daisy and
Dave's out there clownin' with her.

CLARK: (In doorway) I ain't gonna have no fussin' round my store, no way. Shut up, you all.

JIM: Well, Mayor Clark, I ain't mad with him. We'se been friends all our lives. He's slept in my bed and wore my clothes and et my grub….

DAVE: I et your grub? And many time as you done laid down with your belly full of my grandma's collard greens. You done et my meat and bread a whole lot more times than I et your stewed fish-heads.

JIM: I'd rather eat stewed fish-heads than steal out of other folkses houses so much till you went to sleep on the roost and fell down one night and broke up the settin' hen. (Loud laughter from the crowd)

DAVE: Youse a liar if you say I stole anybody's chickens. I didn't have to. But you … 'fore you started goin' around with me, playin' that little box of yours, you was so hungry you had the white mouth. If it wasn't for these white folks throwin' *me* money for *my* dancin', you would be thin as a whisper right now.

JIM: (Laughing sarcastically) Your dancin'! You been leapin' around here like a tailless monkey in a wash pot for a long time and nobody was payin' no 'tention to you, till I come along playing.

LINDSAY: Boys, boys, that ain't no way for friends to carry on.

DAISY: Well, if you all gonna keep up this quarrelin' and carryin' on I'm goin' home. 'Bout time for me to be gittin' back to my white folks anyhow. It's dark now. I'm goin', even if I have to go by myself. I shouldn't a stopped by here nohow.

JIM: (Stopping his quarrel) You ain't gonna go home by yourself. I'm goin' with you.

DAVE: (Singing softly)
It may be so,
I don't know.
But it sounds to me
Like a lie.

WALTER: Dave ain't' got as much rabbit blood as folks thought.

DAVE: Tell 'em 'bout me. (Turns to DAISY) Won't you choose a treat on me, Miss Daisy, 'fore we go?

DAISY: (Coyly) Yessir, thank you. I wants a drink of soda water.

(DAVE pulls his hat down over his eyes, whirls around and offers his arm to DAISY. They strut into the store, DAVE gazing contemptuously at JIM as he passes. Crowd roars with laughter, much to the embarrassment of JIM.)

LIGE: Ol' fast Dave jus' runnin' the hog right over you, Jim.

WALTER: Thought you was such a hot man.

LUM BOGER: Want me to go in there and put Daisy under arrest and bring her to you?

JIM: (Sitting down on the edge of porch with one foot on the step and lights a cigarette pretending not to be bothered.) Aw, I'll get her when I want her. Let him treat her, but see who struts around that lake and down the railroad with her by and by.

(DAVE and DAISY emerge from the store, each holding a bottle of red soda pop and laughing together. As they start down the steps DAVE accidentally steps on JIM's outstretched foot. JIM jumps up and pushes DAVE back, causing him to spill the red soda all over his white shirt front.)

JIM: Stay off my foot, you big ox.

DAVE: Well, you don't have to wet me all up, do you, and me in company? Why don't you put your damn foot in your pocket?

DAISY: (Wiping DAVE'S shirt front with her handkerchief) Aw, ain't that too bad.

JIM: (To DAVE) Well, who's shirt did I wet? It's mine, anyhow, ain't it?

DAVE: (Belligerently) Well, if it's your shirt, then you come take it off me. I'm tired of your lip.

JIM: Well, I will.

DAVE: Well, put your fist where you lip is. (Pushing DAISY aside.)

DAISY: (Frightened) I want to go home. Now, don't you all boys fight.

(JIM attempts to come up the steps. DAVE pushes him back and he stumbles and falls in the dust. General excitement as the crowd senses a fight.)

LITTLE BOY: (On the edge of crowd) Fight, fight, you're no kin. Kill one another, won't be no sin. Fight, fight, you're no kin.

(JIM jumps up and rushes for DAVE as the latter starts down the steps. DAVE meets him with his fist squarely in the face and causes him to step backward, confused.)

DAISY: (Still on porch, half crying) Aw, my Lawd! I want to go home.

(General hubbub, women's cries of "Don't let 'em fight." "Why don't somebody stop 'em?" "What kind of men is you all, sit there and let them boys fight like that." Men's voices urging the fight: "Aw, let 'em fight." "Go for him, Dave." "Slug him, Jim."

JIM makes another rush toward the steps. He staggers DAVE. DAVE knocks JIM sprawling once more. This time JIM grabs the mule bone as he rises, rushes DAVE, strikes DAVE over the head with it and knocks him out. DAVE falls prone on his back. There is great excitement.)

OLD WOMAN: (Screams) Lawdy, is he kilt? (Several men rush to the fallen man.)

VOICE: Run down to the pump and get a dipper o' water.

CLARK: (To his wife in door) Mattie, come out of that store with a bottle of witch hazely oil quick as you can. Jim Weston, I'm gonna arrest you for this. You Lum Boger. Where is that marshall? Lum Boger! (LUM BOGER detaches himself from the crowd.) Arrest Jim.

LUM: (Grabs JIM'S arm, relieves him of the mule bone and looks helplessly at the Mayor.) Now I got him arrested, what's I going to do with him?

CLARK: Lock him up back yonder in my barn till Monday when we'll have the trial in de Baptist Church.

LINDSAY: Yeah, just like all the rest of them Methodists … always tryin' to take undercurrents on people.

WALTER: Ain't no worse then some of you Baptists, nohow. You all don't run this town. We got jus' as much to say as you have.

CLARK: (Angrily to both men) Shut up! Done had enough arguing in front of my place. (To LUM BOGER) Take that boy on and lock him up in my barn. And save that mule bone for evidence.

(LUM BOGER leads JIM off toward the back of the store. A crowd follows him. Other men and women are busy applying restoratives to DAVE. DAISY stands alone, unnoticed in the center of the stage.)

DAISY: (Worriedly) Now, who's gonna take me home?

:::: CURTAIN::::

ACT TWO

SCENE I

SETTING: Village street scene; huge oak tree upstage center; a house or two on back drop. When curtain goes up, Sister LUCY TAYLOR is seen standing under the tree. She is painfully spelling it out.

(Enter SISTER THOMAS, a younger woman (In her thirties) at left.)

SISTER THOMAS: Evenin', Sis Taylor.

SISTER TAYLOR: Evenin'. (Returns to the notice)

SISTER THOMAS: Whut you doin'? Readin' dat notice Joe Clark put up 'bout de meeting? (Approaches tree)

SISTER TAYLOR: Is dat whut it says? I ain't much on readin' since I had my teeth pulled out. You know if you pull out dem eye teeth you ruins' yo' eye sight. (Turns back to notice) Whut it say?

SISTER THOMAS: (Reading notice) "The trial of Jim Weston for assault and battery on Dave Carter wid a dangerous weapon will be held at Macedonia Baptist Church on Monday, November 10, at three o'clock. All are welcome. By order of J. Clark, Mayor of Eatonville, Florida." (Turning to SISTER TAYLOR) Hit's makin' on to three now.

SISTER TAYLOR: You mean it's right *now*. (Looks up at sun to tell time) Lemme go git ready to be at de trial 'cause I'm sho goin' to be there an' I ain't goin' to bite my tongue neither.

SISTER THOMAS: I done went an' crapped a mess of collard greens for supper. I better go put 'em on 'cause Lawd knows when we goin' to git outa there an' my husband is one of them dat's gointer eat don't keer whut happen. I bet if judgment day was to happen tomorrow he'd speck I orter fix him a bucket to carry long. (She moves to exit, right)

SISTER TAYLOR: All men favors they guts, chile. But what you think of all dis mess they got goin' on round here?

SISTER THOMAS: I just think it's a sin an' a shame befo' de livin' justice de way dese Baptis' niggers is runnin' round here carryin' on.

SISTER TAYLOR: Oh, they been puttin' out the brags ever since Sat'day night 'bout whut they gointer do to Jim. They thinks they runs this town. They tell me Rev. CHILDERS preached a sermon on it yistiddy.

SISTER THOMAS: Lawd help us! He can't preach an' he look like 10 cents worth of have-mercy let lone gittin' up dere tryin' to throw slams at us. Now all Elder Simms done wuz to explain to us our rights … whut you think 'bout Joe Clarke runnin' round here takin' up for these ole Baptist niggers?

SISTER TAYLOR: De puzzle-gut rascal … we oughter have him up in conference an' put him out de Methdis' faith. He don't b'long in there—wanter tun dat boy outa town for nothin'.

SISTER THOMAS: But we all know how come he so hot to law Jim outa town—hit's to dig de foundation out from under Elder Simms.

SISTER TAYLOR: Whut he wants do dat for?

SISTER THOMAS: 'Cause he wants to be a God-know-it-all an' a God-do-it-all an' Simms is de onliest one in this town whut will buck up to him.

(Enter SISTER JONES, walking leisurely)

SISTER JONES: Hello, Hoyt, hello, Lucy.

SISTER TAYLOR: Goin' to de meetin'?

SISTER JONES: Done got my clothes on de line an' I'm bound to be dere.

SISTER THOMAS: Gointer testify for Jim?

SISTER JONES: Naw, I reckon—don't make such difference to me which way de drop fall…. 'Tain't neither one of 'em much good.

SISTER TAYLOR: I know it. I know it, Ida. But dat ain't de point. De crow we wants to pick is: Is we gointer set still an' let dese Baptist tell us when to plant an' when to pluck up?

SISTER JONES: Dat is something to think about when you come to think 'bout it. (Starts to move on) Guess I better go ahead—see y'all later an tell you straighter.

(Enter ELDER SIMMS, right, walking fast, Bible under his arm, almost collides with SISTER JONES as she exits.)

SIMMS: Oh, 'scuse me, Sister Jones. (She nods and smiles and exits.)
How you do, Sister Taylor, Sister Thomas.

BOTH: Good evenin', Elder.

SIMMS: Sho is a hot day.

SISTER TAYLOR: Yeah, de bear is walkin' de earth lak a natural man.

SISTER THOMAS: Reverend, look like you headed de wrong way. It's almost time for de trial an' youse all de dependence we got.

SIMMS: I know it. I'm tryin' to find de marshall so we kin go after
Jim. I wants a chance to talk wid him a minute before court sets.

SISTER TAYLOR: Y'think he'll come clear?

SIMMS: (Proudly) I *know* it! (Shakes the Bible) I'm goin' to law 'em from Genesis to Revelation.

SISTER THOMAS: Give it to 'em, Elder. Wear 'em out!

SIMMS: We'se liable to havea new Mayor when all dis dust settle. Well,
I better scuffle on down de road. (Exits, left.)

SISTER THOMAS: Lord, lemme gwan home an' put dese greens on. (Looks off stage left) Here come Mayor Clark now, wid his belly settin' out in front of him like a cow catcher! His name oughter be Mayor Belly.

SISTER TAYLOR: (Arms akimbo) Jus' look at him! Tryin' to look like a jigadier Breneral.

(Enter CLARK hot and perspiring. They look at him coldly.)

CLARK: I God, de bear got me! (Silence for a moment) How y'all feelin', ladies?

SISTER TAYLOR: Brother Mayor, I ain't one of these folks dat bite my tongue an' bust my gall—whut's inside got to come out! I can't see to my rest why you cloakin' in wid dese Baptist buzzards 'ginst yo' own church.

MAYOR CLARK: I ain't cloakin' in wid *none*. I'm de Mayor of dis whole town I stands for de right an' ginst de wrong—I don't keer who it kill or cure.

SISTER THOMAS: You think it's right to be runnin' dat boy off for nothin'?

CLARK: I God! You call knockin' a man in de head wid a mule bone nothin'? 'Nother thin; I done missed nine of my best-layin' hens. I ain't sayin' Jim got 'em, but different people has tole me he burries a powerful lot of feathers in his back yard. I God, I'm a ruint man! (He starts towards the right exit, but LUM BOGER enters right.) I God, Lum, I been lookin' for you all day. It's almost three o'clock. (Hands him a key from his ring) Take dis key an' go fetch Jim Weston on to de church.

LUM: Have you got yo' gavel from de lodge-room?

CLARK: I God, that's right, Lum. I'll go get it from de lodge room whilst you go git de bone an' de prisoner. Hurry up! You walk like dead lice droppin' off you. (He exits right while LUM crosses stage towards left.)

SISTER TAYLOR: Lum, Elder Simms been huntin' you—he's gone on down 'bout de barn. (She gestures)

LUM BOGER: I reckon I'll overtake him. (Exit left.)

SISTER THOMAS: I better go put dese greens on. My husband will kill me if he don't find no supper ready. Here come Mrs. Blunt. She oughter feel like a penny's worth of have-mercy wid all dis stink behind her daughter.

SISTER TAYLOR: Chile, some folks don't keer. They don't raise they chillun; they drags 'em up. God knows if dat Daisy wuz mine, I'd throw her down an' put a hundred lashes on her back wid a plow-line. Here she come in de store Sat'day night (Acts coy and coquettish, burlesques DAISY'S walk) a wringing and a twisting!

(Enter MRS. BLUNT, left.)

MRS. BLUNT: How y'all sisters?

SISTER THOMAS: Very well, Miz Blunt, how you?

MRS. BLUNT: Oh, so-so.

MRS. TAYLOR: I'm kickin', but not high.

MRS. BLUNT: Well, thank God you still on prayin' ground an' in a Bible country. Me, I ain't so many today. De niggers got my Daisy's name all mixed up in dis mess.

MRS. TAYLOR: You musn't mind dat, Sister Blunt. People jus' *will* talk. They's talkin' in New York an' they's talkin' in Georgy an' they's talkin' in Italy.

SISTER THOMAS: Chile, if you talk folkses talk, they'll have you in de graveyard or in Chattahoochee one. You can't pay no 'tention to talk.

MRS. BLUNT: Well, I know one thing. De man or women, chick or child, grizzly or gray, that tells me to my face anything wrong 'bout *my* chile, I'm goin' to take *my* fist (Rolls up right sleeve and gestures with right fist) and knock they teeth down they throat. (She looks ferocious) 'Case y'all know I raised my Daisy right round my feet till I let her go up north last year wid them white folks. I'd ruther her to be in de white folks' kitchen than walkin' de streets like some of dese girls round here. If I do say so, I done raised a lady. She can't help it if all dese mens get stuck on her.

MRS. TAYLOR: You'se tellin' de truth, Sister Blunt. That's whut I always say: Don't confidence dese niggers. Do, they'll sho put you in de street.

MRS. THOMAS: Naw indeed, never syndicate wid niggers. Do, they will distriminate you. They'll be an *anybody*. You goin' to de trial, ain't you?

MRS. BLUNT: Just as sho as you snore. An' they better leave Daisy's name outa dis, too. I done told her and told her to come straight home from her work. Naw, she had to stop by dat store and skin her gums back wid dem trashy niggers. She better not leave them white folks today to come traipsin' over here scornin' her name all up wid dis nigger mess. Do, I'll kill her. No daughter of mine ain't goin' to do as she please, long as she live under de sound of my voice. (She crosses to right.)

MRS. THOMAS: That's right, Sister Blunt. I glory in yo' spunk. Lord, I better go put on my supper.

(As MRS. BLUNT exits, right, REV. CHILDERS enters left with DAVE and
DEACON LINDSAY and SISTER LEWIS. Very hostile glances from SISTERS
THOMAS and TAYLOR toward the others.)

CHILDERS: Good evenin', folks.

(SISTERS THOMAS and TAYLOR just grunt. MRS. THOMAS moves a step or two towards exit. Flirts her skirts and exits.)

LINDSAY: (Angrily) Whut's de matter, y'all? Cat got yo' tongue?

MRS. TAYLOR: More matter than you kin scatter all over Cincinnatti.

LINDSAY: Go 'head on, Lucy Taylor. Go 'head on. You know a very little of yo' sugar sweetens my coffee. Go 'head on. Everytime you lift yo' arm you smell like a nest of yellow hammers.

MRS. TAYLOR: Go 'head on yo'self. Yo' head look like it done wore out three bodies. Talkin' 'bout *me* smellin'—you smell lak a nest of grand daddies yo'self.

LINDSAY: Aw rock on down de road, 'oman. Ah, don't wantuh change words wid yuh. Youse too ugly.

MRS. TAYLOR: You ain't nobody's pretty baby, yo'self. You so ugly I betcha yo' wife have to spread uh sheet over yo' head tuh let sleep slip up on yuh.

LINDSAY: (Threatening) You better git way from me while you able. I done tole you I don't wanter break a breath wid you. It's uh whole heap better tuh walk off on yo' own legs than it is to be toted off. I'm tired of yo' achin' round here. You fool wid me now an' I'll knock you into doll rags, Tony or no Tony.

MRS. TAYLOR: (Jumping up in his face) Hit me? Hit me! I dare you tuh hit me. If you take dat dare, you'll steal uh hawg an' eat his hair.

LINDSAY: Lemme gwan down to dat church befo' you make me stomp you.
(He exits, right.)

MRS. TAYLOR: You mean you'll *git* stomped. Ah'm goin' to de trial, too. De nex trial gointer be *me* for kickin' some uh you Baptist niggers around.

(A great noise is heard off stage left. The angry and jeering voices of children. MRS. TAYLOR looks off left and takes a step or two towards left exit as the noise comes nearer.)

VOICE OF ONE CHILD: Tell her! Tell her! Turn her up and smell her. Yo' mama ain't got nothin' to do wid me.

MRS. TAYLOR: (Hollering off left) You lil Baptis' haitians leave them chillun alone. If you don't, you better!

(Enter about ten children struggling and wrestling in a bunch. MRS. TAYLOR looks about on the ground for a stick to strike the children with.)

VOICE OF CHILD: Hey! Hey! He's skeered tuh knock it off. Coward!

MRS. TAYLOR: If y'all don't git on home!

SASSY LITTLE GIRL: (Standing akimbo) I know you better not touch me, do my mama will 'tend to you.

MRS. TAYLOR: (Making as if to strike her.) Shet up you nasty lil heifer, sassin' me! You ain't half raised.

(The little girl shakes herself at MRS. TAYLOR and is joined by two or three others.)

MRS. TAYLOR: (Walkin' towards right exit.) I'm goin' on down to de church an' tell yo' mammy. But she ain't been half raised herself. (She exits right with several children making faces behind her.)

ONE BOY: (To sassy GIRL) Aw, haw! Y'all ol' Baptis' ain't got no bookcase in yo' chuch. We went there one day an' I saw uh soda cracker box settin' up in de corner so I set down on it. (Pointing at sassy GIRL) Know what ole Mary Ella say? (Jeering laughter) Willie, you git up off our library! Haw! Haw!

MARY ELLA: Y'all ole Meth'dis' ain't got no window panes in yo' ole church.

ANOTHER GIRL: (Takes center of stand, hands akimbo and shakes her hips) I don't keer whut y'all say, I'm a Meth'dis' bred an' uh Meth'dis' born an' when I'm dead there'll be uh Meth'dis' gone.

MARY ELLA: (Snaps fingers under other girl's nose and starts singing.
Several join her.)
Oh Baptis', Baptis' is my name
My name's written on high
I got my lick in de Baptis' church
Gointer eat up de Meth'dis' pie.

(The Methodist children jeer and make faces. The Baptist camp make faces back; for a full minute there is silence while each camp tries to outdo the other in face making. The Baptist makes the last face.)

METHODIST BOY: Come on, less us don't notice 'em. Less gwan down to de church an' hear de trial.

MARY ELLA: Y'all ain't de onliest ones kin go. We goin', too.

WILLIE: Aw, haw! Copy cats! (Makes face) Dat's right. Follow on behind us lak uh puppy dog tail. (They start walking toward right exit, switching their clothes behind.) Dat's right. Follow on behind us lak uh puppy dog tail. (They start walking toward right exit, switching their clothes behind.)

(Baptist children stage a rush and struggle to get in front of the Methodists. They finally succeed in flinging some of the Methodist children to the ground and some behind them and walk towards right exit haughtily switching their clothes.)

WILLIE: (Whispers to his crowd) Less go round by Mosely's lot an' beat 'em there!

OTHERS: All right!

WILLIE: (Yellin' to Baptists) We wouldn't walk behind no ole Baptists!

(The Methodists turn and walk off towards left exit, switching their clothes as the Baptists are doing.)

SLOW CURTAIN

Zora Neale Hurston (January 7, 1891– January 28, 1960) was an American novelist, short story writer, folklorist, and anthropologist. Of Hurston's four novels and more than 50 published short stories, plays, and essays, she is best known for her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

James Mercer Langston Hughes (February 1, 1902 – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from Joplin, Missouri.

He was one of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form called jazz poetry. Hughes is best known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance in New York City. He famously wrote about the period that "the negro was in vogue," which was later paraphrased as "when Harlem was in vogue."

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Biography of Langston Hughes. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Langston_Hughes. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*
- Biography of Zora Hurston. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Zora_Neale_Hurston. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

Public domain content

- The Mule-Bone. **Authored by**: Langston Hughes and Zora Hurston. **Located at**: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19435. **License**: *Public Domain: No Known Copyright*

7.4: Langston Hughes and Zora Hurston's The Mule-Bone (1930) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **6.10: Langston Hughes and Zora Hurston, "The Mule-Bone," 1930** by Lumen Learning is licensed Public Domain.

7.5: Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House (1879)

Characters

Torvald Helmer.
Nora, his wife.
Doctor Rank.
Mrs. Linde.
Nils Krogstad.
Helmer's three young children.
Anne, their nurse.
A Housemaid.
A Porter.
[The action takes place in Helmer's house.]



"A Doll's House" by Otterbein University Theatre & Dance (2012) CC BY-SA 2.0

Act I

[SCENE: A room furnished comfortably and tastefully, but not extravagantly. At the back, a door to the right leads to the entrance-hall, another to the left leads to Helmer's study. Between the doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left-hand wall is a door, and beyond it a window. Near the window are a round table, arm-chairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, at the farther end, another door; and on the same side, nearer the footlights, a stove, two easy chairs and a rocking-chair; between the stove and the door, a small table. Engravings on the walls; a cabinet with china and other small objects; a small book-case with well-bound books. The floors are carpeted, and a fire burns in the stove.

It is winter. A bell rings in the hall; shortly afterwards the door is heard to open. Enter NORA, humming a tune and in high spirits. She is in outdoor dress and carries a number of parcels; these she lays on the table to the right. She leaves the outer door open after her, and through it is seen a PORTER who is carrying a Christmas Tree and a basket, which he gives to the MAID who has opened the door.]

Nora. Hide the Christmas Tree carefully, Helen. Be sure the children do not see it until this evening, when it is dressed. *[To the PORTER, taking out her purse.]* How much?

Porter. Sixpence.

Nora. There is a shilling. No, keep the change. *[The PORTER thanks her, and goes out. NORA shuts the door. She is laughing to herself, as she takes off her hat and coat. She takes a packet of macaroons from her pocket and eats one or two; then goes cautiously to her husband's door and listens.]* Yes, he is in. *[Still humming, she goes to the table on the right.]*

Helmer *[calls out from his room]*. Is that my little lark twittering out there?

Nora *[busy opening some of the parcels]*. Yes, it is!

Helmer. Is it my little squirrel bustling about?

Nora. Yes!

Helmer. When did my squirrel come home?

Nora. Just now. *[Puts the bag of macaroons into her pocket and wipes her mouth.]* Come in here, Torvald, and see what I have bought.

Helmer. Don't disturb me. *[A little later, he opens the door and looks into the room, pen in hand.]* Bought, did you say? All these things? Has my little spendthrift been wasting money again?

Nora. Yes but, Torvald, this year we really can let ourselves go a little. This is the first Christmas that we have not needed to economise.

Helmer. Still, you know, we can't spend money recklessly.

Nora. Yes, Torvald, we may be a wee bit more reckless now, mayn't we? Just a tiny wee bit! You are going to have a big salary and earn lots and lots of money.

Helmer. Yes, after the New Year; but then it will be a whole quarter before the salary is due.

Nora. Pooh! we can borrow until then.

Helmer. Nora! *[Goes up to her and takes her playfully by the ear.]* The same little featherhead! Suppose, now, that I borrowed fifty pounds today, and you spent it all in the Christmas week, and then on New Year's Eve a slate fell on my head and killed me, and--

Nora *[putting her hands over his mouth]*. Oh! don't say such horrid things.

Helmer. Still, suppose that happened,--what then?

Nora. If that were to happen, I don't suppose I should care whether I owed money or not.

Helmer. Yes, but what about the people who had lent it?

Nora. They? Who would bother about them? I should not know who they were.

Helmer. That is like a woman! But seriously, Nora, you know what I think about that. No debt, no borrowing. There can be no freedom or beauty about a home life that depends on borrowing and debt. We two have kept bravely on the straight road so far, and we will go on the same way for the short time longer that there need be any struggle.

Nora *[moving towards the stove]*. As you please, Torvald.

Helmer *[following her]*. Come, come, my little skylark must not droop her wings. What is this! Is my little squirrel out of temper? *[Taking out his purse.]* Nora, what do you think I have got here?

Nora *[turning round quickly]*. Money!

Helmer. There you are. *[Gives her some money.]* Do you think I don't know what a lot is wanted for housekeeping at Christmas-time?

Nora *[counting]*. Ten shillings--a pound--two pounds! Thank you, thank you, Torvald; that will keep me going for a long time.

Helmer. Indeed it must.

Nora. Yes, yes, it will. But come here and let me show you what I have bought. And all so cheap! Look, here is a new suit for Ivar, and a sword; and a horse and a trumpet for Bob; and a doll and dolly's bedstead for Emmy,--they are very plain, but anyway she will soon break them in pieces. And here are dress-lengths and handkerchiefs for the maids; old Anne ought really to have something better.

Helmer. And what is in this parcel?

Nora *[crying out]*. No, no! you mustn't see that until this evening.

Helmer. Very well. But now tell me, you extravagant little person, what would you like for yourself?

Nora. For myself? Oh, I am sure I don't want anything.

Helmer. Yes, but you must. Tell me something reasonable that you would particularly like to have.

Nora. No, I really can't think of anything--unless, Torvald--

Helmer. Well?

Nora *[playing with his coat buttons, and without raising her eyes to his]*. If you really want to give me something, you might--you might--

Helmer. Well, out with it!

Nora *[speaking quickly]*. You might give me money, Torvald. Only just as much as you can afford; and then one of these days I will buy something with it.

Helmer. But, Nora--

Nora. Oh, do! dear Torvald; please, please do! Then I will wrap it up in beautiful gilt paper and hang it on the Christmas Tree. Wouldn't that be fun?

Helmer. What are little people called that are always wasting money?

Nora. Spendthrifts--I know. Let us do as you suggest, Torvald, and then I shall have time to think what I am most in want of. That is a very sensible plan, isn't it?

Helmer *[smiling]*. Indeed it is--that is to say, if you were really to save out of the money I give you, and then really buy something for yourself. But if you spend it all on the housekeeping and any number of unnecessary things, then I merely have to pay up again.

Nora. Oh but, Torvald--

Helmer. You can't deny it, my dear little Nora. *[Puts his arm round her waist.]* It's a sweet little spendthrift, but she uses up a deal of money. One would hardly believe how expensive such little persons are!

Nora. It's a shame to say that. I do really save all I can.

Helmer *[laughing]*. That's very true,--all you can. But you can't save anything!

Nora *[smiling quietly and happily]*. You haven't any idea how many expenses we skylarks and squirrels have, Torvald.

Helmer. You are an odd little soul. Very like your father. You always find some new way of wheedling money out of me, and, as soon as you have got it, it seems to melt in your hands. You never know where it has gone. Still, one must take you as you are. It is in the blood; for indeed it is true that you can inherit these things, Nora.

Nora. Ah, I wish I had inherited many of papa's qualities.

Helmer. And I would not wish you to be anything but just what you are, my sweet little skylark. But, do you know, it strikes me that you are looking rather--what shall I say--rather uneasy today?

Nora. Do I?

Helmer. You do, really. Look straight at me.

Nora *[looks at him]*. Well?

Helmer *[wagging his finger at her]*. Hasn't Miss Sweet Tooth been breaking rules in town today?

Nora. No; what makes you think that?

Helmer. Hasn't she paid a visit to the confectioner's?

Nora. No, I assure you, Torvald--

Helmer. Not been nibbling sweets?

Nora. No, certainly not.

Helmer. Not even taken a bite at a macaroon or two?

Nora. No, Torvald, I assure you really--

Helmer. There, there, of course I was only joking.

Nora *[going to the table on the right]*. I should not think of going against your wishes.

Helmer. No, I am sure of that; besides, you gave me your word-- *[Going up to her.]* Keep your little Christmas secrets to yourself, my darling. They will all be revealed tonight when the Christmas Tree is lit, no doubt.

Nora. Did you remember to invite Doctor Rank?

Helmer. No. But there is no need; as a matter of course he will come to dinner with us. However, I will ask him when he comes in this morning. I have ordered some good wine. Nora, you can't think how I am looking forward to this evening.

Nora. So am I! And how the children will enjoy themselves, Torvald!

Helmer. It is splendid to feel that one has a perfectly safe appointment, and a big enough income. It's delightful to think of, isn't it?

Nora. It's wonderful!

Helmer. Do you remember last Christmas? For a full three weeks beforehand you shut yourself up every evening until long after midnight, making ornaments for the Christmas Tree, and all the other fine things that were to be a surprise to us. It was the dullest three weeks I ever spent!

Nora. I didn't find it dull.

Helmer *[smiling]*. But there was precious little result, Nora.

Nora. Oh, you shouldn't tease me about that again. How could I help the cat's going in and tearing everything to pieces?

Helmer. Of course you couldn't, poor little girl. You had the best of intentions to please us all, and that's the main thing. But it is a good thing that our hard times are over.

Nora. Yes, it is really wonderful.

Helmer. This time I needn't sit here and be dull all alone, and you needn't ruin your dear eyes and your pretty little hands--

Nora *[clapping her hands]*. No, Torvald, I needn't any longer, need I! It's wonderfully lovely to hear you say so! *[Taking his arm.]* Now I will tell you how I have been thinking we ought to arrange things, Torvald. As soon as Christmas is over--*[A bell rings in the hall.]* There's the bell. *[She tidies the room a little.]* There's some one at the door. What a nuisance!

Helmer. If it is a caller, remember I am not at home.

Maid *[in the doorway]*. A lady to see you, ma'am,--a stranger.

Nora. Ask her to come in.

Maid *[to HELMER]*. The doctor came at the same time, sir.

Helmer. Did he go straight into my room?

Maid. Yes, sir.

[HELMER goes into his room. The MAID ushers in Mrs. Linde, who is in travelling dress, and shuts the door.]

Mrs Linde *[in a dejected and timid voice]*. How do you do, Nora?

Nora *[doubtfully]*. How do you do--

Mrs. Linde. You don't recognise me, I suppose.

Nora. No, I don't know--yes, to be sure, I seem to--*[Suddenly.]* Yes! Christine! Is it really you?

Mrs Linde. Yes, it is I.

Nora. Christine! To think of my not recognising you! And yet how could I--*[In a gentle voice.]* How you have altered, Christine!

Mrs. Linde. Yes, I have indeed. In nine, ten long years--

Nora. Is it so long since we met? I suppose it is. The last eight years have been a happy time for me, I can tell you. And so now you have come into the town, and have taken this long journey in winter--that was plucky of you.

Mrs. Linde. I arrived by steamer this morning.

Nora. To have some fun at Christmas-time, of course. How delightful! We will have such fun together! But take off your things. You are not cold, I hope. *[Helps her.]* Now we will sit down by the stove, and be cosy. No, take this armchair; I will sit here in the

rocking-chair. *[Takes her hands.]* Now you look like your old self again; it was only the first moment--You are a little paler, Christine, and perhaps a little thinner.

Mrs Linde. And much, much older, Nora.

Nora. Perhaps a little older; very, very little; certainly not much. *[Stops suddenly and speaks seriously.]* What a thoughtless creature I am, chattering away like this. My poor, dear Christine, do forgive me.

Mrs Linde. What do you mean, Nora?

Nora *[gently]*. Poor Christine, you are a widow.

Mrs Linde. Yes; it is three years ago now.

Nora. Yes, I knew; I saw it in the papers. I assure you, Christine, I meant ever so often to write to you at the time, but I always put it off and something always prevented me.

Mrs. Linde. I quite understand, dear.

Nora. It was very bad of me, Christine. Poor thing, how you must have suffered. And he left you nothing?

Mrs Linde. No.

Nora. And no children?

Mrs Linde. No.

Nora. Nothing at all, then.

Mrs. Linde. Not even any sorrow or grief to live upon.

Nora *[looking incredulously at her]*. But, Christine, is that possible?

Mrs. Linde *[smiles sadly and strokes her hair]*. It sometimes happens, Nora.

Nora. So you are quite alone. How dreadfully sad that must be. I have three lovely children. You can't see them just now, for they are out with their nurse. But now you must tell me all about it.

Mrs. Linde. No, no; I want to hear about you.

Nora. No, you must begin. I mustn't be selfish today; today I must only think of your affairs. But there is one thing I must tell you. Do you know we have just had a great piece of good luck?

Mrs. Linde. No, what is it?

Nora. Just fancy, my husband has been made manager of the Bank!

Mrs. Linde. Your husband? What good luck!

Nora. Yes, tremendous! A barrister's profession is such an uncertain thing, especially if he won't undertake unsavoury cases; and naturally Torvald has never been willing to do that, and I quite agree with him. You may imagine how pleased we are! He is to take up his work in the Bank at the New Year, and then he will have a big salary and lots of commissions. For the future we can live quite differently--we can do just as we like. I feel so relieved and so happy, Christine! It will be splendid to have heaps of money and not need to have any anxiety, won't it?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, anyhow I think it would be delightful to have what one needs.

Nora. No, not only what one needs, but heaps and heaps of money.

Mrs. Linde *[smiling]*. Nora, Nora, haven't you learned sense yet? In our schooldays you were a great spendthrift.

Nora *[laughing]*. Yes, that is what Torvald says now. *[Wags her finger at her.]* But "Nora, Nora" is not so silly as you think. We have not been in a position for me to waste money. We have both had to work.

Mrs. Linde. You too?

Nora. Yes; odds and ends, needlework, crotchet-work, embroidery, and that kind of thing. *[Dropping her voice.]* And other things as well. You know Torvald left his office when we were married? There was no prospect of promotion there, and he had to try and earn more than before. But during the first year he over-worked himself dreadfully. You see, he had to make money every way he

could, and he worked early and late; but he couldn't stand it, and fell dreadfully ill, and the doctors said it was necessary for him to go south.

Mrs. Linde. You spent a whole year in Italy, didn't you?

Nora. Yes. It was no easy matter to get away, I can tell you. It was just after Ivar was born; but naturally we had to go. It was a wonderfully beautiful journey, and it saved Torvald's life. But it cost a tremendous lot of money, Christine.

Mrs. Linde. So I should think.

Nora. It cost about two hundred and fifty pounds. That's a lot, isn't it?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, and in emergencies like that it is lucky to have the money.

Nora. I ought to tell you that we had it from papa.

Mrs. Linde. Oh, I see. It was just about that time that he died, wasn't it?

Nora. Yes; and, just think of it, I couldn't go and nurse him. I was expecting little Ivar's birth every day and I had my poor sick Torvald to look after. My dear, kind father--I never saw him again, Christine. That was the saddest time I have known since our marriage.

Mrs. Linde. I know how fond you were of him. And then you went off to Italy?

Nora. Yes; you see we had money then, and the doctors insisted on our going, so we started a month later.

Mrs. Linde. And your husband came back quite well?

Nora. As sound as a bell!

Mrs. Linde. But--the doctor?

Nora. What doctor?

Mrs. Linde. I thought your maid said the gentleman who arrived here just as I did, was the doctor?

Nora. Yes, that was Doctor Rank, but he doesn't come here professionally. He is our greatest friend, and comes in at least once every day. No, Torvald has not had an hour's illness since then, and our children are strong and healthy and so am I. *[Jumps up and claps her hands.]* Christine! Christine! it's good to be alive and happy!--But how horrid of me; I am talking of nothing but my own affairs. *[Sits on a stool near her, and rests her arms on her knees.]* You mustn't be angry with me. Tell me, is it really true that you did not love your husband? Why did you marry him?

Mrs. Linde. My mother was alive then, and was bedridden and helpless, and I had to provide for my two younger brothers; so I did not think I was justified in refusing his offer.

Nora. No, perhaps you were quite right. He was rich at that time, then?

Mrs. Linde. I believe he was quite well off. But his business was a precarious one; and, when he died, it all went to pieces and there was nothing left.

Nora. And then?--

Mrs. Linde. Well, I had to turn my hand to anything I could find--first a small shop, then a small school, and so on. The last three years have seemed like one long working-day, with no rest. Now it is at an end, Nora. My poor mother needs me no more, for she is gone; and the boys do not need me either; they have got situations and can shift for themselves.

Nora. What a relief you must feel if--

Mrs. Linde. No, indeed; I only feel my life unspeakably empty. No one to live for anymore. *[Gets up restlessly.]* That was why I could not stand the life in my little backwater any longer. I hope it may be easier here to find something which will busy me and occupy my thoughts. If only I could have the good luck to get some regular work--office work of some kind--

Nora. But, Christine, that is so frightfully tiring, and you look tired out now. You had far better go away to some watering-place.

Mrs. Linde *[walking to the window]*. I have no father to give me money for a journey, Nora.

Nora *[rising]*. Oh, don't be angry with me!

Mrs. Linde *[going up to her]*. It is you that must not be angry with me, dear. The worst of a position like mine is that it makes one so bitter. No one to work for, and yet obliged to be always on the lookout for chances. One must live, and so one becomes selfish. When you told me of the happy turn your fortunes have taken--you will hardly believe it--I was delighted not so much on your account as on my own.

Nora. How do you mean?--Oh, I understand. You mean that perhaps Torvald could get you something to do.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, that was what I was thinking of.

Nora. He must, Christine. Just leave it to me; I will broach the subject very cleverly--I will think of something that will please him very much. It will make me so happy to be of some use to you.

Mrs. Linde. How kind you are, Nora, to be so anxious to help me! It is doubly kind in you, for you know so little of the burdens and troubles of life.

Nora. I--? I know so little of them?

Mrs. Linde *[smiling]*. My dear! Small household cares and that sort of thing!--You are a child, Nora.

Nora *[tosses her head and crosses the stage]*. You ought not to be so superior.

Mrs. Linde. No?

Nora. You are just like the others. They all think that I am incapable of anything really serious--

Mrs. Linde. Come, come--

Nora.--that I have gone through nothing in this world of cares.

Mrs. Linde. But, my dear Nora, you have just told me all your troubles.

Nora. Pooh!--those were trifles. *[Lowering her voice.]* I have not told you the important thing.

Mrs. Linde. The important thing? What do you mean?

Nora. You look down upon me altogether, Christine--but you ought not to. You are proud, aren't you, of having worked so hard and so long for your mother?

Mrs. Linde. Indeed, I don't look down on anyone. But it is true that I am both proud and glad to think that I was privileged to make the end of my mother's life almost free from care.

Nora. And you are proud to think of what you have done for your brothers?

Mrs. Linde. I think I have the right to be.

Nora. I think so, too. But now, listen to this; I too have something to be proud and glad of.

Mrs. Linde. I have no doubt you have. But what do you refer to?

Nora. Speak low. Suppose Torvald were to hear! He mustn't on any account--no one in the world must know, Christine, except you.

Mrs. Linde. But what is it?

Nora. Come here. *[Pulls her down on the sofa beside her.]* Now I will show you that I too have something to be proud and glad of. It was I who saved Torvald's life.

Mrs. Linde. "Saved"? How?

Nora. I told you about our trip to Italy. Torvald would never have recovered if he had not gone there--

Mrs. Linde. Yes, but your father gave you the necessary funds.

Nora *[smiling]*. Yes, that is what Torvald and all the others think, but--

Mrs. Linde. But--

Nora. Papa didn't give us a shilling. It was I who procured the money.

Mrs. Linde. You? All that large sum?

Nora. Two hundred and fifty pounds. What do you think of that?

Mrs. Linde. But, Nora, how could you possibly do it? Did you win a prize in the Lottery?

Nora *[contemptuously]*. In the Lottery? There would have been no credit in that.

Mrs. Linde. But where did you get it from, then? Nora *[humming and smiling with an air of mystery]*. Hm, hm! Aha!

Mrs. Linde. Because you couldn't have borrowed it.

Nora. Couldn't I? Why not?

Mrs. Linde. No, a wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent.

Nora *[tossing her head]*. Oh, if it is a wife who has any head for business--a wife who has the wit to be a little bit clever--

Mrs. Linde. I don't understand it at all, Nora.

Nora. There is no need you should. I never said I had borrowed the money. I may have got it some other way. *[Lies back on the sofa.]* Perhaps I got it from some other admirer. When anyone is as attractive as I am--

Mrs. Linde. You are a mad creature.

Nora. Now, you know you're full of curiosity, Christine.

Mrs. Linde. Listen to me, Nora dear. Haven't you been a little bit imprudent?

Nora *[sits up straight]*. Is it imprudent to save your husband's life?

Mrs. Linde. It seems to me imprudent, without his knowledge, to--

Nora. But it was absolutely necessary that he should not know! My goodness, can't you understand that? It was necessary he should have no idea what a dangerous condition he was in. It was to me that the doctors came and said that his life was in danger, and that the only thing to save him was to live in the south. Do you suppose I didn't try, first of all, to get what I wanted as if it were for myself? I told him how much I should love to travel abroad like other young wives; I tried tears and entreaties with him; I told him that he ought to remember the condition I was in, and that he ought to be kind and indulgent to me; I even hinted that he might raise a loan. That nearly made him angry, Christine. He said I was thoughtless, and that it was his duty as my husband not to indulge me in my whims and caprices--as I believe he called them. Very well, I thought, you must be saved--and that was how I came to devise a way out of the difficulty--

Mrs. Linde. And did your husband never get to know from your father that the money had not come from him?

Nora. No, never. Papa died just at that time. I had meant to let him into the secret and beg him never to reveal it. But he was so ill then--alas, there never was any need to tell him.

Mrs. Linde. And since then have you never told your secret to your husband?

Nora. Good Heavens, no! How could you think so? A man who has such strong opinions about these things! And besides, how painful and humiliating it would be for Torvald, with his manly independence, to know that he owed me anything! It would upset our mutual relations altogether; our beautiful happy home would no longer be what it is now.

Mrs. Linde. Do you mean never to tell him about it?

Nora *[meditatively, and with a half smile]*. Yes--someday, perhaps, after many years, when I am no longer as nice-looking as I am now. Don't laugh at me! I mean, of course, when Torvald is no longer as devoted to me as he is now; when my dancing and dressing-up and reciting have palled on him; then it may be a good thing to have something in reserve--*[Breaking off.]* What nonsense! That time will never come. Now, what do you think of my great secret, Christine? Do you still think I am of no use? I can tell you, too, that this affair has caused me a lot of worry. It has been by no means easy for me to meet my engagements punctually. I may tell you that there is something that is called, in business, quarterly interest, and another thing called payment in installments, and it is always so dreadfully difficult to manage them. I have had to save a little here and there, where I could, you understand. I have not been able to put aside much from my housekeeping money, for Torvald must have a good table. I couldn't let my children be shabbily dressed; I have felt obliged to use up all he gave me for them, the sweet little darlings!

Mrs. Linde. So it has all had to come out of your own necessaries of life, poor Nora?

Nora. Of course. Besides, I was the one responsible for it. Whenever Torvald has given me money for new dresses and such things, I have never spent more than half of it; I have always bought the simplest and cheapest things. Thank Heaven, any clothes look

well on me, and so Torvald has never noticed it. But it was often very hard on me, Christine--because it is delightful to be really well dressed, isn't it?

Mrs. Linde. Quite so.

Nora. Well, then I have found other ways of earning money. Last winter I was lucky enough to get a lot of copying to do; so I locked myself up and sat writing every evening until quite late at night. Many a time I was desperately tired; but all the same it was a tremendous pleasure to sit there working and earning money. It was like being a man.

Mrs. Linde. How much have you been able to pay off in that way?

Nora. I can't tell you exactly. You see, it is very difficult to keep an account of a business matter of that kind. I only know that I have paid every penny that I could scrape together. Many a time I was at my wits' end. *[Smiles.]* Then I used to sit here and imagine that a rich old gentleman had fallen in love with me--

Mrs. Linde. What! Who was it?

Nora. Be quiet!--that he had died; and that when his will was opened it contained, written in big letters, the instruction: "The lovely Mrs. Nora Helmer is to have all I possess paid over to her at once in cash."

Mrs. Linde. But, my dear Nora--who could the man be?

Nora. Good gracious, can't you understand? There was no old gentleman at all; it was only something that I used to sit here and imagine, when I couldn't think of any way of procuring money. But it's all the same now; the tiresome old person can stay where he is, as far as I am concerned; I don't care about him or his will either, for I am free from care now. *[Jumps up.]* My goodness, it's delightful to think of, Christine! Free from care! To be able to be free from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it! And, think of it, soon the spring will come and the big blue sky! Perhaps we shall be able to take a little trip--perhaps I shall see the sea again! Oh, it's a wonderful thing to be alive and be happy. *[A bell is heard in the hall.]*

Mrs. Linde *[rising]*. There is the bell; perhaps I had better go.

Nora. No, don't go; no one will come in here; it is sure to be for Torvald.

Servant *[at the hall door]*. Excuse me, ma'am--there is a gentleman to see the master, and as the doctor is with him--

Nora. Who is it?

Krogstad *[at the door]*. It is I, Mrs. Helmer. *[Mrs. LINDE starts, trembles, and turns to the window.]*

Nora *[takes a step towards him, and speaks in a strained, low voice]*. You? What is it? What do you want to see my husband about?

Krogstad. Bank business--in a way. I have a small post in the Bank, and I hear your husband is to be our chief now--

Nora. Then it is--

Krogstad. Nothing but dry business matters, Mrs. Helmer; absolutely nothing else.

Nora. Be so good as to go into the study, then. *[She bows indifferently to him and shuts the door into the hall; then comes back and makes up the fire in the stove.]*

Mrs. Linde. Nora--who was that man?

Nora. A lawyer, of the name of Krogstad.

Mrs. Linde. Then it really was he.

Nora. Do you know the man?

Mrs. Linde. I used to--many years ago. At one time he was a solicitor's clerk in our town.

Nora. Yes, he was.

Mrs. Linde. He is greatly altered.

Nora. He made a very unhappy marriage.

Mrs. Linde. He is a widower now, isn't he?

Nora. With several children. There now, it is burning up. [Shuts the door of the stove and moves the rocking-chair aside.]

Mrs. Linde. They say he carries on various kinds of business.

Nora. Really! Perhaps he does; I don't know anything about it. But don't let us think of business; it is so tiresome.

Doctor Rank *[comes out of HELMER'S study. Before he shuts the door he calls to him]*. No, my dear fellow, I won't disturb you; I would rather go in to your wife for a little while. *[Shuts the door and sees Mrs. LINDE.]* I beg your pardon; I am afraid I am disturbing you too.

Nora. No, not at all. *[Introducing him]*. Doctor Rank, Mrs. Linde.

Rank. I have often heard Mrs. Linde's name mentioned here. I think I passed you on the stairs when I arrived, Mrs. Linde?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, I go up very slowly; I can't manage stairs well.

Rank. Ah! some slight internal weakness?

Mrs. Linde. No, the fact is I have been overworking myself.

Rank. Nothing more than that? Then I suppose you have come to town to amuse yourself with our entertainments?

Mrs. Linde. I have come to look for work.

Rank. Is that a good cure for overwork?

Mrs. Linde. One must live, Doctor Rank.

Rank. Yes, the general opinion seems to be that it is necessary.

Nora. Look here, Doctor Rank--you know you want to live.

Rank. Certainly. However wretched I may feel, I want to prolong the agony as long as possible. All my patients are like that. And so are those who are morally diseased; one of them, and a bad case too, is at this very moment with Helmer--

Mrs. Linde *[sadly]*. Ah!

Nora. Whom do you mean?

Rank. A lawyer of the name of Krogstad, a fellow you don't know at all. He suffers from a diseased moral character, Mrs. Helmer; but even he began talking of its being highly important that he should live.

Nora. Did he? What did he want to speak to Torvald about?

Rank. I have no idea; I only heard that it was something about the Bank.

Nora. I didn't know this--what's his name--Krogstad had anything to do with the Bank.

Rank. Yes, he has some sort of appointment there. *[To Mrs. Linde.]* I don't know whether you find also in your part of the world that there are certain people who go zealously snuffing about to smell out moral corruption, and, as soon as they have found some, put the person concerned into some lucrative position where they can keep their eye on him. Healthy natures are left out in the cold.

Mrs Linde. Still I think the sick are those who most need taking care of.

Rank *[shrugging his shoulders]*. Yes, there you are. That is the sentiment that is turning Society into a sick-house.

[NORA, who has been absorbed in her thoughts, breaks out into smothered laughter and claps her hands.]

Rank. Why do you laugh at that? Have you any notion what Society really is?

Nora. What do I care about tiresome Society? I am laughing at something quite different, something extremely amusing. Tell me, Doctor Rank, are all the people who are employed in the Bank dependent on Torvald now?

Rank. Is that what you find so extremely amusing?

Nora *[smiling and humming]*. That's my affair! *[Walking about the room.]* It's perfectly glorious to think that we have--that Torvald has so much power over so many people. *[Takes the packet from her pocket.]* Doctor Rank, what do you say to a macaroon?

Rank. What, macaroons? I thought they were forbidden here.

Nora. Yes, but these are some Christine gave me.

Mrs. Linde. What! I?--

Nora. Oh, well, don't be alarmed! You couldn't know that Torvald had forbidden them. I must tell you that he is afraid they will spoil my teeth. But, bah!--once in a way--That's so, isn't it, Doctor Rank? By your leave! *[Puts a macaroon into his mouth.]* You must have one too, Christine. And I shall have one, just a little one--or at most two. *[Walking about.]* I am tremendously happy. There is just one thing in the world now that I should dearly love to do.

Rank. Well, what is that?

Nora. It's something I should dearly love to say, if Torvald could hear me.

Rank. Well, why can't you say it?

Nora. No, I daren't; it's so shocking.

Mrs. Linde. Shocking?

Rank. Well, I should not advise you to say it. Still, with us you might. What is it you would so much like to say if Torvald could hear you?

Nora. I should just love to say--Well, I'm damned!

Rank. Are you mad?

Mrs. Linde. Nora, dear--!

Rank. Say it, here he is!

Nora *[hiding the packet]*. Hush! Hush! Hush! *[HELMER comes out of his room, with his coat over his arm and his hat in his hand.]*

Nora. Well, Torvald dear, have you got rid of him?

Helmer. Yes, he has just gone.

Nora. Let me introduce you--this is Christine, who has come to town.

Helmer. Christine--? Excuse me, but I don't know--

Nora. Mrs. Linde, dear; Christine Linde.

Helmer. Of course. A school friend of my wife's, I presume?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, we have known each other since then.

Nora. And just think, she has taken a long journey in order to see you.

Helmer. What do you mean?

Mrs Linde. No, really, I--

Nora. Christine is tremendously clever at book-keeping, and she is frightfully anxious to work under some clever man, so as to perfect herself--

Helmer. Very sensible, Mrs. Linde.

Nora. And when she heard you had been appointed manager of the Bank--the news was telegraphed, you know--she travelled here as quick as she could. Torvald, I am sure you will be able to do something for Christine, for my sake, won't you?

Helmer. Well, it is not altogether impossible. I presume you are a widow, Mrs. Linde?

Mrs. Linde. Yes.

Helmer. And have had some experience of book-keeping?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, a fair amount.

Helmer. Ah! well, it's very likely I may be able to find something for you--

Nora *[clapping her hands]*. What did I tell you? What did I tell you?

Helmer. You have just come at a fortunate moment, Mrs. Linde.

Mrs. Linde. How am I to thank you?

Helmer. There is no need. *[Puts on his coat.]* But today you must excuse me--

Rank. Wait a minute; I will come with you. *[Brings his fur coat from the hall and warms it at the fire.]*

Nora. Don't be long away, Torvald dear.

Helmer. About an hour, not more.

Nora. Are you going too, Christine?

Mrs. Linde *[putting on her cloak]*. Yes, I must go and look for a room.

Helmer. Oh, well then, we can walk down the street together.

Nora *[helping her]*. What a pity it is we are so short of space here; I am afraid it is impossible for us--

Mrs. Linde. Please don't think of it! Goodbye, Nora dear, and many thanks.

Nora. Goodbye for the present. Of course you will come back this evening. And you too, Dr. Rank. What do you say? If you are well enough? Oh, you must be! Wrap yourself up well. *[They go to the door all talking together. Children's voices are heard on the staircase.]*

Nora. There they are! There they are! *[She runs to open the door. The NURSE comes in with the children.]* Come in! Come in! *[Stoops and kisses them.]* Oh, you sweet blessings! Look at them, Christine! Aren't they darlings?

Rank. Don't let us stand here in the draught.

Helmer. Come along, Mrs. Linde; the place will only be bearable for a mother now!

[RANK, HELMER, and Mrs Linde go downstairs. The NURSE comes forward with the children; NORA shuts the hall door.]

Nora. How fresh and well you look! Such red cheeks like apples and roses. *[The children all talk at once while she speaks to them.]* Have you had great fun? That's splendid! What, you pulled both Emmy and Bob along on the sledge? --both at once?--that was good. You are a clever boy, Ivar. Let me take her for a little, Anne. My sweet little baby doll! *[Takes the baby from the MAID and dances it up and down.]* Yes, yes, mother will dance with Bob too. What! Have you been snowballing? I wish I had been there too! No, no, I will take their things off, Anne; please let me do it, it is such fun. Go in now, you look half frozen. There is some hot coffee for you on the stove.

[The NURSE goes into the room on the left. NORA takes off the children's things and throws them about, while they all talk to her at once.]

Nora. Really! Did a big dog run after you? But it didn't bite you? No, dogs don't bite nice little dolly children. You mustn't look at the parcels, Ivar. What are they? Ah, I daresay you would like to know. No, no--it's something nasty! Come, let us have a game! What shall we play at? Hide and Seek? Yes, we'll play Hide and Seek. Bob shall hide first. Must I hide? Very well, I'll hide first. *[She and the children laugh and shout, and romp in and out of the room; at last NORA hides under the table, the children rush in and out for her, but do not see her; they hear her smothered laughter, run to the table, lift up the cloth and find her. Shouts of laughter. She crawls forward and pretends to frighten them. Fresh laughter. Meanwhile there has been a knock at the hall door, but none of them has noticed it. The door is half opened, and KROGSTAD appears, he waits a little; the game goes on.]*

Krogstad. Excuse me, Mrs. Helmer.

Nora *[with a stifled cry, turns round and gets up on to her knees]*. Ah! what do you want?

Krogstad. Excuse me, the outer door was ajar; I suppose someone forgot to shut it.

Nora *[rising]*. My husband is out, Mr. Krogstad.

Krogstad. I know that.

Nora. What do you want here, then?

Krogstad. A word with you.

Nora. With me?--*[To the children, gently.]* Go in to nurse. What? No, the strange man won't do mother any harm. When he has gone we will have another game. *[She takes the children into the room on the left, and shuts the door after them.]* You want to speak to me?

Krogstad. Yes, I do.

Nora. Today? It is not the first of the month yet.

Krogstad. No, it is Christmas Eve, and it will depend on yourself what sort of a Christmas you will spend.

Nora. What do you mean? Today it is absolutely impossible for me--

Krogstad. We won't talk about that until later on. This is something different. I presume you can give me a moment?

Nora. Yes--yes, I can--although--

Krogstad. Good. I was in Olsen's Restaurant and saw your husband going down the street--

Nora. Yes?

Krogstad. With a lady.

Nora. What then?

Krogstad. May I make so bold as to ask if it was a Mrs. Linde?

Nora. It was.

Krogstad. Just arrived in town?

Nora. Yes, today.

Krogstad. She is a great friend of yours, isn't she?

Nora. She is. But I don't see--

Krogstad. I knew her too, once upon a time.

Nora. I am aware of that.

Krogstad. Are you? So you know all about it; I thought as much. Then I can ask you, without beating about the bush--is Mrs. Linde to have an appointment in the Bank?

Nora. What right have you to question me, Mr. Krogstad?--You, one of my husband's subordinates! But since you ask, you shall know. Yes, Mrs. Linde is to have an appointment. And it was I who pleaded her cause, Mr. Krogstad, let me tell you that.

Krogstad. I was right in what I thought, then.

Nora *[walking up and down the stage]*. Sometimes one has a tiny little bit of influence, I should hope. Because one is a woman, it does not necessarily follow that--. When anyone is in a subordinate position, Mr. Krogstad, they should really be careful to avoid offending anyone who--who--

Krogstad. Who has influence?

Nora. Exactly.

Krogstad *[changing his tone]*. Mrs. Helmer, you will be so good as to use your influence on my behalf.

Nora. What? What do you mean?

Krogstad. You will be so kind as to see that I am allowed to keep my subordinate position in the Bank.

Nora. What do you mean by that? Who proposes to take your post away from you?

Krogstad. Oh, there is no necessity to keep up the pretence of ignorance. I can quite understand that your friend is not very anxious to expose herself to the chance of rubbing shoulders with me; and I quite understand, too, whom I have to thank for being turned off.

Nora. But I assure you--

Krogstad. Very likely; but, to come to the point, the time has come when I should advise you to use your influence to prevent that.

Nora. But, Mr. Krogstad, I have no influence.

Krogstad. Haven't you? I thought you said yourself just now--

Nora. Naturally I did not mean you to put that construction on it. I! What should make you think I have any influence of that kind with my husband?

Krogstad. Oh, I have known your husband from our student days. I don't suppose he is any more unassailable than other husbands.

Nora. If you speak slightingly of my husband, I shall turn you out of the house.

Krogstad. You are bold, Mrs. Helmer.

Nora. I am not afraid of you any longer. As soon as the New Year comes, I shall in a very short time be free of the whole thing.

Krogstad *[controlling himself]*. Listen to me, Mrs. Helmer. If necessary, I am prepared to fight for my small post in the Bank as if I were fighting for my life.

Nora. So it seems.

Krogstad. It is not only for the sake of the money; indeed, that weighs least with me in the matter. There is another reason--well, I may as well tell you. My position is this. I daresay you know, like everybody else, that once, many years ago, I was guilty of an indiscretion.

Nora. I think I have heard something of the kind.

Krogstad. The matter never came into court; but every way seemed to be closed to me after that. So I took to the business that you know of. I had to do something; and, honestly, I don't think I've been one of the worst. But now I must cut myself free from all that. My sons are growing up; for their sake I must try and win back as much respect as I can in the town. This post in the Bank was like the first step up for me--and now your husband is going to kick me downstairs again into the mud.

Nora. But you must believe me, Mr. Krogstad; it is not in my power to help you at all.

Krogstad. Then it is because you haven't the will; but I have means to compel you.

Nora. You don't mean that you will tell my husband that I owe you money?

Krogstad. Hm!--suppose I were to tell him?

Nora. It would be perfectly infamous of you. *[Sobbing.]* To think of his learning my secret, which has been my joy and pride, in such an ugly, clumsy way--that he should learn it from you! And it would put me in a horribly disagreeable position--

Krogstad. Only disagreeable?

Nora *[impetuously]*. Well, do it, then!--and it will be the worse for you. My husband will see for himself what a blackguard you are, and you certainly won't keep your post then.

Krogstad. I asked you if it was only a disagreeable scene at home that you were afraid of?

Nora. If my husband does get to know of it, of course he will at once pay you what is still owing, and we shall have nothing more to do with you.

Krogstad *[coming a step nearer]*. Listen to me, Mrs. Helmer. Either you have a very bad memory or you know very little of business. I shall be obliged to remind you of a few details.

Nora. What do you mean?

Krogstad. When your husband was ill, you came to me to borrow two hundred and fifty pounds.

Nora. I didn't know anyone else to go to.

Krogstad. I promised to get you that amount--

Nora. Yes, and you did so.

Krogstad. I promised to get you that amount, on certain conditions. Your mind was so taken up with your husband's illness, and you were so anxious to get the money for your journey, that you seem to have paid no attention to the conditions of our bargain. Therefore it will not be amiss if I remind you of them. Now, I promised to get the money on the security of a bond which I drew up.

Nora. Yes, and which I signed.

Krogstad. Good. But below your signature there were a few lines constituting your father a surety for the money; those lines your father should have signed.

Nora. Should? He did sign them.

Krogstad. I had left the date blank; that is to say, your father should himself have inserted the date on which he signed the paper. Do you remember that?

Nora. Yes, I think I remember--

Krogstad. Then I gave you the bond to send by post to your father. Is that not so?

Nora. Yes.

Krogstad. And you naturally did so at once, because five or six days afterwards you brought me the bond with your father's signature. And then I gave you the money.

Nora. Well, haven't I been paying it off regularly?

Krogstad. Fairly so, yes. But--to come back to the matter in hand--that must have been a very trying time for you, Mrs. Helmer?

Nora. It was, indeed.

Krogstad. Your father was very ill, wasn't he?

Nora. He was very near his end.

Krogstad. And died soon afterwards?

Nora. Yes.

Krogstad. Tell me, Mrs. Helmer, can you by any chance remember what day your father died?--on what day of the month, I mean.

Nora. Papa died on the 29th of September.

Krogstad. That is correct; I have ascertained it for myself. And, as that is so, there is a discrepancy *[taking a paper from his pocket]* which I cannot account for.

Nora. What discrepancy? I don't know--

Krogstad. The discrepancy consists, Mrs. Helmer, in the fact that your father signed this bond three days after his death.

Nora. What do you mean? I don't understand--

Krogstad. Your father died on the 29th of September. But, look here; your father has dated his signature the 2nd of October. It is a discrepancy, isn't it? *[NORA is silent.]* Can you explain it to me? *[NORA is still silent.]* It is a remarkable thing, too, that the words "2nd of October," as well as the year, are not written in your father's handwriting but in one that I think I know. Well, of course it can be explained; your father may have forgotten to date his signature, and someone else may have dated it haphazard before they knew of his death. There is no harm in that. It all depends on the signature of the name; and that is genuine, I suppose, Mrs. Helmer? It was your father himself who signed his name here?

Nora *[after a short pause, throws her head up and looks defiantly at him]*. No, it was not. It was I that wrote papa's name.

Krogstad. Are you aware that is a dangerous confession?

Nora. In what way? You shall have your money soon.

Krogstad. Let me ask you a question; why did you not send the paper to your father?

Nora. It was impossible; papa was so ill. If I had asked him for his signature, I should have had to tell him what the money was to be used for; and when he was so ill himself I couldn't tell him that my husband's life was in danger--it was impossible.

Krogstad. It would have been better for you if you had given up your trip abroad.

Nora. No, that was impossible. That trip was to save my husband's life; I couldn't give that up.

Krogstad. But did it never occur to you that you were committing a fraud on me?

Nora. I couldn't take that into account; I didn't trouble myself about you at all. I couldn't bear you, because you put so many heartless difficulties in my way, although you knew what a dangerous condition my husband was in.

Krogstad. Mrs. Helmer, you evidently do not realise clearly what it is that you have been guilty of. But I can assure you that my one false step, which lost me all my reputation, was nothing more or nothing worse than what you have done.

Nora. You? Do you ask me to believe that you were brave enough to run a risk to save your wife's life?

Krogstad. The law cares nothing about motives.

Nora. Then it must be a very foolish law.

Krogstad. Foolish or not, it is the law by which you will be judged, if I produce this paper in court.

Nora. I don't believe it. Is a daughter not to be allowed to spare her dying father anxiety and care? Is a wife not to be allowed to save her husband's life? I don't know much about law; but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that. Have you no knowledge of such laws--you who are a lawyer? You must be a very poor lawyer, Mr. Krogstad.

Krogstad. Maybe. But matters of business--such business as you and I have had together--do you think I don't understand that? Very well. Do as you please. But let me tell you this--if I lose my position a second time, you shall lose yours with me. *[He bows, and goes out through the hall.]*

Nora *[appears buried in thought for a short time, then tosses her head]*. Nonsense! Trying to frighten me like that!--I am not so silly as he thinks. *[Begins to busy herself putting the children's things in order.]* And yet--? No, it's impossible! I did it for love's sake.

The children *[in the doorway on the left]*. Mother, the stranger man has gone out through the gate.

Nora. Yes, dears, I know. But, don't tell anyone about the stranger man. Do you hear? Not even papa.

Children. No, mother; but will you come and play again?

Nora. No, no,--not now.

Children. But, mother, you promised us.

Nora. Yes, but I can't now. Run away in; I have such a lot to do. Run away in, my sweet little darlings. *[She gets them into the room by degrees and shuts the door on them; then sits down on the sofa, takes up a piece of needlework and sews a few stitches, but soon stops.]* No! *[Throws down the work, gets up, goes to the hall door and calls out.]* Helen! bring the Tree in. *[Goes to the table on the left, opens a drawer, and stops again.]* No, no! it is quite impossible!

Maid *[coming in with the Tree]*. Where shall I put it, ma'am?

Nora. Here, in the middle of the floor.

Maid. Shall I get you anything else?

Nora. No, thank you. I have all I want. [Exit MAID.]

Nora *[begins dressing the tree]*. A candle here-and flowers here--The horrible man! It's all nonsense--there's nothing wrong. The tree shall be splendid! I will do everything I can think of to please you, Torvald!--I will sing for you, dance for you--*[HELMER comes in with some papers under his arm.]* Oh! are you back already?

Helmer. Yes. Has anyone been here?

Nora. Here? No.

Helmer. That is strange. I saw Krogstad going out of the gate.

Nora. Did you? Oh yes, I forgot, Krogstad was here for a moment.

Helmer. Nora, I can see from your manner that he has been here begging you to say a good word for him.

Nora. Yes.

Helmer. And you were to appear to do it of your own accord; you were to conceal from me the fact of his having been here; didn't he beg that of you too?

Nora. Yes, Torvald, but--

Helmer. Nora, Nora, and you would be a party to that sort of thing? To have any talk with a man like that, and give him any sort of promise? And to tell me a lie into the bargain?

Nora. A lie--?

Helmer. Didn't you tell me no one had been here? *[Shakes his finger at her.]* My little songbird must never do that again. A songbird must have a clean beak to chirp with--no false notes! *[Puts his arm round her waist.]* That is so, isn't it? Yes, I am sure it is. *[Lets her go.]* We will say no more about it. *[Sits down by the stove.]* How warm and snug it is here! *[Turns over his papers.]*

Nora *[after a short pause, during which she busies herself with the Christmas Tree.]* Torvald!

Helmer. Yes.

Nora. I am looking forward tremendously to the fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs' the day after tomorrow.

Helmer. And I am tremendously curious to see what you are going to surprise me with.

Nora. It was very silly of me to want to do that.

Helmer. What do you mean?

Nora. I can't hit upon anything that will do; everything I think of seems so silly and insignificant.

Helmer. Does my little Nora acknowledge that at last?

Nora *[standing behind his chair with her arms on the back of it]*. Are you very busy, Torvald?

Helmer. Well--

Nora. What are all those papers?

Helmer. Bank business.

Nora. Already?

Helmer. I have got authority from the retiring manager to undertake the necessary changes in the staff and in the rearrangement of the work; and I must make use of the Christmas week for that, so as to have everything in order for the new year.

Nora. Then that was why this poor Krogstad--

Helmer. Hm!

Nora *[leans against the back of his chair and strokes his hair]*. If you hadn't been so busy I should have asked you a tremendously big favour, Torvald.

Helmer. What is that? Tell me.

Nora. There is no one has such good taste as you. And I do so want to look nice at the fancy-dress ball. Torvald, couldn't you take me in hand and decide what I shall go as, and what sort of a dress I shall wear?

Helmer. Aha! so my obstinate little woman is obliged to get someone to come to her rescue?

Nora. Yes, Torvald, I can't get along a bit without your help.

Helmer. Very well, I will think it over, we shall manage to hit upon something.

Nora. That is nice of you. *[Goes to the Christmas Tree. A short pause.]* How pretty the red flowers look--. But, tell me, was it really something very bad that this Krogstad was guilty of?

Helmer. He forged someone's name. Have you any idea what that means?

Nora. Isn't it possible that he was driven to do it by necessity?

Helmer. Yes; or, as in so many cases, by imprudence. I am not so heartless as to condemn a man altogether because of a single false step of that kind.

Nora. No, you wouldn't, would you, Torvald?

Helmer. Many a man has been able to retrieve his character, if he has openly confessed his fault and taken his punishment.

Nora. Punishment--?

Helmer. But Krogstad did nothing of that sort; he got himself out of it by a cunning trick, and that is why he has gone under altogether.

Nora. But do you think it would--?

Helmer. Just think how a guilty man like that has to lie and play the hypocrite with every one, how he has to wear a mask in the presence of those near and dear to him, even before his own wife and children. And about the children--that is the most terrible part of it all, Nora.

Nora. How?

Helmer. Because such an atmosphere of lies infects and poisons the whole life of a home. Each breath the children take in such a house is full of the germs of evil.

Nora *[coming nearer him]*. Are you sure of that?

Helmer. My dear, I have often seen it in the course of my life as a lawyer. Almost everyone who has gone to the bad early in life has had a deceitful mother.

Nora. Why do you only say--mother?

Helmer. It seems most commonly to be the mother's influence, though naturally a bad father's would have the same result. Every lawyer is familiar with the fact. This Krogstad, now, has been persistently poisoning his own children with lies and dissimulation; that is why I say he has lost all moral character. *[Holds out his hands to her.]* That is why my sweet little Nora must promise me not to plead his cause. Give me your hand on it. Come, come, what is this? Give me your hand. There now, that's settled. I assure you it would be quite impossible for me to work with him; I literally feel physically ill when I am in the company of such people.

Nora *[takes her hand out of his and goes to the opposite side of the Christmas Tree]*. How hot it is in here; and I have such a lot to do.

Helmer *[getting up and putting his papers in order]*. Yes, and I must try and read through some of these before dinner; and I must think about your costume, too. And it is just possible I may have something ready in gold paper to hang up on the Tree. *[Puts his hand on her head.]* My precious little singing-bird! *[He goes into his room and shuts the door after him.]*

Nora *[after a pause, whispers]*. No, no--it isn't true. It's impossible; it must be impossible.

[The NURSE opens the door on the left.]

Nurse. The little ones are begging so hard to be allowed to come in to mamma.

Nora. No, no, no! Don't let them come in to me! You stay with them, Anne.

Nurse. Very well, ma'am. *[Shuts the door.]*

Nora *[pale with terror]*. Deprave my little children? Poison my home? *[A short pause. Then she tosses her head.]* It's not true. It can't possibly be true.

Act II

[THE SAME SCENE: THE Christmas Tree is in the corner by the piano, stripped of its ornaments and with burnt-down candle-ends on its dishevelled branches. NORA'S cloak and hat are lying on the sofa. She is alone in the room, walking about uneasily. She stops by the sofa and takes up her cloak.]

Nora *[drops her cloak]*. Someone is coming now! *[Goes to the door and listens.]* No--it is no one. Of course, no one will come today, Christmas Day--nor tomorrow either. But, perhaps--*[opens the door and looks out]*. No, nothing in the letterbox; it is quite empty. *[Comes forward.]* What rubbish! of course he can't be in earnest about it. Such a thing couldn't happen; it is impossible--I have three little children.

[Enter the NURSE from the room on the left, carrying a big cardboard box.]

Nurse. At last I have found the box with the fancy dress.

Nora. Thanks; put it on the table.

Nurse *[doing so]*. But it is very much in want of mending.

Nora. I should like to tear it into a hundred thousand pieces.

Nurse. What an idea! It can easily be put in order--just a little patience.

Nora. Yes, I will go and get Mrs. Linde to come and help me with it.

Nurse. What, out again? In this horrible weather? You will catch cold, ma'am, and make yourself ill.

Nora. Well, worse than that might happen. How are the children?

Nurse. The poor little souls are playing with their Christmas presents, but--

Nora. Do they ask much for me?

Nurse. You see, they are so accustomed to have their mamma with them.

Nora. Yes, but, nurse, I shall not be able to be so much with them now as I was before.

Nurse. Oh well, young children easily get accustomed to anything.

Nora. Do you think so? Do you think they would forget their mother if she went away altogether?

Nurse. Good heavens!--went away altogether?

Nora. Nurse, I want you to tell me something I have often wondered about--how could you have the heart to put your own child out among strangers?

Nurse. I was obliged to, if I wanted to be little Nora's nurse.

Nora. Yes, but how could you be willing to do it?

Nurse. What, when I was going to get such a good place by it? A poor girl who has got into trouble should be glad to. Besides, that wicked man didn't do a single thing for me.

Nora. But I suppose your daughter has quite forgotten you.

Nurse. No, indeed she hasn't. She wrote to me when she was confirmed, and when she was married.

Nora *[putting her arms round her neck]*. Dear old Anne, you were a good mother to me when I was little.

Nurse. Little Nora, poor dear, had no other mother but me.

Nora. And if my little ones had no other mother, I am sure you would--What nonsense I am talking! *[Opens the box.]* Go in to them. Now I must--. You will see tomorrow how charming I shall look.

Nurse. I am sure there will be no one at the ball so charming as you, ma'am. *[Goes into the room on the left.]*

Nora *[begins to unpack the box, but soon pushes it away from her]*. If only I dared go out. If only no one would come. If only I could be sure nothing would happen here in the meantime. Stuff and nonsense! No one will come. Only I mustn't think about it. I will brush my muff. What lovely, lovely gloves! Out of my thoughts, out of my thoughts! One, two, three, four, five, six--*[Screams.]* Ah! there is someone coming--. *[Makes a movement towards the door, but stands irresolute.]*

[Enter Mrs. Linde from the hall, where she has taken off her cloak and hat.]

Nora. Oh, it's you, Christine. There is no one else out there, is there? How good of you to come!

Mrs. Linde. I heard you were up asking for me.

Nora. Yes, I was passing by. As a matter of fact, it is something you could help me with. Let us sit down here on the sofa. Look here. Tomorrow evening there is to be a fancy-dress ball at the Stenborgs', who live above us; and Torvald wants me to go as a Neapolitan fisher-girl, and dance the Tarantella that I learned at Capri.

Mrs. Linde. I see; you are going to keep up the character.

Nora. Yes, Torvald wants me to. Look, here is the dress; Torvald had it made for me there, but now it is all so torn, and I haven't any idea--

Mrs. Linde. We will easily put that right. It is only some of the trimming come unsewn here and there. Needle and thread? Now then, that's all we want.

Nora. It is nice of you.

Mrs. Linde *[sewing]*. So you are going to be dressed up tomorrow Nora. I will tell you what--I shall come in for a moment and see you in your fine feathers. But I have completely forgotten to thank you for a delightful evening yesterday.

Nora *[gets up, and crosses the stage]*. Well, I don't think yesterday was as pleasant as usual. You ought to have come to town a little earlier, Christine. Certainly Torvald does understand how to make a house dainty and attractive.

Mrs. Linde. And so do you, it seems to me; you are not your father's daughter for nothing. But tell me, is Doctor Rank always as depressed as he was yesterday?

Nora. No; yesterday it was very noticeable. I must tell you that he suffers from a very dangerous disease. He has consumption of the spine, poor creature. His father was a horrible man who committed all sorts of excesses; and that is why his son was sickly from childhood, do you understand?

Mrs. Linde *[dropping her sewing]*. But, my dearest Nora, how do you know anything about such things?

Nora *[walking about]*. Pooh! When you have three children, you get visits now and then from--from married women, who know something of medical matters, and they talk about one thing and another.

Mrs. Linde *[goes on sewing. A short silence]*. Does Doctor Rank come here everyday?

Nora. Everyday regularly. He is Torvald's most intimate friend, and a great friend of mine too. He is just like one of the family.

Mrs. Linde. But tell me this--is he perfectly sincere? I mean, isn't he the kind of man that is very anxious to make himself agreeable?

Nora. Not in the least. What makes you think that?

Mrs. Linde. When you introduced him to me yesterday, he declared he had often heard my name mentioned in this house; but afterwards I noticed that your husband hadn't the slightest idea who I was. So how could Doctor Rank--?

Nora. That is quite right, Christine. Torvald is so absurdly fond of me that he wants me absolutely to himself, as he says. At first he used to seem almost jealous if I mentioned any of the dear folk at home, so naturally I gave up doing so. But I often talk about such things with Doctor Rank, because he likes hearing about them.

Mrs. Linde. Listen to me, Nora. You are still very like a child in many things, and I am older than you in many ways and have a little more experience. Let me tell you this--you ought to make an end of it with Doctor Rank.

Nora. What ought I to make an end of?

Mrs. Linde. Of two things, I think. Yesterday you talked some nonsense about a rich admirer who was to leave you money--

Nora. An admirer who doesn't exist, unfortunately! But what then?

Mrs. Linde. Is Doctor Rank a man of means?

Nora. Yes, he is.

Mrs. Linde. And has no one to provide for?

Nora. No, no one; but--

Mrs. Linde. And comes here everyday?

Nora. Yes, I told you so.

Mrs Linde. But how can this well-bred man be so tactless?

Nora. I don't understand you at all.

Mrs. Linde. Don't prevaricate, Nora. Do you suppose I don't guess who lent you the two hundred and fifty pounds?

Nora. Are you out of your senses? How can you think of such a thing! A friend of ours, who comes here everyday! Do you realise what a horribly painful position that would be?

Mrs. Linde. Then it really isn't he?

Nora. No, certainly not. It would never have entered into my head for a moment. Besides, he had no money to lend then; he came into his money afterwards.

Mrs. Linde. Well, I think that was lucky for you, my dear Nora.

Nora. No, it would never have come into my head to ask Doctor Rank. Although I am quite sure that if I had asked him--

Mrs. Linde. But of course you won't.

Nora. Of course not. I have no reason to think it could possibly be necessary. But I am quite sure that if I told Doctor Rank--

Mrs. Linde. Behind your husband's back?

Nora. I must make an end of it with the other one, and that will be behind his back too. I must make an end of it with him.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, that is what I told you yesterday, but--

Nora *[walking up and down]*. A man can put a thing like that straight much easier than a woman--

Mrs. Linde. One's husband, yes.

Nora. Nonsense! *[Standing still.]* When you pay off a debt you get your bond back, don't you?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, as a matter of course.

Nora. And can tear it into a hundred thousand pieces, and burn it up--the nasty dirty paper!

Mrs. Linde *[looks hard at her, lays down her sewing and gets up slowly]*. Nora, you are concealing something from me.

Nora. Do I look as if I were?

Mrs. Linde. Something has happened to you since yesterday morning. Nora, what is it?

Nora *[going nearer to her]*. Christine! *[Listens.]* Hush! there's Torvald come home. Do you mind going in to the children for the present? Torvald can't bear to see dressmaking going on. Let Anne help you.

Mrs. Linde *[gathering some of the things together]*. Certainly--but I am not going away from here until we have had it out with one another. *[She goes into the room on the left, as HELMER comes in from the hall.]*

Nora *[going up to HELMER]*. I have wanted you so much, Torvald dear.

Helmer. Was that the dressmaker?

Nora. No, it was Christine; she is helping me to put my dress in order. You will see I shall look quite smart.

Helmer. Wasn't that a happy thought of mine, now?

Nora. Splendid! But don't you think it is nice of me, too, to do as you wish?

Helmer. Nice?--because you do as your husband wishes? Well, well, you little rogue, I am sure you did not mean it in that way. But I am not going to disturb you; you will want to be trying on your dress, I expect.

Nora. I suppose you are going to work.

Helmer. Yes. *[Shows her a bundle of papers.]* Look at that. I have just been into the bank. *[Turns to go into his room.]*

Nora. Torvald.

Helmer. Yes.

Nora. If your little squirrel were to ask you for something very, very prettily--?

Helmer. What then?

Nora. Would you do it?

Helmer. I should like to hear what it is, first.

Nora. Your squirrel would run about and do all her tricks if you would be nice, and do what she wants.

Helmer. Speak plainly.

Nora. Your skylark would chirp about in every room, with her song rising and falling--

Helmer. Well, my skylark does that anyhow.

Nora. I would play the fairy and dance for you in the moonlight, Torvald.

Helmer. Nora--you surely don't mean that request you made to me this morning?

Nora *[going near him]*. Yes, Torvald, I beg you so earnestly--

Helmer. Have you really the courage to open up that question again?

Nora. Yes, dear, you must do as I ask; you must let Krogstad keep his post in the bank.

Helmer. My dear Nora, it is his post that I have arranged Mrs. Linde shall have.

Nora. Yes, you have been awfully kind about that; but you could just as well dismiss some other clerk instead of Krogstad.

Helmer. This is simply incredible obstinacy! Because you chose to give him a thoughtless promise that you would speak for him, I am expected to--

Nora. That isn't the reason, Torvald. It is for your own sake. This fellow writes in the most scurrilous newspapers; you have told me so yourself. He can do you an unspeakable amount of harm. I am frightened to death of him--

Helmer. Ah, I understand; it is recollections of the past that scare you.

Nora. What do you mean?

Helmer. Naturally you are thinking of your father.

Nora. Yes--yes, of course. Just recall to your mind what these malicious creatures wrote in the papers about papa, and how horribly they slandered him. I believe they would have procured his dismissal if the Department had not sent you over to inquire into it, and if you had not been so kindly disposed and helpful to him.

Helmer. My little Nora, there is an important difference between your father and me. Your father's reputation as a public official was not above suspicion. Mine is, and I hope it will continue to be so, as long as I hold my office.

Nora. You never can tell what mischief these men may contrive. We ought to be so well off, so snug and happy here in our peaceful home, and have no cares--you and I and the children, Torvald! That is why I beg you so earnestly--

Helmer. And it is just by interceding for him that you make it impossible for me to keep him. It is already known at the Bank that I mean to dismiss Krogstad. Is it to get about now that the new manager has changed his mind at his wife's bidding--

Nora. And what if it did?

Helmer. Of course!--if only this obstinate little person can get her way! Do you suppose I am going to make myself ridiculous before my whole staff, to let people think that I am a man to be swayed by all sorts of outside influence? I should very soon feel the consequences of it, I can tell you! And besides, there is one thing that makes it quite impossible for me to have Krogstad in the Bank as long as I am manager.

Nora. Whatever is that?

Helmer. His moral failings I might perhaps have overlooked, if necessary--

Nora. Yes, you could--couldn't you?

Helmer. And I hear he is a good worker, too. But I knew him when we were boys. It was one of those rash friendships that so often prove an incubus in afterlife. I may as well tell you plainly, we were once on very intimate terms with one another. But this tactless fellow lays no restraint on himself when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives him the right to adopt a familiar tone with me, and every minute it is "I say, Helmer, old fellow!" and that sort of thing. I assure you it is extremely painful for me. He would make my position in the Bank intolerable.

Nora. Torvald, I don't believe you mean that.

Helmer. Don't you? Why not?

Nora. Because it is such a narrow-minded way of looking at things.

Helmer. What are you saying? Narrow-minded? Do you think I am narrow-minded?

Nora. No, just the opposite, dear--and it is exactly for that reason.

Helmer. It's the same thing. You say my point of view is narrow-minded, so I must be so too. Narrow-minded! Very well--I must put an end to this. *[Goes to the hall door and calls.]* Helen!

Nora. What are you going to do?

Helmer *[looking among his papers]*. Settle it. *[Enter MAID.]* Look here; take this letter and go downstairs with it at once. Find a messenger and tell him to deliver it, and be quick. The address is on it, and here is the money.

Maid. Very well, sir. *[Exit with the letter.]*

Helmer *[putting his papers together]*. Now then, little Miss Obstinate.

Nora *[breathlessly]*. Torvald--what was that letter?

Helmer. Krogstad's dismissal.

Nora. Call her back, Torvald! There is still time. Oh Torvald, call her back! Do it for my sake--for your own sake--for the children's sake! Do you hear me, Torvald? Call her back! You don't know what that letter can bring upon us.

Helmer. It's too late.

Nora. Yes, it's too late.

Helmer. My dear Nora, I can forgive the anxiety you are in, although really it is an insult to me. It is, indeed. Isn't it an insult to think that I should be afraid of a starving quill-driver's vengeance? But I forgive you nevertheless, because it is such eloquent witness to your great love for me. *[Takes her in his arms.]* And that is as it should be, my own darling Nora. Come what will, you may be sure I shall have both courage and strength if they be needed. You will see I am man enough to take everything upon myself.

Nora *[in a horror-stricken voice]*. What do you mean by that?

Helmer. Everything, I say--

Nora *[recovering herself]*. You will never have to do that.

Helmer. That's right. Well, we will share it, Nora, as man and wife should. That is how it shall be. *[Caressing her.]* Are you content now? There! There!--not these frightened dove's eyes! The whole thing is only the wildest fancy!--Now, you must go and play through the Tarantella and practise with your tambourine. I shall go into the inner office and shut the door, and I shall hear nothing; you can make as much noise as you please. *[Turns back at the door.]* And when Rank comes, tell him where he will find me. *[Nods to her, takes his papers and goes into his room, and shuts the door after him.]*

Nora *[bewildered with anxiety, stands as if rooted to the spot, and whispers]*. He was capable of doing it. He will do it. He will do it in spite of everything.--No, not that! Never, never! Anything rather than that! Oh, for some help, some way out of it! *[The door-bell rings.]* Doctor Rank! Anything rather than that--anything, whatever it is! *[She puts her hands over her face, pulls herself together, goes to the door and opens it. RANK is standing without, hanging up his coat. During the following dialogue it begins to grow dark.]*

Nora. Good day, Doctor Rank. I knew your ring. But you mustn't go in to Torvald now; I think he is busy with something.

Rank. And you?

Nora *[brings him in and shuts the door after him]*. Oh, you know very well I always have time for you.

Rank. Thank you. I shall make use of as much of it as I can.

Nora. What do you mean by that? As much of it as you can?

Rank. Well, does that alarm you?

Nora. It was such a strange way of putting it. Is anything likely to happen?

Rank. Nothing but what I have long been prepared for. But I certainly didn't expect it to happen so soon.

Nora *[gripping him by the arm]*. What have you found out? Doctor Rank, you must tell me.

Rank *[sitting down by the stove]*. It is all up with me. And it can't be helped.

Nora *[with a sigh of relief]*. Is it about yourself?

Rank. Who else? It is no use lying to one's self. I am the most wretched of all my patients, Mrs. Helmer. Lately I have been taking stock of my internal economy. Bankrupt! Probably within a month I shall lie rotting in the churchyard.

Nora. What an ugly thing to say!

Rank. The thing itself is cursedly ugly, and the worst of it is that I shall have to face so much more that is ugly before that. I shall only make one more examination of myself; when I have done that, I shall know pretty certainly when it will be that the horrors of

dissolution will begin. There is something I want to tell you. Helmer's refined nature gives him an unconquerable disgust at everything that is ugly; I won't have him in my sick-room.

Nora. Oh, but, Doctor Rank--

Rank. I won't have him there. Not on any account. I bar my door to him. As soon as I am quite certain that the worst has come, I shall send you my card with a black cross on it, and then you will know that the loathsome end has begun.

Nora. You are quite absurd today. And I wanted you so much to be in a really good humour.

Rank. With death stalking beside me?--To have to pay this penalty for another man's sin? Is there any justice in that? And in every single family, in one way or another, some such inexorable retribution is being exacted--

Nora *[putting her hands over her ears]*. Rubbish! Do talk of something cheerful.

Rank. Oh, it's a mere laughing matter, the whole thing. My poor innocent spine has to suffer for my father's youthful amusements.

Nora *[sitting at the table on the left]*. I suppose you mean that he was too partial to asparagus and pate de foie gras, don't you?

Rank. Yes, and to truffles.

Nora. Truffles, yes. And oysters too, I suppose?

Rank. Oysters, of course, that goes without saying.

Nora. And heaps of port and champagne. It is sad that all these nice things should take their revenge on our bones.

Rank. Especially that they should revenge themselves on the unlucky bones of those who have not had the satisfaction of enjoying them.

Nora. Yes, that's the saddest part of it all.

Rank *[with a searching look at her]*. Hm!--

Nora *[after a short pause]*. Why did you smile?

Rank. No, it was you that laughed.

Nora. No, it was you that smiled, Doctor Rank!

Rank *[rising]*. You are a greater rascal than I thought.

Nora. I am in a silly mood today.

Rank. So it seems.

Nora *[putting her hands on his shoulders]*. Dear, dear Doctor Rank, death mustn't take you away from Torvald and me.

Rank. It is a loss you would easily recover from. Those who are gone are soon forgotten.

Nora *[looking at him anxiously]*. Do you believe that?

Rank. People form new ties, and then--

Nora. Who will form new ties?

Rank. Both you and Helmer, when I am gone. You yourself are already on the high road to it, I think. What did that Mrs. Linde want here last night?

Nora. Oho!--you don't mean to say you are jealous of poor Christine?

Rank. Yes, I am. She will be my successor in this house. When I am done for, this woman will--

Nora. Hush! don't speak so loud. She is in that room.

Rank. Today again. There, you see.

Nora. She has only come to sew my dress for me. Bless my soul, how unreasonable you are! *[Sits down on the sofa.]* Be nice now, Doctor Rank, and tomorrow you will see how beautifully I shall dance, and you can imagine I am doing it all for you--and for Torvald too, of course. *[Takes various things out of the box.]* Doctor Rank, come and sit down here, and I will show you something.

Rank *[sitting down]*. What is it?

Nora. Just look at those!

Rank. Silk stockings.

Nora. Flesh-coloured. Aren't they lovely? It is so dark here now, but tomorrow--. No, no, no! you must only look at the feet. Oh well, you may have leave to look at the legs too.

Rank. Hm!--

Nora. Why are you looking so critical? Don't you think they will fit me?

Rank. I have no means of forming an opinion about that.

Nora *[looks at him for a moment]*. For shame! *[Hits him lightly on the ear with the stockings.]* That's to punish you. *[Folds them up again.]*

Rank. And what other nice things am I to be allowed to see?

Nora. Not a single thing more, for being so naughty. *[She looks among the things, humming to herself.]*

Rank *[after a short silence]*. When I am sitting here, talking to you as intimately as this, I cannot imagine for a moment what would have become of me if I had never come into this house.

Nora *[smiling]*. I believe you do feel thoroughly at home with us.

Rank *[in a lower voice, looking straight in front of him]*. And to be obliged to leave it all--

Nora. Nonsense, you are not going to leave it.

Rank *[as before]*. And not be able to leave behind one the slightest token of one's gratitude, scarcely even a fleeting regret--nothing but an empty place which the first comer can fill as well as any other.

Nora. And if I asked you now for a--? No!

Rank. For what?

Nora. For a big proof of your friendship--

Rank. Yes, yes!

Nora. I mean a tremendously big favour--

Rank. Would you really make me so happy for once?

Nora. Ah, but you don't know what it is yet.

Rank. No--but tell me.

Nora. I really can't, Doctor Rank. It is something out of all reason; it means advice, and help, and a favour--

Rank. The bigger a thing it is the better. I can't conceive what it is you mean. Do tell me. Haven't I your confidence?

Nora. More than anyone else. I know you are my truest and best friend, and so I will tell you what it is. Well, Doctor Rank, it is something you must help me to prevent. You know how devotedly, how inexpressibly deeply Torvald loves me; he would never for a moment hesitate to give his life for me.

Rank *[leaning towards her]*. Nora--do you think he is the only one--?

Nora *[with a slight start]*. The only one--?

Rank. The only one who would gladly give his life for your sake.

Nora *[sadly]*. Is that it?

Rank. I was determined you should know it before I went away, and there will never be a better opportunity than this. Now you know it, Nora. And now you know, too, that you can trust me as you would trust no one else.

Nora *[rises, deliberately and quietly]*. Let me pass.

Rank *[makes room for her to pass him, but sits still]*. Nora!

Nora *[at the hall door]*. Helen, bring in the lamp. *[Goes over to the stove.]* Dear Doctor Rank, that was really horrid of you.

Rank. To have loved you as much as anyone else does? Was that horrid?

Nora. No, but to go and tell me so. There was really no need--

Rank. What do you mean? Did you know--? *[MAID enters with lamp, puts it down on the table, and goes out.]* Nora--Mrs. Helmer--tell me, had you any idea of this?

Nora. Oh, how do I know whether I had or whether I hadn't? I really can't tell you--To think you could be so clumsy, Doctor Rank! We were getting on so nicely.

Rank. Well, at all events you know now that you can command me, body and soul. So won't you speak out?

Nora *[looking at him]*. After what happened?

Rank. I beg you to let me know what it is.

Nora. I can't tell you anything now.

Rank. Yes, yes. You mustn't punish me in that way. Let me have permission to do for you whatever a man may do.

Nora. You can do nothing for me now. Besides, I really don't need any help at all. You will find that the whole thing is merely fancy on my part. It really is so--of course it is! *[Sits down in the rocking-chair, and looks at him with a smile.]* You are a nice sort of man, Doctor Rank!--don't you feel ashamed of yourself, now the lamp has come?

Rank. Not a bit. But perhaps I had better go--for ever?

Nora. No, indeed, you shall not. Of course you must come here just as before. You know very well Torvald can't do without you.

Rank. Yes, but you?

Nora. Oh, I am always tremendously pleased when you come.

Rank. It is just that, that put me on the wrong track. You are a riddle to me. I have often thought that you would almost as soon be in my company as in Helmer's.

Nora. Yes--you see there are some people one loves best, and others whom one would almost always rather have as companions.

Rank. Yes, there is something in that.

Nora. When I was at home, of course I loved papa best. But I always thought it tremendous fun if I could steal down into the maids' room, because they never moralised at all, and talked to each other about such entertaining things.

Rank. I see--it is their place I have taken.

Nora *[jumping up and going to him]*. Oh, dear, nice Doctor Rank, I never meant that at all. But surely you can understand that being with Torvald is a little like being with papa--*[Enter MAID from the hall.]*

Maid. If you please, ma'am. *[Whispers and hands her a card.]*

Nora *[glancing at the card]*. Oh! *[Puts it in her pocket.]*

Rank. Is there anything wrong?

Nora. No, no, not in the least. It is only something--it is my new dress--

Rank. What? Your dress is lying there.

Nora. Oh, yes, that one; but this is another. I ordered it. Torvald mustn't know about it--

Rank. Oho! Then that was the great secret.

Nora. Of course. Just go in to him; he is sitting in the inner room. Keep him as long as--

Rank. Make your mind easy; I won't let him escape.

[Goes into HELMER'S room.]

Nora *[to the MAID]*. And he is standing waiting in the kitchen?

Maid. Yes; he came up the back stairs.

Nora. But didn't you tell him no one was in?

Maid. Yes, but it was no good.

Nora. He won't go away?

Maid. No; he says he won't until he has seen you, ma'am.

Nora. Well, let him come in--but quietly. Helen, you mustn't say anything about it to anyone. It is a surprise for my husband.

Maid. Yes, ma'am, I quite understand. *[Exit.]*

Nora. This dreadful thing is going to happen! It will happen in spite of me! No, no, no, it can't happen--it shan't happen! *[She bolts the door of HELMER'S room. The MAID opens the hall door for KROGSTAD and shuts it after him. He is wearing a fur coat, high boots and a fur cap.]*

Nora *[advancing towards him]*. Speak low--my husband is at home.

Krogstad. No matter about that.

Nora. What do you want of me?

Krogstad. An explanation of something.

Nora. Make haste then. What is it?

Krogstad. You know, I suppose, that I have got my dismissal.

Nora. I couldn't prevent it, Mr. Krogstad. I fought as hard as I could on your side, but it was no good.

Krogstad. Does your husband love you so little, then? He knows what I can expose you to, and yet he ventures--

Nora. How can you suppose that he has any knowledge of the sort?

Krogstad. I didn't suppose so at all. It would not be the least like our dear Torvald Helmer to show so much courage--

Nora. Mr. Krogstad, a little respect for my husband, please.

Krogstad. Certainly--all the respect he deserves. But since you have kept the matter so carefully to yourself, I make bold to suppose that you have a little clearer idea, than you had yesterday, of what it actually is that you have done?

Nora. More than you could ever teach me.

Krogstad. Yes, such a bad lawyer as I am.

Nora. What is it you want of me?

Krogstad. Only to see how you were, Mrs. Helmer. I have been thinking about you all day long. A mere cashier, a quill-driver, a--well, a man like me--even he has a little of what is called feeling, you know.

Nora. Show it, then; think of my little children.

Krogstad. Have you and your husband thought of mine? But never mind about that. I only wanted to tell you that you need not take this matter too seriously. In the first place there will be no accusation made on my part.

Nora. No, of course not; I was sure of that.

Krogstad. The whole thing can be arranged amicably; there is no reason why anyone should know anything about it. It will remain a secret between us three.

Nora. My husband must never get to know anything about it.

Krogstad. How will you be able to prevent it? Am I to understand that you can pay the balance that is owing?

Nora. No, not just at present.

Krogstad. Or perhaps that you have some expedient for raising the money soon?

Nora. No expedient that I mean to make use of.

Krogstad. Well, in any case, it would have been of no use to you now. If you stood there with ever so much money in your hand, I would never part with your bond.

Nora. Tell me what purpose you mean to put it to.

Krogstad. I shall only preserve it--keep it in my possession. No one who is not concerned in the matter shall have the slightest hint of it. So that if the thought of it has driven you to any desperate resolution--

Nora. It has.

Krogstad. If you had it in your mind to run away from your home--

Nora. I had.

Krogstad. Or even something worse--

Nora. How could you know that?

Krogstad. Give up the idea.

Nora. How did you know I had thought of that?

Krogstad. Most of us think of that at first. I did, too--but I hadn't the courage.

Nora *[faintly]*. No more had I.

Krogstad *[in a tone of relief]*. No, that's it, isn't it--you hadn't the courage either?

Nora. No, I haven't--I haven't.

Krogstad. Besides, it would have been a great piece of folly. Once the first storm at home is over--. I have a letter for your husband in my pocket.

Nora. Telling him everything?

Krogstad. In as lenient a manner as I possibly could.

Nora *[quickly]*. He mustn't get the letter. Tear it up. I will find some means of getting money.

Krogstad. Excuse me, Mrs. Helmer, but I think I told you just now--

Nora. I am not speaking of what I owe you. Tell me what sum you are asking my husband for, and I will get the money.

Krogstad. I am not asking your husband for a penny.

Nora. What do you want, then?

Krogstad. I will tell you. I want to rehabilitate myself, Mrs Helmer; I want to get on; and in that your husband must help me. For the last year and a half I have not had a hand in anything dishonourable, amid all that time I have been struggling in most restricted circumstances. I was content to work my way up step by step. Now I am turned out, and I am not going to be satisfied with merely being taken into favour again. I want to get on, I tell you. I want to get into the Bank again, in a higher position. Your husband must make a place for me--

Nora. That he will never do!

Krogstad. He will; I know him; he dare not protest. And as soon as I am in there again with him, then you will see! Within a year I shall be the manager's right hand. It will be Nils Krogstad and not Torvald Helmer who manages the Bank.

Nora. That's a thing you will never see!

Krogstad. Do you mean that you will--?

Nora. I have courage enough for it now.

Krogstad. Oh, you can't frighten me. A fine, spoilt lady like you--

Nora. You will see, you will see.

Krogstad. Under the ice, perhaps? Down into the cold, coal-black water? And then, in the spring, to float up to the surface, all horrible and unrecognisable, with your hair fallen out--

Nora. You can't frighten me.

Krogstad. Nor you me. People don't do such things, Mrs. Helmer. Besides, what use would it be? I should have him completely in my power all the same.

Nora. Afterwards? When I am no longer--

Krogstad. Have you forgotten that it is I who have the keeping of your reputation? *[NORA stands speechlessly looking at him.]* Well, now, I have warned you. Do not do anything foolish. When Helmer has had my letter, I shall expect a message from him. And be sure you remember that it is your husband himself who has forced me into such ways as this again. I will never forgive him for that. Goodbye, Mrs. Helmer. *[Exit through the hall.]*

Nora *[goes to the hall door, opens it slightly and listens.]* He is going. He is not putting the letter in the box. Oh no, no! that's impossible! *[Opens the door by degrees.]* What is that? He is standing outside. He is not going downstairs. Is he hesitating? Can he--? *[A letter drops into the box; then KROGSTAD'S footsteps are heard, until they die away as he goes downstairs. NORA utters a stifled cry, and runs across the room to the table by the sofa. A short pause.]*

Nora. In the letter-box. *[Steals across to the hall door.]* There it lies--Torvald, Torvald, there is no hope for us now!

[Mrs. Linde comes in from the room on the left, carrying the dress.]

Mrs. Linde. There, I can't see anything more to mend now. Would you like to try it on--?

Nora *[in a hoarse whisper]*. Christine, come here.

Mrs. Linde *[throwing the dress down on the sofa]*. What is the matter with you? You look so agitated!

Nora. Come here. Do you see that letter? There, look--you can see it through the glass in the letter-box.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, I see it.

Nora. That letter is from Krogstad.

Mrs. Linde. Nora--it was Krogstad who lent you the money!

Nora. Yes, and now Torvald will know all about it.

Mrs Linde. Believe me, Nora, that's the best thing for both of you.

Nora. You don't know all. I forged a name.

Mrs. Linde. Good heavens--!

Nora. I only want to say this to you, Christine--you must be my witness.

Mrs. Linde. Your witness? What do you mean? What am I to--?

Nora. If I should go out of my mind--and it might easily happen--

Mrs Linde. Nora!

Nora. Or if anything else should happen to me--anything, for instance, that might prevent my being here--

Mrs. Linde. Nora! Nora! you are quite out of your mind.

Nora. And if it should happen that there were some one who wanted to take all the responsibility, all the blame, you understand--

Mrs Linde. Yes, yes--but how can you suppose--?

Nora. Then you must be my witness, that it is not true, Christine. I am not out of my mind at all; I am in my right senses now, and I tell you no one else has known anything about it; I, and I alone, did the whole thing. Remember that.

Mrs Linde. I will, indeed. But I don't understand all this.

Nora. How should you understand it? A wonderful thing is going to happen!

Mrs. Linde. A wonderful thing?

Nora. Yes, a wonderful thing!--But it is so terrible, Christine; it mustn't happen, not for all the world.

Mrs. Linde. I will go at once and see Krogstad.

Nora. Don't go to him; he will do you some harm.

Mrs. Linde. There was a time when he would gladly do anything for my sake.

Nora. He?

Mrs. Linde. Where does he live?

Nora. How should I know--? Yes *[feeling in her pocket]*, here is his card. But the letter, the letter--!

Helmer *[calls from his room, knocking at the door]*. Nora! Nora *[cries out anxiously]*. Oh, what's that? What do you want?

Helmer. Don't be so frightened. We are not coming in; you have locked the door. Are you trying on your dress?

Nora. Yes, that's it. I look so nice, Torvald.

Mrs. Linde *[who has read the card]*. I see he lives at the corner here.

Nora. Yes, but it's no use. It is hopeless. The letter is lying there in the box.

Mrs. Linde. And your husband keeps the key?

Nora. Yes, always.

Mrs. Linde. Krogstad must ask for his letter back unread, he must find some pretence--

Nora. But it is just at this time that Torvald generally--

Mrs. Linde. You must delay him. Go in to him in the meantime. I will come back as soon as I can. *[She goes out hurriedly through the hall door.]*

Nora *[goes to HELMER'S door, opens it and peeps in]*. Torvald!

Helmer *[from the inner room]*. Well? May I venture at last to come into my own room again? Come along, Rank, now you will see-- *[Halting in the doorway.]* But what is this?

Nora. What is what, dear?

Helmer. Rank led me to expect a splendid transformation.

Rank *[in the doorway]*. I understood so, but evidently I was mistaken.

Nora. Yes, nobody is to have the chance of admiring me in my dress until tomorrow.

Helmer. But, my dear Nora, you look so worn out. Have you been practising too much?

Nora. No, I have not practised at all.

Helmer. But you will need to--

Nora. Yes, indeed I shall, Torvald. But I can't get on a bit without you to help me; I have absolutely forgotten the whole thing.

Helmer. Oh, we will soon work it up again.

Nora. Yes, help me, Torvald. Promise that you will! I am so nervous about it--all the people--. You must give yourself up to me entirely this evening. Not the tiniest bit of business--you mustn't even take a pen in your hand. Will you promise, Torvald dear?

Helmer. I promise. This evening I will be wholly and absolutely at your service, you helpless little mortal. Ah, by the way, first of all I will just-- *[Goes towards the hall door.]*

Nora. What are you going to do there?

Helmer. Only see if any letters have come.

Nora. No, no! don't do that, Torvald!

Helmer. Why not?

Nora. Torvald, please don't. There is nothing there.

Helmer. Well, let me look. *[Turns to go to the letter-box. NORA, at the piano, plays the first bars of the Tarantella. HELMER stops in the doorway.]* Aha!

Nora. I can't dance tomorrow if I don't practise with you.

Helmer *[going up to her]*. Are you really so afraid of it, dear?

Nora. Yes, so dreadfully afraid of it. Let me practise at once; there is time now, before we go to dinner. Sit down and play for me, Torvald dear; criticise me, and correct me as you play.

Helmer. With great pleasure, if you wish me to. *[Sits down at the piano.]*

Nora *[takes out of the box a tambourine and a long variegated shawl. She hastily drapes the shawl round her. Then she springs to the front of the stage and calls out]*. Now play for me! I am going to dance!

[HELMER plays and NORA dances. RANK stands by the piano behind HELMER, and looks on.]

Helmer *[as he plays]*. Slower, slower!

Nora. I can't do it any other way.

Helmer. Not so violently, Nora!

Nora. This is the way.

Helmer *[stops playing]*. No, no--that is not a bit right.

Nora *[laughing and swinging the tambourine]*. Didn't I tell you so?

Rank. Let me play for her.

Helmer *[getting up]*. Yes, do. I can correct her better then.

[RANK sits down at the piano and plays. NORA dances more and more wildly. HELMER has taken up a position beside the stove, and during her dance gives her frequent instructions. She does not seem to hear him; her hair comes down and falls over her shoulders; she pays no attention to it, but goes on dancing. Enter Mrs. Linde.]

Mrs. Linde *[standing as if spell-bound in the doorway]*. Oh!--

Nora *[as she dances]*. Such fun, Christine!

Helmer. My dear darling Nora, you are dancing as if your life depended on it.

Nora. So it does.

Helmer. Stop, Rank; this is sheer madness. Stop, I tell you! *[RANK stops playing, and NORA suddenly stands still. HELMER goes up to her.]* I could never have believed it. You have forgotten everything I taught you.

Nora *[throwing away the tambourine]*. There, you see.

Helmer. You will want a lot of coaching.

Nora. Yes, you see how much I need it. You must coach me up to the last minute. Promise me that, Torvald!

Helmer. You can depend on me.

Nora. You must not think of anything but me, either today or tomorrow; you mustn't open a single letter--not even open the letter-box--

Helmer. Ah, you are still afraid of that fellow--

Nora. Yes, indeed I am.

Helmer. Nora, I can tell from your looks that there is a letter from him lying there.

Nora. I don't know; I think there is; but you must not read anything of that kind now. Nothing horrid must come between us until this is all over.

Rank *[whispers to HELMER]*. You mustn't contradict her.

Helmer *[taking her in his arms]*. The child shall have her way. But tomorrow night, after you have danced--

Nora. Then you will be free. *[The MAID appears in the doorway to the right.]*

Maid. Dinner is served, ma'am.

Nora. We will have champagne, Helen.

Maid. Very good, ma'am. [Exit.

Helmer. Hullo!--are we going to have a banquet?

Nora. Yes, a champagne banquet until the small hours. *[Calls out.]* And a few macaroons, Helen--lots, just for once!

Helmer. Come, come, don't be so wild and nervous. Be my own little skylark, as you used.

Nora. Yes, dear, I will. But go in now and you too, Doctor Rank. Christine, you must help me to do up my hair.

Rank *[whispers to HELMER as they go out]*. I suppose there is nothing--she is not expecting anything?

Helmer. Far from it, my dear fellow; it is simply nothing more than this childish nervousness I was telling you of. *[They go into the right-hand room.]*

Nora. Well!

Mrs Linde. Gone out of town.

Nora. I could tell from your face.

Mrs Linde. He is coming home tomorrow evening. I wrote a note for him.

Nora. You should have let it alone; you must prevent nothing. After all, it is splendid to be waiting for a wonderful thing to happen.

Mrs Linde. What is it that you are waiting for?

Nora. Oh, you wouldn't understand. Go in to them, I will come in a moment. *[Mrs. Linde goes into the dining-room. NORA stands still for a little while, as if to compose herself. Then she looks at her watch.]* Five o'clock. Seven hours until midnight; and then four-and-twenty hours until the next midnight. Then the Tarantella will be over. Twenty-four and seven? Thirty-one hours to live.

Helmer *[from the doorway on the right]*. Where's my little skylark?

Nora *[going to him with her arms outstretched]*. Here she is!

Act III

[THE SAME SCENE: The table has been placed in the middle of the stage, with chairs around it. A lamp is burning on the table. The door into the hall stands open. Dance music is heard in the room above. Mrs. Linde is sitting at the table idly turning over the leaves of a book; she tries to read, but does not seem able to collect her thoughts. Every now and then she listens intently for a sound at the outer door.]

Mrs Linde *[looking at her watch]*. Not yet--and the time is nearly up. If only he does not--. *[Listens again.]* Ah, there he is. *[Goes into the hall and opens the outer door carefully. Light footsteps are heard on the stairs. She whispers.]* Come in. There is no one here.

Krogstad *[in the doorway]*. I found a note from you at home. What does this mean?

Mrs. Linde. It is absolutely necessary that I should have a talk with you.

Krogstad. Really? And is it absolutely necessary that it should be here?

Mrs. Linde. It is impossible where I live; there is no private entrance to my rooms. Come in; we are quite alone. The maid is asleep, and the Helmers are at the dance upstairs.

Krogstad *[coming into the room]*. Are the Helmers really at a dance tonight?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, why not?

Krogstad. Certainly--why not?

Mrs Linde. Now, Nils, let us have a talk.

Krogstad. Can we two have anything to talk about?

Mrs. Linde. We have a great deal to talk about.

Krogstad. I shouldn't have thought so.

Mrs. Linde. No, you have never properly understood me.

Krogstad. Was there anything else to understand except what was obvious to all the world--a heartless woman jilts a man when a more lucrative chance turns up?

Mrs. Linde. Do you believe I am as absolutely heartless as all that? And do you believe that I did it with a light heart?

Krogstad. Didn't you?

Mrs Linde. Nils, did you really think that?

Krogstad. If it were as you say, why did you write to me as you did at the time?

Mrs. Linde. I could do nothing else. As I had to break with you, it was my duty also to put an end to all that you felt for me.

Krogstad *[wringing his hands]*. So that was it. And all this--only for the sake of money!

Mrs. Linde. You must not forget that I had a helpless mother and two little brothers. We couldn't wait for you, Nils; your prospects seemed hopeless then.

Krogstad. That may be so, but you had no right to throw me over for anyone else's sake.

Mrs. Linde. Indeed I don't know. Many a time did I ask myself if I had the right to do it.

Krogstad *[more gently]*. When I lost you, it was as if all the solid ground went from under my feet. Look at me now--I am a shipwrecked man clinging to a bit of wreckage.

Mrs. Linde. But help may be near.

Krogstad. It was near; but then you came and stood in my way.

Mrs. Linde. Unintentionally, Nils. It was only today that I learned it was your place I was going to take in the Bank.

Krogstad. I believe you, if you say so. But now that you know it, are you not going to give it up to me?

Mrs Linde. No, because that would not benefit you in the least.

Krogstad. Oh, benefit, benefit--I would have done it whether or no.

Mrs. Linde. I have learned to act prudently. Life, and hard, bitter necessity have taught me that.

Krogstad. And life has taught me not to believe in fine speeches.

Mrs. Linde. Then life has taught you something very reasonable. But deeds you must believe in?

Krogstad. What do you mean by that?

Mrs. Linde. You said you were like a shipwrecked man clinging to some wreckage.

Krogstad. I had good reason to say so.

Mrs. Linde. Well, I am like a shipwrecked woman clinging to some wreckage--no one to mourn for, no one to care for.

Krogstad. It was your own choice.

Mrs. Linde. There was no other choice--then.

Krogstad. Well, what now?

Mrs. Linde. Nils, how would it be if we two shipwrecked people could join forces?

Krogstad. What are you saying?

Mrs. Linde. Two on the same piece of wreckage would stand a better chance than each on their own.

Krogstad. Christine I...

Mrs. Linde. What do you suppose brought me to town?

Krogstad. Do you mean that you gave me a thought?

Mrs. Linde. I could not endure life without work. All my life, as long as I can remember, I have worked, and it has been my greatest and only pleasure. But now I am quite alone in the world--my life is so dreadfully empty and I feel so forsaken. There is not the least pleasure in working for one's self. Nils, give me someone and something to work for.

Krogstad. I don't trust that. It is nothing but a woman's overstrained sense of generosity that prompts you to make such an offer of yourself.

Mrs. Linde. Have you ever noticed anything of the sort in me?

Krogstad. Could you really do it? Tell me--do you know all about my past life?

Mrs. Linde. Yes.

Krogstad. And do you know what they think of me here?

Mrs. Linde. You seemed to me to imply that with me you might have been quite another man.

Krogstad. I am certain of it.

Mrs. Linde. Is it too late now?

Krogstad. Christine, are you saying this deliberately? Yes, I am sure you are. I see it in your face. Have you really the courage, then--?

Mrs. Linde. I want to be a mother to someone, and your children need a mother. We two need each other. Nils, I have faith in your real character--I can dare anything together with you.

Krogstad *[grasps her hands]*. Thanks, thanks, Christine! Now I shall find a way to clear myself in the eyes of the world. Ah, but I forgot--

Mrs. Linde *[listening]*. Hush! The Tarantella! Go, go!

Krogstad. Why? What is it?

Mrs. Linde. Do you hear them up there? When that is over, we may expect them back.

Krogstad. Yes, yes--I will go. But it is all no use. Of course you are not aware what steps I have taken in the matter of the Helmers.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, I know all about that.

Krogstad. And in spite of that have you the courage to--?

Mrs. Linde. I understand very well to what lengths a man like you might be driven by despair.

Krogstad. If I could only undo what I have done!

Mrs. Linde. You cannot. Your letter is lying in the letter-box now.

Krogstad. Are you sure of that?

Mrs. Linde. Quite sure, but--

Krogstad *[with a searching look at her]*. Is that what it all means?--that you want to save your friend at any cost? Tell me frankly. Is that it?

Mrs. Linde. Nils, a woman who has once sold herself for another's sake, doesn't do it a second time.

Krogstad. I will ask for my letter back.

Mrs. Linde. No, no.

Krogstad. Yes, of course I will. I will wait here until Helmer comes; I will tell him he must give me my letter back--that it only concerns my dismissal--that he is not to read it--

Mrs. Linde. No, Nils, you must not recall your letter.

Krogstad. But, tell me, wasn't it for that very purpose that you asked me to meet you here?

Mrs. Linde. In my first moment of fright, it was. But twenty-four hours have elapsed since then, and in that time I have witnessed incredible things in this house. Helmer must know all about it. This unhappy secret must be disclosed; they must have a complete understanding between them, which is impossible with all this concealment and falsehood going on.

Krogstad. Very well, if you will take the responsibility. But there is one thing I can do in any case, and I shall do it at once.

Mrs. Linde *[listening]*. You must be quick and go! The dance is over; we are not safe a moment longer.

Krogstad. I will wait for you below.

Mrs. Linde. Yes, do. You must see me back to my door...

Krogstad. I have never had such an amazing piece of good fortune in my life! *[Goes out through the outer door. The door between the room and the hall remains open.]*

Mrs. Linde *[tidying up the room and laying her hat and cloak ready]*. What a difference! what a difference! Someone to work for and live for--a home to bring comfort into. That I will do, indeed. I wish they would be quick and come--*[Listens.]* Ah, there they

are now. I must put on my things. *[Takes up her hat and cloak. HELMER'S and NORA'S voices are heard outside; a key is turned, and HELMER brings NORA almost by force into the hall. She is in an Italian costume with a large black shawl around her; he is in evening dress, and a black domino which is flying open.]*

Nora *[hanging back in the doorway, and struggling with him]*. No, no, no!--don't take me in. I want to go upstairs again; I don't want to leave so early.

Helmer. But, my dearest Nora--

Nora. Please, Torvald dear--please, please--only an hour more.

Helmer. Not a single minute, my sweet Nora. You know that was our agreement. Come along into the room; you are catching cold standing there. *[He brings her gently into the room, in spite of her resistance.]*

Mrs. Linde. Good evening.

Nora. Christine!

Helmer. You here, so late, Mrs. Linde?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, you must excuse me; I was so anxious to see Nora in her dress.

Nora. Have you been sitting here waiting for me?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, unfortunately I came too late, you had already gone upstairs; and I thought I couldn't go away again without having seen you.

Helmer *[taking off NORA'S shawl]*. Yes, take a good look at her. I think she is worth looking at. Isn't she charming, Mrs. Linde?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, indeed she is.

Helmer. Doesn't she look remarkably pretty? Everyone thought so at the dance. But she is terribly self-willed, this sweet little person. What are we to do with her? You will hardly believe that I had almost to bring her away by force.

Nora. Torvald, you will repent not having let me stay, even if it were only for half an hour.

Helmer. Listen to her, Mrs. Linde! She had danced her Tarantella, and it had been a tremendous success, as it deserved--although possibly the performance was a trifle too realistic--a little more so, I mean, than was strictly compatible with the limitations of art. But never mind about that! The chief thing is, she had made a success--she had made a tremendous success. Do you think I was going to let her remain there after that, and spoil the effect? No, indeed! I took my charming little Capri maiden--my capricious little Capri maiden, I should say--on my arm; took one quick turn round the room; a curtsey on either side, and, as they say in novels, the beautiful apparition disappeared. An exit ought always to be effective, Mrs. Linde; but that is what I cannot make Nora understand. Pooh! this room is hot. *[Throws his domino on a chair, and opens the door of his room.]* Hullo! it's all dark in here. Oh, of course--excuse me--. *[He goes in, and lights some candles.]*

Nora *[in a hurried and breathless whisper]*. Well?

Mrs. Linde *[in a low voice]*. I have had a talk with him.

Nora. Yes, and--

Mrs. Linde. Nora, you must tell your husband all about it.

Nora *[in an expressionless voice]*. I knew it.

Mrs. Linde. You have nothing to be afraid of as far as Krogstad is concerned; but you must tell him.

Nora. I won't tell him.

Mrs. Linde. Then the letter will.

Nora. Thank you, Christine. Now I know what I must do. Hush--!

Helmer *[coming in again]*. Well, Mrs. Linde, have you admired her?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, and now I will say goodnight.

Helmer. What, already? Is this yours, this knitting?

Mrs. Linde *[taking it]*. Yes, thank you, I had very nearly forgotten it.

Helmer. So you knit?

Mrs. Linde. Of course.

Helmer. Do you know, you ought to embroider.

Mrs. Linde. Really? Why?

Helmer. Yes, it's far more becoming. Let me show you. You hold the embroidery thus in your left hand, and use the needle with the right--like this--with a long, easy sweep. Do you see?

Mrs. Linde. Yes, perhaps--

Helmer. But in the case of knitting--that can never be anything but ungraceful; look here--the arms close together, the knitting-needles going up and down--it has a sort of Chinese effect--. That was really excellent champagne they gave us.

Mrs. Linde. Well,--goodnight, Nora, and don't be self-willed any more.

Helmer. That's right, Mrs. Linde.

Mrs. Linde. Goodnight, Mr. Helmer.

Helmer *[accompanying her to the door]*. Goodnight, goodnight. I hope you will get home all right. I should be very happy to--but you haven't any great distance to go. Goodnight, goodnight. *[She goes out; he shuts the door after her, and comes in again.]* Ah!--at last we have got rid of her. She is a frightful bore, that woman.

Nora. Aren't you very tired, Torvald?

Helmer. No, not in the least.

Nora. Nor sleepy?

Helmer. Not a bit. On the contrary, I feel extraordinarily lively. And you?--you really look both tired and sleepy.

Nora. Yes, I am very tired. I want to go to sleep at once.

Helmer. There, you see it was quite right of me not to let you stay there any longer.

Nora. Everything you do is quite right, Torvald.

Helmer *[kissing her on the forehead]*. Now my little skylark is speaking reasonably. Did you notice what good spirits Rank was in this evening?

Nora. Really? Was he? I didn't speak to him at all.

Helmer. And I very little, but I have not for a long time seen him in such good form. *[Looks for a while at her and then goes nearer to her.]* It is delightful to be at home by ourselves again, to be all alone with you--you fascinating, charming little darling!

Nora. Don't look at me like that, Torvald.

Helmer. Why shouldn't I look at my dearest treasure?--at all the beauty that is mine, all my very own?

Nora *[going to the other side of the table]*. You mustn't say things like that to me tonight.

Helmer *[following her]*. You have still got the Tarantella in your blood, I see. And it makes you more captivating than ever. Listen--the guests are beginning to go now. *[In a lower voice.]* Nora--soon the whole house will be quiet.

Nora. Yes, I hope so.

Helmer. Yes, my own darling Nora. Do you know, when I am out at a party with you like this, why I speak so little to you, keep away from you, and only send a stolen glance in your direction now and then?--do you know why I do that? It is because I make believe to myself that we are secretly in love, and you are my secretly promised bride, and that no one suspects there is anything between us.

Nora. Yes, yes--I know very well your thoughts are with me all the time.

Helmer. And when we are leaving, and I am putting the shawl over your beautiful young shoulders--on your lovely neck--then I imagine that you are my young bride and that we have just come from the wedding, and I am bringing you for the first time into our home--to be alone with you for the first time--quite alone with my shy little darling! All this evening I have longed for nothing

but you. When I watched the seductive figures of the Tarantella, my blood was on fire; I could endure it no longer, and that was why I brought you down so early--

Nora. Go away, Torvald! You must let me go. I won't--

Helmer. What's that? You're joking, my little Nora! You won't--you won't? Am I not your husband--? *[A knock is heard at the outer door.]*

Nora *[starting]*. Did you hear--?

Helmer *[going into the hall]*. Who is it?

Rank *[outside]*. It is I. May I come in for a moment?

Helmer *[in a fretful whisper]*. Oh, what does he want now? *[Aloud.]* Wait a minute! *[Unlocks the door.]* Come, that's kind of you not to pass by our door.

Rank. I thought I heard your voice, and felt as if I should like to look in. *[With a swift glance round.]* Ah, yes!--these dear familiar rooms. You are very happy and cosy in here, you two.

Helmer. It seems to me that you looked after yourself pretty well upstairs too.

Rank. Excellently. Why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't one enjoy everything in this world?--at any rate as much as one can, and as long as one can. The wine was capital--

Helmer. Especially the champagne.

Rank. So you noticed that too? It is almost incredible how much I managed to put away!

Nora. Torvald drank a great deal of champagne tonight too.

Rank. Did he?

Nora. Yes, and he is always in such good spirits afterwards.

Rank. Well, why should one not enjoy a merry evening after a well-spent day?

Helmer. Well spent? I am afraid I can't take credit for that.

Rank *[clapping him on the back]*. But I can, you know!

Nora. Doctor Rank, you must have been occupied with some scientific investigation today.

Rank. Exactly.

Helmer. Just listen!--little Nora talking about scientific investigations!

Nora. And may I congratulate you on the result?

Rank. Indeed you may.

Nora. Was it favourable, then?

Rank. The best possible, for both doctor and patient--certainty.

Nora *[quickly and searchingly]*. Certainty?

Rank. Absolute certainty. So wasn't I entitled to make a merry evening of it after that?

Nora. Yes, you certainly were, Doctor Rank.

Helmer. I think so too, so long as you don't have to pay for it in the morning.

Rank. Oh well, one can't have anything in this life without paying for it.

Nora. Doctor Rank--are you fond of fancy-dress balls?

Rank. Yes, if there is a fine lot of pretty costumes.

Nora. Tell me--what shall we two wear at the next?

Helmer. Little featherbrain!--are you thinking of the next already?

Rank. We two? Yes, I can tell you. You shall go as a good fairy--

Helmer. Yes, but what do you suggest as an appropriate costume for that?

Rank. Let your wife go dressed just as she is in everyday life.

Helmer. That was really very prettily turned. But can't you tell us what you will be?

Rank. Yes, my dear friend, I have quite made up my mind about that.

Helmer. Well?

Rank. At the next fancy-dress ball I shall be invisible.

Helmer. That's a good joke!

Rank. There is a big black hat--have you never heard of hats that make you invisible? If you put one on, no one can see you.

Helmer *[suppressing a smile]*. Yes, you are quite right.

Rank. But I am clean forgetting what I came for. Helmer, give me a cigar--one of the dark Havanas.

Helmer. With the greatest pleasure. *[Offers him his case.]*

Rank *[takes a cigar and cuts off the end]*. Thanks.

Nora *[striking a match]*. Let me give you a light.

Rank. Thank you. *[She holds the match for him to light his cigar.]* And now goodbye!

Helmer. Goodbye, goodbye, dear old man!

Nora. Sleep well, Doctor Rank.

Rank. Thank you for that wish.

Nora. Wish me the same.

Rank. You? Well, if you want me to sleep well! And thanks for the light. *[He nods to them both and goes out.]*

Helmer *[in a subdued voice]*. He has drunk more than he ought.

Nora *[absently]*. Maybe. *[HELMER takes a bunch of keys out of his pocket and goes into the hall.]* Torvald! what are you going to do there?

Helmer. Emptying the letter-box; it is quite full; there will be no room to put the newspaper in tomorrow morning.

Nora. Are you going to work tonight?

Helmer. You know quite well I'm not. What is this? Someone has been at the lock.

Nora. At the lock--?

Helmer. Yes, someone has. What can it mean? I should never have thought the maid--. Here is a broken hairpin. Nora, it is one of yours.

Nora *[quickly]*. Then it must have been the children--

Helmer. Then you must get them out of those ways. There, at last I have got it open. *[Takes out the contents of the letter-box, and calls to the kitchen.]* Helen!--Helen, put out the light over the front door. *[Goes back into the room and shuts the door into the hall. He holds out his hand full of letters.]* Look at that--look what a heap of them there are. *[Turning them over.]* What on earth is that?

Nora *[at the window]*. The letter--No! Torvald, no!

Helmer. Two cards--of Rank's.

Nora. Of Doctor Rank's?

Helmer *[looking at them]*. Doctor Rank. They were on the top. He must have put them in when he went out.

Nora. Is there anything written on them?

Helmer. There is a black cross over the name. Look there--what an uncomfortable idea! It looks as if he were announcing his own death.

Nora. It is just what he is doing.

Helmer. What? Do you know anything about it? Has he said anything to you?

Nora. Yes. He told me that when the cards came it would be his leave-taking from us. He means to shut himself up and die.

Helmer. My poor old friend! Certainly I knew we should not have him very long with us. But so soon! And so he hides himself away like a wounded animal.

Nora. If it has to happen, it is best it should be without a word--don't you think so, Torvald?

Helmer *[walking up and down]*. He had so grown into our lives. I can't think of him as having gone out of them. He, with his sufferings and his loneliness, was like a cloudy background to our sunlit happiness. Well, perhaps it is best so. For him, anyway. *[Standing still.]* And perhaps for us too, Nora. We two are thrown quite upon each other now. *[Puts his arms round her.]* My darling wife, I don't feel as if I could hold you tight enough. Do you know, Nora, I have often wished that you might be threatened by some great danger, so that I might risk my life's blood, and everything, for your sake.

Nora *[disengages herself, and says firmly and decidedly]*. Now you must read your letters, Torvald.

Helmer. No, no; not tonight. I want to be with you, my darling wife.

Nora. With the thought of your friend's death--

Helmer. You are right, it has affected us both. Something ugly has come between us--the thought of the horrors of death. We must try and rid our minds of that. Until then--we will each go to our own room.

Nora *[hanging on his neck]*. Goodnight, Torvald--Goodnight!

Helmer *[kissing her on the forehead]*. Goodnight, my little singing-bird. Sleep sound, Nora. Now I will read my letters through. *[He takes his letters and goes into his room, shutting the door after him.]*

Nora *[gropes distractedly about, seizes HELMER'S domino, throws it round her, while she says in quick, hoarse, spasmodic whispers]*. Never to see him again. Never! Never! *[Puts her shawl over her head.]* Never to see my children again either--never again. Never! Never!--Ah! the icy, black water--the unfathomable depths--If only it were over! He has got it now--now he is reading it. Goodbye, Torvald and my children! *[She is about to rush out through the hall, when HELMER opens his door hurriedly and stands with an open letter in his hand.]*

Helmer. Nora!

Nora. Ah!--

Helmer. What is this? Do you know what is in this letter?

Nora. Yes, I know. Let me go! Let me get out!

Helmer *[holding her back]*. Where are you going?

Nora *[trying to get free]*. You shan't save me, Torvald!

Helmer *[reeling]*. True? Is this true, that I read here? Horrible! No, no--it is impossible that it can be true.

Nora. It is true. I have loved you above everything else in the world.

Helmer. Oh, don't let us have any silly excuses.

Nora *[taking a step towards him]*. Torvald--!

Helmer. Miserable creature--what have you done?

Nora. Let me go. You shall not suffer for my sake. You shall not take it upon yourself.

Helmer. No tragic airs, please. *[Locks the hall door.]* Here you shall stay and give me an explanation. Do you understand what you have done? Answer me! Do you understand what you have done?

Nora *[looks steadily at him and says with a growing look of coldness in her face]*. Yes, now I am beginning to understand thoroughly.

Helmer *[walking about the room]*. What a horrible awakening! All these eight years--she who was my joy and pride--a hypocrite, a liar--worse, worse--a criminal! The unutterable ugliness of it all!--For shame! For shame! *[NORA is silent and looks steadily at him. He stops in front of her.]* I ought to have suspected that something of the sort would happen. I ought to have foreseen it. All

your father's want of principle--be silent!--all your father's want of principle has come out in you. No religion, no morality, no sense of duty--. How I am punished for having winked at what he did! I did it for your sake, and this is how you repay me.

Nora. Yes, that's just it.

Helmer. Now you have destroyed all my happiness. You have ruined all my future. It is horrible to think of! I am in the power of an unscrupulous man; he can do what he likes with me, ask anything he likes of me, give me any orders he pleases--I dare not refuse. And I must sink to such miserable depths because of a thoughtless woman!

Nora. When I am out of the way, you will be free.

Helmer. No fine speeches, please. Your father had always plenty of those ready, too. What good would it be to me if you were out of the way, as you say? Not the slightest. He can make the affair known everywhere; and if he does, I may be falsely suspected of having been a party to your criminal action. Very likely people will think I was behind it all--that it was I who prompted you! And I have to thank you for all this--you whom I have cherished during the whole of our married life. Do you understand now what it is you have done for me?

Nora *[coldly and quietly]*. Yes.

Helmer. It is so incredible that I can't take it in. But we must come to some understanding. Take off that shawl. Take it off, I tell you. I must try and appease him some way or another. The matter must be hushed up at any cost. And as for you and me, it must appear as if everything between us were just as before--but naturally only in the eyes of the world. You will still remain in my house, that is a matter of course. But I shall not allow you to bring up the children; I dare not trust them to you. To think that I should be obliged to say so to one whom I have loved so dearly, and whom I still--. No, that is all over. From this moment happiness is not the question; all that concerns us is to save the remains, the fragments, the appearance--

[A ring is heard at the front-door bell.]

Helmer *[with a start]*. What is that? So late! Can the worst--? Can he--? Hide yourself, Nora. Say you are ill.

[NORA stands motionless. HELMER goes and unlocks the hall door.]

Maid *[half-dressed, comes to the door]*. A letter for the mistress.

Helmer. Give it to me. *[Takes the letter, and shuts the door.]* Yes, it is from him. You shall not have it; I will read it myself.

Nora. Yes, read it.

Helmer *[standing by the lamp]*. I scarcely have the courage to do it. It may mean ruin for both of us. No, I must know. *[Tears open the letter, runs his eye over a few lines, looks at a paper enclosed, and gives a shout of joy.]* Nora! *[She looks at him questioningly.]* Nora!--No, I must read it once again--. Yes, it is true! I am saved! Nora, I am saved!

Nora. And I?

Helmer. You too, of course; we are both saved, both you and I. Look, he sends you your bond back. He says he regrets and repents--that a happy change in his life--never mind what he says! We are saved, Nora! No one can do anything to you. Oh, Nora, Nora!--no, first I must destroy these hateful things. Let me see--. *[Takes a look at the bond.]* No, no, I won't look at it. The whole thing shall be nothing but a bad dream to me. *[Tears up the bond and both letters, throws them all into the stove, and watches them burn.]* There--now it doesn't exist any longer. He says that since Christmas Eve you--. These must have been three dreadful days for you, Nora.

Nora. I have fought a hard fight these three days.

Helmer. And suffered agonies, and seen no way out but--. No, we won't call any of the horrors to mind. We will only shout with joy, and keep saying, "It's all over! It's all over!" Listen to me, Nora. You don't seem to realise that it is all over. What is this?--such a cold, set face! My poor little Nora, I quite understand; you don't feel as if you could believe that I have forgiven you. But it is true, Nora, I swear it; I have forgiven you everything. I know that what you did, you did out of love for me.

Nora. That is true.

Helmer. You have loved me as a wife ought to love her husband. Only you had not sufficient knowledge to judge of the means you used. But do you suppose you are any the less dear to me, because you don't understand how to act on your own responsibility? No, no; only lean on me; I will advise you and direct you. I should not be a man if this womanly helplessness did not just give you a

double attractiveness in my eyes. You must not think anymore about the hard things I said in my first moment of consternation, when I thought everything was going to overwhelm me. I have forgiven you, Nora; I swear to you I have forgiven you.

Nora. Thank you for your forgiveness. *[She goes out through the door to the right.]*

Helmer. No, don't go--. *[Looks in.]* What are you doing in there?

Nora *[from within]*. Taking off my fancy dress.

Helmer *[standing at the open door]*. Yes, do. Try and calm yourself, and make your mind easy again, my frightened little singing-bird. Be at rest, and feel secure; I have broad wings to shelter you under. *[Walks up and down by the door.]* How warm and cosy our home is, Nora. Here is shelter for you; here I will protect you like a hunted dove that I have saved from a hawk's claws; I will bring peace to your poor beating heart. It will come, little by little, Nora, believe me. Tomorrow morning you will look upon it all quite differently; soon everything will be just as it was before. Very soon you won't need me to assure you that I have forgiven you; you will yourself feel the certainty that I have done so. Can you suppose I should ever think of such a thing as repudiating you, or even reproaching you? You have no idea what a true man's heart is like, Nora. There is something so indescribably sweet and satisfying, to a man, in the knowledge that he has forgiven his wife--forgiven her freely, and with all his heart. It seems as if that had made her, as it were, doubly his own; he has given her a new life, so to speak; and she has in a way become both wife and child to him. So you shall be for me after this, my little scared, helpless darling. Have no anxiety about anything, Nora; only be frank and open with me, and I will serve as will and conscience both to you--. What is this? Not gone to bed? Have you changed your things?

Nora *[in everyday dress]*. Yes, Torvald, I have changed my things now.

Helmer. But what for?--so late as this.

Nora. I shall not sleep tonight.

Helmer. But, my dear Nora--

Nora *[looking at her watch]*. It is not so very late. Sit down here, Torvald. You and I have much to say to one another. *[She sits down at one side of the table.]*

Helmer. Nora--what is this?--this cold, set face?

Nora. Sit down. It will take some time; I have a lot to talk over with you.

Helmer *[sits down at the opposite side of the table]*. You alarm me, Nora!--and I don't understand you.

Nora. No, that is just it. You don't understand me, and I have never understood you either--before tonight. No, you mustn't interrupt me. You must simply listen to what I say. Torvald, this is a settling of accounts.

Helmer. What do you mean by that?

Nora *[after a short silence]*. Isn't there one thing that strikes you as strange in our sitting here like this?

Helmer. What is that?

Nora. We have been married now eight years. Does it not occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, husband and wife, have had a serious conversation?

Helmer. What do you mean by serious?

Nora. In all these eight years--longer than that--from the very beginning of our acquaintance, we have never exchanged a word on any serious subject.

Helmer. Was it likely that I would be continually and forever telling you about worries that you could not help me to bear?

Nora. I am not speaking about business matters. I say that we have never sat down in earnest together to try and get at the bottom of anything.

Helmer. But, dearest Nora, would it have been any good to you?

Nora. That is just it; you have never understood me. I have been greatly wronged, Torvald--first by papa and then by you.

Helmer. What! By us two--by us two, who have loved you better than anyone else in the world?

Nora *[shaking her head]*. You have never loved me. You have only thought it pleasant to be in love with me.

Helmer. Nora, what do I hear you saying?

Nora. It is perfectly true, Torvald. When I was at home with papa, he told me his opinion about everything, and so I had the same opinions; and if I differed from him I concealed the fact, because he would not have liked it. He called me his doll-child, and he played with me just as I used to play with my dolls. And when I came to live with you--

Helmer. What sort of an expression is that to use about our marriage?

Nora *[undisturbed]*. I mean that I was simply transferred from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything according to your own taste, and so I got the same tastes as you--or else I pretended to, I am really not quite sure which--I think sometimes the one and sometimes the other. When I look back on it, it seems to me as if I had been living here like a poor woman--just from hand to mouth. I have existed merely to perform tricks for you, Torvald. But you would have it so. You and papa have committed a great sin against me. It is your fault that I have made nothing of my life.

Helmer. How unreasonable and how ungrateful you are, Nora! Have you not been happy here?

Nora. No, I have never been happy. I thought I was, but it has never really been so.

Helmer. Not--not happy!

Nora. No, only merry. And you have always been so kind to me. But our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald.

Helmer. There is some truth in what you say--exaggerated and strained as your view of it is. But for the future it shall be different. Playtime shall be over, and lesson-time shall begin.

Nora. Whose lessons? Mine, or the children's?

Helmer. Both yours and the children's, my darling Nora.

Nora. Alas, Torvald, you are not the man to educate me into being a proper wife for you.

Helmer. And you can say that!

Nora. And I--how am I fitted to bring up the children?

Helmer. Nora!

Nora. Didn't you say so yourself a little while ago--that you dare not trust me to bring them up?

Helmer. In a moment of anger! Why do you pay any heed to that?

Nora. Indeed, you were perfectly right. I am not fit for the task. There is another task I must undertake first. I must try and educate myself--you are not the man to help me in that. I must do that for myself. And that is why I am going to leave you now.

Helmer *[springing up]*. What do you say?

Nora. I must stand quite alone, if I am to understand myself and everything about me. It is for that reason that I cannot remain with you any longer.

Helmer. Nora, Nora!

Nora. I am going away from here now, at once. I am sure Christine will take me in for the night--

Helmer. You are out of your mind! I won't allow it! I forbid you!

Nora. It is no use forbidding me anything any longer. I will take with me what belongs to myself. I will take nothing from you, either now or later.

Helmer. What sort of madness is this!

Nora. Tomorrow I shall go home--I mean, to my old home. It will be easiest for me to find something to do there.

Helmer. You blind, foolish woman!

Nora. I must try and get some sense, Torvald.

Helmer. To desert your home, your husband and your children! And you don't consider what people will say!

Nora. I cannot consider that at all. I only know that it is necessary for me.

Helmer. It's shocking. This is how you would neglect your most sacred duties.

Nora. What do you consider my most sacred duties?

Helmer. Do I need to tell you that? Are they not your duties to your husband and your children?

Nora. I have other duties just as sacred.

Helmer. That you have not. What duties could those be?

Nora. Duties to myself.

Helmer. Before all else, you are a wife and a mother.

Nora. I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before all else I am a reasonable human being, just as you are--or, at all events, that I must try and become one. I know quite well, Torvald, that most people would think you right, and that views of that kind are to be found in books; but I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think over things for myself and get to understand them.

Helmer. Can you not understand your place in your own home? Have you not a reliable guide in such matters as that?--have you no religion?

Nora. I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is.

Helmer. What are you saying?

Nora. I know nothing but what the clergyman said, when I went to be confirmed. He told us that religion was this, and that, and the other. When I am away from all this, and am alone, I will look into that matter too. I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events if it is true for me.

Helmer. This is unheard of in a girl of your age! But if religion cannot lead you aright, let me try and awaken your conscience. I suppose you have some moral sense? Or--answer me--am I to think you have none?

Nora. I assure you, Torvald, that is not an easy question to answer. I really don't know. The thing perplexes me altogether. I only know that you and I look at it in quite a different light. I am learning, too, that the law is quite another thing from what I supposed; but I find it impossible to convince myself that the law is right. According to it a woman has no right to spare her old dying father, or to save her husband's life. I can't believe that.

Helmer. You talk like a child. You don't understand the conditions of the world in which you live.

Nora. No, I don't. But now I am going to try. I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I.

Helmer. You are ill, Nora; you are delirious; I almost think you are out of your mind.

Nora. I have never felt my mind so clear and certain as tonight.

Helmer. And is it with a clear and certain mind that you forsake your husband and your children?

Nora. Yes, it is.

Helmer. Then there is only one possible explanation.

Nora. What is that?

Helmer. You do not love me anymore.

Nora. No, that is just it.

Helmer. Nora!--and you can say that?

Nora. It gives me great pain, Torvald, for you have always been so kind to me, but I cannot help it. I do not love you any more.

Helmer *[regaining his composure]*. Is that a clear and certain conviction too?

Nora. Yes, absolutely clear and certain. That is the reason why I will not stay here any longer.

Helmer. And can you tell me what I have done to forfeit your love?

Nora. Yes, indeed I can. It was tonight, when the wonderful thing did not happen; then I saw you were not the man I had thought you were.

Helmer. Explain yourself better. I don't understand you.

Nora. I have waited so patiently for eight years; for, goodness knows, I knew very well that wonderful things don't happen every day. Then this horrible misfortune came upon me; and then I felt quite certain that the wonderful thing was going to happen at last. When Krogstad's letter was lying out there, never for a moment did I imagine that you would consent to accept this man's conditions. I was so absolutely certain that you would say to him: Publish the thing to the whole world. And when that was done--

Helmer. Yes, what then?--when I had exposed my wife to shame and disgrace?

Nora. When that was done, I was so absolutely certain, you would come forward and take everything upon yourself, and say: I am the guilty one.

Helmer. Nora--!

Nora. You mean that I would never have accepted such a sacrifice on your part? No, of course not. But what would my assurances have been worth against yours? That was the wonderful thing which I hoped for and feared; and it was to prevent that, that I wanted to kill myself.

Helmer. I would gladly work night and day for you, Nora--bear sorrow and want for your sake. But no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves.

Nora. It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done.

Helmer. Oh, you think and talk like a heedless child.

Nora. Maybe. But you neither think nor talk like the man I could bind myself to. As soon as your fear was over--and it was not fear for what threatened me, but for what might happen to you--when the whole thing was past, as far as you were concerned it was exactly as if nothing at all had happened. Exactly as before, I was your little skylark, your doll, which you would in future treat with doubly gentle care, because it was so brittle and fragile. *[Getting up.]* Torvald--it was then it dawned upon me that for eight years I had been living here with a strange man, and had borne him three children--. Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I could tear myself into little bits!

Helmer *[sadly]*. I see, I see. An abyss has opened between us--there is no denying it. But, Nora, would it not be possible to fill it up?

Nora. As I am now, I am no wife for you.

Helmer. I have it in me to become a different man.

Nora. Perhaps--if your doll is taken away from you.

Helmer. But to part!--to part from you! No, no, Nora, I can't understand that idea.

Nora *[going out to the right]*. That makes it all the more certain that it must be done. *[She comes back with her cloak and hat and a small bag which she puts on a chair by the table.]*

Helmer. Nora, Nora, not now! Wait until tomorrow.

Nora *[putting on her cloak]*. I cannot spend the night in a strange man's room.

Helmer. But can't we live here like brother and sister--?

Nora *[putting on her hat]*. You know very well that would not last long. *[Puts the shawl round her.]* Goodbye, Torvald. I won't see the little ones. I know they are in better hands than mine. As I am now, I can be of no use to them.

Helmer. But some day, Nora--some day?

Nora. How can I tell? I have no idea what is going to become of me.

Helmer. But you are my wife, whatever becomes of you.

Nora. Listen, Torvald. I have heard that when a wife deserts her husband's house, as I am doing now, he is legally freed from all obligations towards her. In any case, I set you free from all your obligations. You are not to feel yourself bound in the slightest way, any more than I shall. There must be perfect freedom on both sides. See, here is your ring back. Give me mine.

Helmer. That too?

Nora. That too.

Helmer. Here it is.

Nora. That's right. Now it is all over. I have put the keys here. The maids know all about everything in the house--better than I do. Tomorrow, after I have left her, Christine will come here and pack up my own things that I brought with me from home. I will have them sent after me.

Helmer. All over! All over!--Nora, shall you never think of me again?

Nora. I know I shall often think of you, the children, and this house.

Helmer. May I write to you, Nora?

Nora. No--never. You must not do that.

Helmer. But at least let me send you--

Nora. Nothing--nothing--

Helmer. Let me help you if you are in want.

Nora. No. I can receive nothing from a stranger.

Helmer. Nora--can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?

Nora *[taking her bag]*. Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

Helmer. Tell me what that would be!

Nora. Both you and I would have to be so changed that--. Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

Helmer. But I will believe in it. Tell me! So changed that--?

Nora. That our life together would be a real wedlock. Goodbye. *[She goes out through the hall.]*

Helmer *[sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands]*. Nora! Nora! *[Looks round, and rises.]* Empty. She is gone. *[A hope flashes across his mind.]* The most wonderful thing of all--?

[The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]

This page titled 7.5: Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House (1879) is shared under a Public Domain license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **9.2: Ibsen, Henrik. A Doll's House (1879)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed Public Domain.

7.6: Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (1895)

The Importance of Being Earnest
A Trivial Comedy for Serious People

THE PERSONS IN THE PLAY

John Worthing, J.P.
Algernon Moncrieff
Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.
Merriman, Butler
Lane, Manservant
Lady Bracknell
Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax
Cecily Cardew
Miss Prism, Governess

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I. Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, W.

ACT II. The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.

ACT III. Drawing-Room at the Manor House, Woolton.

TIME: The Present.

FIRST ACT

SCENE

Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.

[**Lane** is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, **Algernon** enters.]

Algernon. Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

Lane. I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

Algernon. I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—any one can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life.

Lane. Yes, sir.

Algernon. And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

Lane. Yes, sir. [Hands them on a salver.]

Algernon. [Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.] Oh! . . . by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

Lane. Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.

Algernon. Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

Lane. I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

Algernon. Good heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?

Lane. I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

Algernon. [Languidly.] I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

Lane. No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

Algernon. Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

Lane. Thank you, sir. [**Lane** goes out.]

Algernon. Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.

[Enter **Lane**.]

Lane. Mr. Ernest Worthing.

[Enter **Jack**.]

[**Lane** goes out.]

Algernon. How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

Jack. Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

Algernon. [Stiffly.] I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

Jack. [Sitting down on the sofa.] In the country.

Algernon. What on earth do you do there?

Jack. [Pulling off his gloves.] When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

Algernon. And who are the people you amuse?

Jack. [Airily.] Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

Algernon. Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

Jack. Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

Algernon. How immensely you must amuse them! [Goes over and takes sandwich.] By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

Jack. Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea?

Algernon. Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

Jack. How perfectly delightful!

Algernon. Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

Jack. May I ask why?

Algernon. My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

Jack. I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

Algernon. I thought you had come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business.

Jack. How utterly unromantic you are!

Algernon. I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

Jack. I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

Algernon. Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven—[**Jack** puts out his hand to take a sandwich. **Algernon** at once interferes.] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt

Augusta. [Takes one and eats it.]

Jack. Well, you have been eating them all the time.

Algernon. That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [Takes plate from below.] Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

Jack. [Advancing to table and helping himself.] And very good bread and butter it is too.

Algernon. Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

Jack. Why on earth do you say that?

Algernon. Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

Jack. Oh, that is nonsense!

Algernon. It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

Jack. Your consent!

Algernon. My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [Rings bell.]

Jack. Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily! I don't know any one of the name of Cecily.

[Enter **Lane**.]

Algernon. Bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

Lane. Yes, sir. [**Lane** goes out.]

Jack. Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward.

Algernon. Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.

Jack. There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.

[Enter **Lane** with the cigarette case on a salver. **Algernon** takes it at once. **Lane** goes out.]

Algernon. I think that is rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say. [Opens case and examines it.] However, it makes no matter, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

Jack. Of course it's mine. [Moving to him.] You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

Algernon. Oh! it is absurd to have a hard and fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

Jack. I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort of thing one should talk of in private. I simply want my cigarette case back.

Algernon. Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from some one of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know any one of that name.

Jack. Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

Algernon. Your aunt!

Jack. Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

Algernon. [Retreating to back of sofa.] But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? [Reading.] 'From little Cecily with her fondest love.'

Jack. [Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it.] My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd! For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. [Follows **Algernon** round the room.]

Algernon. Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? ‘From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.’ There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can’t quite make out. Besides, your name isn’t Jack at all; it is Ernest.

Jack. It isn’t Ernest; it’s Jack.

Algernon. You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn’t Ernest. It’s on your cards. Here is one of them. [Taking it from case.] ‘Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.’ I’ll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else. [Puts the card in his pocket.]

Jack. Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

Algernon. Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

Jack. My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn’t a dentist. It produces a false impression.

Algernon. Well, that is exactly what dentists always do. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

Jack. Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

Algernon. I’ll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

Jack. Well, produce my cigarette case first.

Algernon. Here it is. [Hands cigarette case.] Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable. [Sits on sofa.]

Jack. My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it’s perfectly ordinary. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

Algernon. Where is that place in the country, by the way?

Jack. That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited . . . I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

Algernon. I suspected that, my dear fellow! I have Bunburyed all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

Jack. My dear Algy, I don’t know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone on all subjects. It’s one’s duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one’s health or one’s happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

Algernon. The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

Jack. That wouldn’t be at all a bad thing.

Algernon. Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don’t try it. You should leave that to people who haven’t been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

Jack. What on earth do you mean?

Algernon. You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the

country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at Willis's to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week.

Jack. I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere to-night.

Algernon. I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations.

Jack. You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

Algernon. I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent down with either no woman at all, or two. In the third place, I know perfectly well whom she will place me next to, to-night. She will place me next Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner-table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent . . . and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburyist I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

Jack. I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr. . . . with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

Algernon. Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

Jack. That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

Algernon. Then your wife will. You don't seem to realise, that in married life three is company and two is none.

Jack. [Sententiously.] That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

Algernon. Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half the time.

Jack. For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical.

Algernon. My dear fellow, it isn't easy to be anything nowadays. There's such a lot of beastly competition about. [The sound of an electric bell is heard.] Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner. Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to-night at Willis's?

Jack. I suppose so, if you want to.

Algernon. Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them.

[Enter **Lane**.]

Lane. Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

[**Algernon** goes forward to meet them. Enter **Lady Bracknell** and **Gwendolen**.]

Lady Bracknell. Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving very well.

Algernon. I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell. That's not quite the same thing. In fact the two things rarely go together. [Sees **Jack** and bows to him with icy coldness.]

Algernon. [To **Gwendolen**.] Dear me, you are smart!

Gwendolen. I am always smart! Am I not, Mr. Worthing?

Jack. You're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

Gwendolen. Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions. [**Gwendolen** and **Jack** sit down together in the corner.]

Lady Bracknell. I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. And now I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

Algernon. Certainly, Aunt Augusta. [Goes over to tea-table.]

Lady Bracknell. Won't you come and sit here, Gwendolen?

Gwendolen. Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am.

Algernon. [Picking up empty plate in horror.] Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

Lane. [Gravely.] There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice.

Algernon. No cucumbers!

Lane. No, sir. Not even for ready money.

Algernon. That will do, Lane, thank you.

Lane. Thank you, sir. [Goes out.]

Algernon. I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.

Lady Bracknell. It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

Algernon. I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

Lady Bracknell. It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause I, of course, cannot say. [**Algernon** crosses and hands tea.] Thank you. I've quite a treat for you to-night, Algernon. I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar. She is such a nice woman, and so attentive to her husband. It's delightful to watch them.

Algernon. I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all.

Lady Bracknell. [Frowning.] I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table completely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately he is accustomed to that.

Algernon. It is a great bore, and, I need hardly say, a terrible disappointment to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. [Exchanges glances with **Jack**.] They seem to think I should be with him.

Lady Bracknell. It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

Algernon. Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

Lady Bracknell. Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice . . . as far as any improvement in his ailment goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when every one has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

Algernon. I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. Of course the music is a great difficulty. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music people don't talk. But I'll run over the programme I've drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

Lady Bracknell. Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. [Rising, and following **Algernon**.] I'm sure the programme will be delightful, after a few expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow. People always seem to think that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

Gwendolen. Certainly, mamma.

[**Lady Bracknell** and **Algernon** go into the music-room, **Gwendolen** remains behind.]

Jack. Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

Gwendolen. Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous.

Jack. I do mean something else.

Gwendolen. I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

Jack. And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence . . .

Gwendolen. I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room that I have often had to speak to her about.

Jack. [Nervously.] Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl . . . I have ever met since . . . I met you.

Gwendolen. Yes, I am quite well aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. [**Jack** looks at her in amazement.] We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits, I am told; and my ideal has always been to love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

Jack. You really love me, Gwendolen?

Gwendolen. Passionately!

Jack. Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me.

Gwendolen. My own Ernest!

Jack. But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

Gwendolen. But your name is Ernest.

Jack. Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

Gwendolen. [Glibly.] Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like most metaphysical speculations has very little reference at all to the actual facts of real life, as we know them.

Jack. Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't much care about the name of Ernest . . . I don't think the name suits me at all.

Gwendolen. It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

Jack. Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

Gwendolen. Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations . . . I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest.

Jack. Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.

Gwendolen. Married, Mr. Worthing?

Jack. [Astounded.] Well . . . surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

Gwendolen. I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

Jack. Well . . . may I propose to you now?

Gwendolen. I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly before-hand that I am fully determined to accept you.

Jack. Gwendolen!

Gwendolen. Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me?

Jack. You know what I have got to say to you.

Gwendolen. Yes, but you don't say it.

Jack. Gwendolen, will you marry me? [Goes on his knees.]

Gwendolen. Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

Jack. My own one, I have never loved any one in the world but you.

Gwendolen. Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite, blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present. [Enter **Lady Bracknell**.]

Lady Bracknell. Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

Gwendolen. Mamma! [He tries to rise; she restrains him.] I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.

Lady Bracknell. Finished what, may I ask?

Gwendolen. I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mamma. [They rise together.]

Lady Bracknell. Pardon me, you are not engaged to any one. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she could be allowed to arrange for herself . . . And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. While I am making these inquiries, you, Gwendolen, will wait for me below in the carriage.

Gwendolen. [Reproachfully.] Mamma!

Lady Bracknell. In the carriage, Gwendolen! [**Gwendolen** goes to the door. She and **Jack** blow kisses to each other behind **Lady Bracknell's** back. **Lady Bracknell** looks vaguely about as if she could not understand what the noise was. Finally turns round.] Gwendolen, the carriage!

Gwendolen. Yes, mamma. [Goes out, looking back at **Jack**.]

Lady Bracknell. [Sitting down.] You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing.

[Looks in her pocket for note-book and pencil.]

Jack. Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

Lady Bracknell. [Pencil and note-book in hand.] I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?

Jack. Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

Lady Bracknell. I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

Jack. Twenty-nine.

Lady Bracknell. A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

Jack. [After some hesitation.] I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell. I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in

England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income?

Jack. Between seven and eight thousand a year.

Lady Bracknell. [Makes a note in her book.] In land, or in investments?

Jack. In investments, chiefly.

Lady Bracknell. That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

Jack. I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen hundred acres, I believe; but I don't depend on that for my real income. In fact, as far as I can make out, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

Lady Bracknell. A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

Jack. Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice.

Lady Bracknell. Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

Jack. Oh, she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably advanced in years.

Lady Bracknell. Ah, nowadays that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

Jack. 149.

Lady Bracknell. [Shaking her head.] The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.

Jack. Do you mean the fashion, or the side?

Lady Bracknell. [Sternly.] Both, if necessary, I presume. What are your politics?

Jack. Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.

Lady Bracknell. Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate. Now to minor matters. Are your parents living?

Jack. I have lost both my parents.

Lady Bracknell. To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

Jack. I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me . . . I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was . . . well, I was found.

Lady Bracknell. Found!

Jack. The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

Lady Bracknell. Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

Jack. [Gravely.] In a hand-bag.

Lady Bracknell. A hand-bag?

Jack. [Very seriously.] Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a hand-bag—a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag, with handles to it—an ordinary hand-bag in fact.

Lady Bracknell. In what locality did this Mr. James, or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?

Jack. In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own.

Lady Bracknell. The cloak-room at Victoria Station?

Jack. Yes. The Brighton line.

Lady Bracknell. The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society.

Jack. May I ask you then what you would advise me to do? I need hardly say I would do anything in the world to ensure Gwendolen's happiness.

Lady Bracknell. I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

Jack. Well, I don't see how I could possibly manage to do that. I can produce the hand-bag at any moment. It is in my dressing-room at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell. Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

[**Lady Bracknell** sweeps out in majestic indignation.]

Jack. Good morning! [**Algernon**, from the other room, strikes up the Wedding March. Jack looks perfectly furious, and goes to the door.] For goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune, Algy. How idiotic you are!

[The music stops and **Algernon** enters cheerily.]

Algernon. Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendolen refused you? I know it is a way she has. She is always refusing people. I think it is most ill-natured of her.

Jack. Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never met such a Gorgon . . . I don't really know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair . . . I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you.

Algernon. My dear boy, I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes me put up with them at all. Relations are simply a tedious pack of people, who haven't got the remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die.

Jack. Oh, that is nonsense!

Algernon. It isn't!

Jack. Well, I won't argue about the matter. You always want to argue about things.

Algernon. That is exactly what things were originally made for.

Jack. Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself . . . [A pause.] You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

Algernon. All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

Jack. Is that clever?

Algernon. It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilised life should be.

Jack. I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever nowadays. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

Algernon. We have.

Jack. I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about?

Algernon. The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course.

Jack. What fools!

Algernon. By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

Jack. [In a very patronising manner.] My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice, sweet, refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman!

Algernon. The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to some one else, if she is plain.

Jack. Oh, that is nonsense.

Algernon. What about your brother? What about the profligate Ernest?

Jack. Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him. I'll say he died in Paris of apoplexy. Lots of people die of apoplexy, quite suddenly, don't they?

Algernon. Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow. It's a sort of thing that runs in families. You had much better say a severe chill.

Jack. You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary, or anything of that kind?

Algernon. Of course it isn't!

Jack. Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest to carried off suddenly, in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him.

Algernon. But I thought you said that . . . Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel his loss a good deal?

Jack. Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.

Algernon. I would rather like to see Cecily.

Jack. I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

Algernon. Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?

Jack. Oh! one doesn't blurt these things out to people. Cecily and Gwendolen are perfectly certain to be extremely great friends. I'll bet you anything you like that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

Algernon. Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's, we really must go and dress. Do you know it is nearly seven?

Jack. [Irritably.] Oh! It always is nearly seven.

Algernon. Well, I'm hungry.

Jack. I never knew you when you weren't . . .

Algernon. What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

Jack. Oh no! I loathe listening.

Algernon. Well, let us go to the Club?

Jack. Oh, no! I hate talking.

Algernon. Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?

Jack. Oh, no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.

Algernon. Well, what shall we do?

Jack. Nothing!

Algernon. It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind.

[Enter **Lane**.]

Lane. Miss Fairfax.

[Enter **Gwendolen**. **Lane** goes out.]

Algernon. Gwendolen, upon my word!

Gwendolen. Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing.

Algernon. Really, Gwendolen, I don't think I can allow this at all.

Gwendolen. Algy, you always adopt a strictly immoral attitude towards life. You are not quite old enough to do that. [**Algernon** retires to the fireplace.]

Jack. My own darling!

Gwendolen. Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents nowadays pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three. But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry some one else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.

Jack. Dear Gwendolen!

Gwendolen. The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with unpleasing comments, has naturally stirred the deeper fibres of my nature. Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me. Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address in the country?

Jack. The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

[**Algernon**, who has been carefully listening, smiles to himself, and writes the address on his shirt-cuff. Then picks up the Railway Guide.]

Gwendolen. There is a good postal service, I suppose? It may be necessary to do something desperate. That of course will require serious consideration. I will communicate with you daily.

Jack. My own one!

Gwendolen. How long do you remain in town?

Jack. Till Monday.

Gwendolen. Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

Algernon. Thanks, I've turned round already.

Gwendolen. You may also ring the bell.

Jack. You will let me see you to your carriage, my own darling?

Gwendolen. Certainly.

Jack. [To **Lane**, who now enters.] I will see Miss Fairfax out.

Lane. Yes, sir. [**Jack** and **Gwendolen** go off.]

[**Lane** presents several letters on a salver to **Algernon**. It is to be surmised that they are bills, as **Algernon**, after looking at the envelopes, tears them up.]

Algernon. A glass of sherry, Lane.

Lane. Yes, sir.

Algernon. To-morrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying.

Lane. Yes, sir.

Algernon. I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits . . .

Lane. Yes, sir. [Handing sherry.]

Algernon. I hope to-morrow will be a fine day, Lane.

Lane. It never is, sir.

Algernon. Lane, you're a perfect pessimist.

Lane. I do my best to give satisfaction, sir.

[Enter **Jack**. **Lane** goes off.]

Jack. There's a sensible, intellectual girl! the only girl I ever cared for in my life. [**Algernon** is laughing immoderately.] What on earth are you so amused at?

Algernon. Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that is all.

Jack. If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape some day.

Algernon. I love scrapes. They are the only things that are never serious.

Jack. Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense.

Algernon. Nobody ever does.

[**Jack** looks indignantly at him, and leaves the room. **Algernon** lights a cigarette, reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles.]

ACT DROP

SECOND ACT

SCENE

Garden at the Manor House. A flight of grey stone steps leads up to the house. The garden, an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Time of year, July. Basket chairs, and a table covered with books, are set under a large yew-tree.

[**Miss Prism** discovered seated at the table. **Cecily** is at the back watering flowers.]

Miss Prism. [Calling.] Cecily, Cecily! Surely such a utilitarian occupation as the watering of flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours? Especially at a moment when intellectual pleasures await you. Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson.

Cecily. [Coming over very slowly.] But I don't like German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson.

Miss Prism. Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German, as he was leaving for town yesterday. Indeed, he always lays stress on your German when he is leaving for town.

Cecily. Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well.

Miss Prism. [Drawing herself up.] Your guardian enjoys the best of health, and his gravity of demeanour is especially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility.

Cecily. I suppose that is why he often looks a little bored when we three are together.

Miss Prism. Cecily! I am surprised at you. Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merriment and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man his brother.

Cecily. I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. You know German, and geology, and things of that kind influence a man very much. [**Cecily** begins to write in her diary.]

Miss Prism. [Shaking her head.] I do not think that even I could produce any effect on a character that according to his own brother's admission is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Indeed I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favour of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. As a man sows so let him reap. You must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all.

Cecily. I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets of my life. If I didn't write them down, I should probably forget all about them.

Miss Prism. Memory, my dear Cecily, is the diary that we all carry about with us.

Cecily. Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never happened, and couldn't possibly have happened. I believe that Memory is responsible for nearly all the three-volume novels that Mudie sends us.

Miss Prism. Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

Cecily. Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

Miss Prism. The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

Cecily. I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. And was your novel ever published?

Miss Prism. Alas! no. The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned. [**Cecily** starts.] I use the word in the sense of lost or mislaid. To your work, child, these speculations are profitless.

Cecily. [Smiling.] But I see dear Dr. Chasuble coming up through the garden.

Miss Prism. [Rising and advancing.] Dr. Chasuble! This is indeed a pleasure.

[Enter **Canon Chasuble**.]

Chasuble. And how are we this morning? Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?

Cecily. Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her so much good to have a short stroll with you in the Park, Dr. Chasuble.

Miss Prism. Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.

Cecily. No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt instinctively that you had a headache. Indeed I was thinking about that, and not about my German lesson, when the Rector came in.

Chasuble. I hope, Cecily, you are not inattentive.

Cecily. Oh, I am afraid I am.

Chasuble. That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips. [**Miss Prism** glares.] I spoke metaphorically.—My metaphor was drawn from bees. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, I suppose, has not returned from town yet?

Miss Prism. We do not expect him till Monday afternoon.

Chasuble. Ah yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London. He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by all accounts, that unfortunate young man his brother seems to be. But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer.

Miss Prism. Egeria? My name is Lætitia, Doctor.

Chasuble. [Bowing.] A classical allusion merely, drawn from the Pagan authors. I shall see you both no doubt at Evensong?

Miss Prism. I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

Chasuble. With pleasure, Miss Prism, with pleasure. We might go as far as the schools and back.

Miss Prism. That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Even these metallic problems have their melodramatic side.

[Goes down the garden with **Dr. Chasuble**.]

Cecily. [Picks up books and throws them back on table.] Horrid Political Economy! Horrid Geography! Horrid, horrid German!

[Enter **Merriman** with a card on a salver.]

Merriman. Mr. Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the station. He has brought his luggage with him.

Cecily. [Takes the card and reads it.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany, W.' Uncle Jack's brother! Did you tell him Mr. Worthing was in town?

Merriman. Yes, Miss. He seemed very much disappointed. I mentioned that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment.

Cecily. Ask Mr. Ernest Worthing to come here. I suppose you had better talk to the housekeeper about a room for him.

Merriman. Yes, Miss.

[**Merriman** goes off.]

Cecily. I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will look just like every one else.

[Enter **Algernon**, very gay and debonnair.] He does!

Algernon. [Raising his hat.] You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

Cecily. You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. [**Algernon** is rather taken aback.] But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.

Algernon. Oh! I am not really wicked at all, cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked.

Cecily. If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

Algernon. [Looks at her in amazement.] Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

Cecily. I am glad to hear it.

Algernon. In fact, now you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

Cecily. I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

Algernon. It is much pleasanter being here with you.

Cecily. I can't understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon.

Algernon. That is a great disappointment. I am obliged to go up by the first train on Monday morning. I have a business appointment that I am anxious . . . to miss?

Cecily. Couldn't you miss it anywhere but in London?

Algernon. No: the appointment is in London.

Cecily. Well, I know, of course, how important it is not to keep a business engagement, if one wants to retain any sense of the beauty of life, but still I think you had better wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigrating.

Algernon. About my what?

Cecily. Your emigrating. He has gone up to buy your outfit.

Algernon. I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my outfit. He has no taste in neckties at all.

Cecily. I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

Algernon. Australia! I'd sooner die.

Cecily. Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night, that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

Algernon. Oh, well! The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world, are not particularly encouraging. This world is good enough for me, cousin Cecily.

Cecily. Yes, but are you good enough for it?

Algernon. I'm afraid I'm not that. That is why I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't mind, cousin Cecily.

Cecily. I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.

Algernon. Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

Cecily. It is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should try.

Algernon. I will. I feel better already.

Cecily. You are looking a little worse.

Algernon. That is because I am hungry.

Cecily. How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?

Algernon. Thank you. Might I have a buttonhole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a buttonhole first.

Cecily. A Marechal Niel? [Picks up scissors.]

Algernon. No, I'd sooner have a pink rose.

Cecily. Why? [Cuts a flower.]

Algernon. Because you are like a pink rose, Cousin Cecily.

Cecily. I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

Algernon. Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady. [**Cecily** puts the rose in his buttonhole.] You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

Cecily. Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

Algernon. They are a snare that every sensible man would like to be caught in.

Cecily. Oh, I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.

[They pass into the house. **Miss Prism** and **Dr. Chasuble** return.]

Miss Prism. You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never!

Chasuble. [With a scholar's shudder.] Believe me, I do not deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept as well as the practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

Miss Prism. [Sententiously.] That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realise, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.

Chasuble. But is a man not equally attractive when married?

Miss Prism. No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

Chasuble. And often, I've been told, not even to her.

Miss Prism. That depends on the intellectual sympathies of the woman. Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are green. [**Dr. Chasuble** starts.] I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits. But where is Cecily?

Chasuble. Perhaps she followed us to the schools.

[Enter **Jack** slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning, with crape hatband and black gloves.]

Miss Prism. Mr. Worthing!

Chasuble. Mr. Worthing?

Miss Prism. This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

Jack. [Shakes **Miss Prism's** hand in a tragic manner.] I have returned sooner than I expected. Dr. Chasuble, I hope you are well?

Chasuble. Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity?

Jack. My brother.

Miss Prism. More shameful debts and extravagance?

Chasuble. Still leading his life of pleasure?

Jack. [Shaking his head.] Dead!

Chasuble. Your brother Ernest dead?

Jack. Quite dead.

Miss Prism. What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it.

Chasuble. Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolence. You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were always the most generous and forgiving of brothers.

Jack. Poor Ernest! He had many faults, but it is a sad, sad blow.

Chasuble. Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?

Jack. No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

Chasuble. Was the cause of death mentioned?

Jack. A severe chill, it seems.

Miss Prism. As a man sows, so shall he reap.

Chasuble. [Raising his hand.] Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity! None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts. Will the interment take place here?

Jack. No. He seems to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris.

Chasuble. In Paris! [Shakes his head.] I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. [**Jack** presses his hand convulsively.] My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful, or, as in the present case, distressing. [All sigh.] I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders. The Bishop, who was present, was much struck by some of the analogies I drew.

Jack. Ah! that reminds me, you mentioned christenings I think, Dr. Chasuble? I suppose you know how to christen all right? [**Dr. Chasuble** looks astounded.] I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you?

Miss Prism. It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

Chasuble. But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

Jack. Oh yes.

Miss Prism. [Bitterly.] People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

Jack. But it is not for any child, dear Doctor. I am very fond of children. No! the fact is, I would like to be christened myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.

Chasuble. But surely, Mr. Worthing, you have been christened already?

Jack. I don't remember anything about it.

Chasuble. But have you any grave doubts on the subject?

Jack. I certainly intend to have. Of course I don't know if the thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

Chasuble. Not at all. The sprinkling, and, indeed, the immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice.

Jack. Immersion!

Chasuble. You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed I think advisable. Our weather is so changeable. At what hour would you wish the ceremony performed?

Jack. Oh, I might trot round about five if that would suit you.

Chasuble. Perfectly, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time. A case of twins that occurred recently in one of the outlying cottages on your own estate. Poor Jenkins the carter, a most hard-working man.

Jack. Oh! I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five do?

Chasuble. Admirably! Admirably! [Takes out watch.] And now, dear Mr. Worthing, I will not intrude any longer into a house of sorrow. I would merely beg you not to be too much bowed down by grief. What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.

Miss Prism. This seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind.

[Enter **Cecily** from the house.]

Cecily. Uncle Jack! Oh, I am pleased to see you back. But what horrid clothes you have got on! Do go and change them.

Miss Prism. Cecily!

Chasuble. My child! my child! [**Cecily** goes towards **Jack**; he kisses her brow in a melancholy manner.]

Cecily. What is the matter, Uncle Jack? Do look happy! You look as if you had toothache, and I have got such a surprise for you. Who do you think is in the dining-room? Your brother!

Jack. Who?

Cecily. Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago.

Jack. What nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

Cecily. Oh, don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past he is still your brother. You couldn't be so heartless as to disown him. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack? [Runs back into the house.]

Chasuble. These are very joyful tidings.

Miss Prism. After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me peculiarly distressing.

Jack. My brother is in the dining-room? I don't know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd.

[Enter **Algernon** and **Cecily** hand in hand. They come slowly up to **Jack**.]

Jack. Good heavens! [Motions **Algernon** away.]

Algernon. Brother John, I have come down from town to tell you that I am very sorry for all the trouble I have given you, and that I intend to lead a better life in the future. [**Jack** glares at him and does not take his hand.]

Cecily. Uncle Jack, you are not going to refuse your own brother's hand?

Jack. Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his coming down here disgraceful. He knows perfectly well why.

Cecily. Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in every one. Ernest has just been telling me about his poor invalid friend Mr. Bunbury whom he goes to visit so often. And surely there must be much good in one who is kind to an invalid, and leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a bed of pain.

Jack. Oh! he has been talking about Bunbury, has he?

Cecily. Yes, he has told me all about poor Mr. Bunbury, and his terrible state of health.

Jack. Bunbury! Well, I won't have him talk to you about Bunbury or about anything else. It is enough to drive one perfectly frantic.

Algernon. Of course I admit that the faults were all on my side. But I must say that I think that Brother John's coldness to me is peculiarly painful. I expected a more enthusiastic welcome, especially considering it is the first time I have come here.

Cecily. Uncle Jack, if you don't shake hands with Ernest I will never forgive you.

Jack. Never forgive me?

Cecily. Never, never, never!

Jack. Well, this is the last time I shall ever do it. [Shakes with **Algernon** and glares.]

Chasuble. It's pleasant, is it not, to see so perfect a reconciliation? I think we might leave the two brothers together.

Miss Prism. Cecily, you will come with us.

Cecily. Certainly, Miss Prism. My little task of reconciliation is over.

Chasuble. You have done a beautiful action to-day, dear child.

Miss Prism. We must not be premature in our judgments.

Cecily. I feel very happy. [They all go off except **Jack** and **Algernon**.]

Jack. You young scoundrel, Algy, you must get out of this place as soon as possible. I don't allow any Bunburying here.

[Enter **Merriman**.]

Merriman. I have put Mr. Ernest's things in the room next to yours, sir. I suppose that is all right?

Jack. What?

Merriman. Mr. Ernest's luggage, sir. I have unpacked it and put it in the room next to your own.

Jack. His luggage?

Merriman. Yes, sir. Three portmanteaus, a dressing-case, two hat-boxes, and a large luncheon-basket.

Algernon. I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this time.

Jack. Merriman, order the dog-cart at once. Mr. Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

Merriman. Yes, sir. [Goes back into the house.]

Algernon. What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been called back to town at all.

Jack. Yes, you have.

Algernon. I haven't heard any one call me.

Jack. Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

Algernon. My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree.

Jack. I can quite understand that.

Algernon. Well, Cecily is a darling.

Jack. You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I don't like it.

Algernon. Well, I don't like your clothes. You look perfectly ridiculous in them. Why on earth don't you go up and change? It is perfectly childish to be in deep mourning for a man who is actually staying for a whole week with you in your house as a guest. I call it grotesque.

Jack. You are certainly not staying with me for a whole week as a guest or anything else. You have got to leave . . . by the four-five train.

Algernon. I certainly won't leave you so long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly. If I were in mourning you would stay with me, I suppose. I should think it very unkind if you didn't.

Jack. Well, will you go if I change my clothes?

Algernon. Yes, if you are not too long. I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.

Jack. Well, at any rate, that is better than being always over-dressed as you are.

Algernon. If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.

Jack. Your vanity is ridiculous, your conduct an outrage, and your presence in my garden utterly absurd. However, you have got to catch the four-five, and I hope you will have a pleasant journey back to town. This Bunburying, as you call it, has not been a great success for you.

[Goes into the house.]

Algernon. I think it has been a great success. I'm in love with Cecily, and that is everything.

[Enter **Cecily** at the back of the garden. She picks up the can and begins to water the flowers.] But I must see her before I go, and make arrangements for another Bunbury. Ah, there she is.

Cecily. Oh, I merely came back to water the roses. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

Algernon. He's gone to order the dog-cart for me.

Cecily. Oh, is he going to take you for a nice drive?

Algernon. He's going to send me away.

Cecily. Then have we got to part?

Algernon. I am afraid so. It's a very painful parting.

Cecily. It is always painful to part from people whom one has known for a very brief space of time. The absence of old friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a momentary separation from anyone to whom one has just been introduced is almost unbearable.

Algernon. Thank you.

[Enter **Merriman**.]

Merriman. The dog-cart is at the door, sir. [**Algernon** looks appealingly at **Cecily**.]

Cecily. It can wait, Merriman for . . . five minutes.

Merriman. Yes, Miss. [Exit **Merriman**.]

Algernon. I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

Cecily. I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me, I will copy your remarks into my diary. [Goes over to table and begins writing in diary.]

Algernon. Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

Cecily. Oh no. [Puts her hand over it.] You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection'. You can go on. I am quite ready for more.

Algernon. [Somewhat taken aback.] Ahem! Ahem!

Cecily. Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don't know how to spell a cough. [Writes as **Algernon** speaks.]

Algernon. [Speaking very rapidly.] Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

Cecily. I don't think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

Algernon. Cecily!

[Enter **Merriman**.]

Merriman. The dog-cart is waiting, sir.

Algernon. Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.

Merriman. [Looks at **Cecily**, who makes no sign.] Yes, sir.

[**Merriman** retires.]

Cecily. Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.

Algernon. Oh, I don't care about Jack. I don't care for anybody in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

Cecily. You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

Algernon. For the last three months?

Cecily. Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

Algernon. But how did we become engaged?

Cecily. Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him, after all. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

Algernon. Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled?

Cecily. On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lover's knot I promised you always to wear.

Algernon. Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

Cecily. Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life. And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters. [Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.]

Algernon. My letters! But, my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

Cecily. You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

Algernon. Oh, do let me read them, Cecily?

Cecily. Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. [Replaces box.] The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

Algernon. But was our engagement ever broken off?

Cecily. Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see the entry if you like. [Shows diary.] 'To-day I broke off my engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming.'

Algernon. But why on earth did you break it off? What had I done? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.

Cecily. It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out.

Algernon. [Crossing to her, and kneeling.] What a perfect angel you are, Cecily.

Cecily. You dear romantic boy. [He kisses her, she puts her fingers through his hair.] I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

Algernon. Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

Cecily. I am so glad.

Algernon. You'll never break off our engagement again, Cecily?

Cecily. I don't think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.

Algernon. Yes, of course. [Nervously.]

Cecily. You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. [**Algernon** rises, **Cecily** also.] There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

Algernon. But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

Cecily. But what name?

Algernon. Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for instance . . .

Cecily. But I don't like the name of Algernon.

Algernon. Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon. But seriously, Cecily . . . [Moving to her] . . . if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?

Cecily. [Rising.] I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention.

Algernon. Ahem! Cecily! [Picking up hat.] Your Rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rites and ceremonials of the Church?

Cecily. Oh, yes. Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows.

Algernon. I must see him at once on a most important christening—I mean on most important business.

Cecily. Oh!

Algernon. I shan't be away more than half an hour.

Cecily. Considering that we have been engaged since February the 14th, and that I only met you to-day for the first time, I think it is rather hard that you should leave me for so long a period as half an hour. Couldn't you make it twenty minutes?

Algernon. I'll be back in no time.

[Kisses her and rushes down the garden.]

Cecily. What an impetuous boy he is! I like his hair so much. I must enter his proposal in my diary.

[Enter **Merriman**.]

Merriman. A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr. Worthing. On very important business, Miss Fairfax states.

Cecily. Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?

Merriman. Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the Rectory some time ago.

Cecily. Pray ask the lady to come out here; Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

Merriman. Yes, Miss. [Goes out.]

Cecily. Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many good elderly women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London. I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.

[Enter **Merriman**.]

Merriman. Miss Fairfax.

[Enter **Gwendolen**.]

[Exit **Merriman**.]

Cecily. [Advancing to meet her.] Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

Gwendolen. Cecily Cardew? [Moving to her and shaking hands.] What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.

Cecily. How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.

Gwendolen. [Still standing up.] I may call you Cecily, may I not?

Cecily. With pleasure!

Gwendolen. And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

Cecily. If you wish.

Gwendolen. Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

Cecily. I hope so. [A pause. They both sit down together.]

Gwendolen. Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose?

Cecily. I don't think so.

Gwendolen. Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

Cecily. Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

Gwendolen. [After examining **Cecily** carefully through a lorgnette.] You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

Cecily. Oh no! I live here.

Gwendolen. [Severely.] Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

Cecily. Oh no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

Gwendolen. Indeed?

Cecily. My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

Gwendolen. Your guardian?

Cecily. Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

Gwendolen. Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. [Rising and going to her.] I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly—

Cecily. Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

Gwendolen. Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.

Cecily. I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

Gwendolen. Yes.

Cecily. Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his brother—his elder brother.

Gwendolen. [Sitting down again.] Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

Cecily. I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

Gwendolen. Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not? Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

Cecily. Quite sure. [A pause.] In fact, I am going to be his.

Gwendolen. [Inquiringly.] I beg your pardon?

Cecily. [Rather shy and confidingly.] Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

Gwendolen. [Quite politely, rising.] My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the *Morning Post* on Saturday at the latest.

Cecily. [Very politely, rising.] I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. [Shows diary.]

Gwendolen. [Examines diary through her lorgnettte carefully.] It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. [Produces diary of her own.] I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

Cecily. It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

Gwendolen. [Meditatively.] If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand.

Cecily. [Thoughtfully and sadly.] Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

Gwendolen. Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

Cecily. Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

Gwendolen. [Satirically.] I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

[Enter **Merriman**, followed by the footman. He carries a salver, table cloth, and plate stand. **Cecily** is about to retort. The presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.]

Merriman. Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss?

Cecily. [Sternly, in a calm voice.] Yes, as usual. [**Merriman** begins to clear table and lay cloth. A long pause. **Cecily** and **Gwendolen** glare at each other.]

Gwendolen. Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

Cecily. Oh! yes! a great many. From the top of one of the hills quite close one can see five counties.

Gwendolen. Five counties! I don't think I should like that; I hate crowds.

Cecily. [Sweetly.] I suppose that is why you live in town? [**Gwendolen** bites her lip, and beats her foot nervously with her parasol.]

Gwendolen. [Looking round.] Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

Cecily. So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

Gwendolen. I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

Cecily. Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

Gwendolen. Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death.

Cecily. Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic amongst them, I have been told. May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

Gwendolen. [With elaborate politeness.] Thank you. [Aside.] Detestable girl! But I require tea!

Cecily. [Sweetly.] Sugar?

Gwendolen. [Superciliously.] No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more. [**Cecily** looks angrily at her, takes up the tongs and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup.]

Cecily. [Severely.] Cake or bread and butter?

Gwendolen. [In a bored manner.] Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

Cecily. [Cuts a very large slice of cake, and puts it on the tray.] Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

[**Merriman** does so, and goes out with footman. **Gwendolen** drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.]

Gwendolen. You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

Cecily. [Rising.] To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl there are no lengths to which I would not go.

Gwendolen. From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

Cecily. It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighbourhood.

[Enter **Jack**.]

Gwendolen. [Catching sight of him.] Ernest! My own Ernest!

Jack. Gwendolen! Darling! [Offers to kiss her.]

Gwendolen. [Draws back.] A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? [Points to**Cecily**.]

Jack. [Laughing.] To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

Gwendolen. Thank you. You may! [Offers her cheek.]

Cecily. [Very sweetly.] I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

Gwendolen. I beg your pardon?

Cecily. This is Uncle Jack.

Gwendolen. [Receding.] Jack! Oh!

[Enter **Algernon**.]

Cecily. Here is Ernest.

Algernon. [Goes straight over to **Cecily** without noticing any one else.] My own love! [Offers to kiss her.]

Cecily. [Drawing back.] A moment, Ernest! May I ask you—are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

Algernon. [Looking round.] To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

Cecily. Yes! to good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

Algernon. [Laughing.] Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

Cecily. Thank you. [Presenting her cheek to be kissed.] You may. [**Algernon** kisses her.]

Gwendolen. I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

Cecily. [Breaking away from **Algernon**.] Algernon Moncrieff! Oh! [The two girls move towards each other and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection.]

Cecily. Are you called Algernon?

Algernon. I cannot deny it.

Cecily. Oh!

Gwendolen. Is your name really John?

Jack. [Standing rather proudly.] I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is John. It has been John for years.

Cecily. [To **Gwendolen**.] A gross deception has been practised on both of us.

Gwendolen. My poor wounded Cecily!

Cecily. My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

Gwendolen. [Slowly and seriously.] You will call me sister, will you not? [They embrace. **Jack** and **Algernon** groan and walk up and down.]

Cecily. [Rather brightly.] There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian.

Gwendolen. An admirable idea! Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be permitted to put to you. Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother Ernest, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is at present.

Jack. [Slowly and hesitatingly.] Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However, I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

Cecily. [Surprised.] No brother at all?

Jack. [Cheerily.] None!

Gwendolen. [Severely.] Had you never a brother of any kind?

Jack. [Pleasantly.] Never. Not even of any kind.

Gwendolen. I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to any one.

Cecily. It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl suddenly to find herself in. Is it?

Gwendolen. Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

Cecily. No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?

[They retire into the house with scornful looks.]

Jack. This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?

Algernon. Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

Jack. Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.

Algernon. That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

Jack. Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens!

Algernon. Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature.

Jack. Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run down to the country quite so often as you used to do, dear Algy. And a very good thing too.

Algernon. Your brother is a little off colour, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either.

Jack. As for your conduct towards Miss Cardew, I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is my ward.

Algernon. I can see no possible defence at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

Jack. I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

Algernon. Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

Jack. There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

Algernon. I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united.

Jack. Well, that is no business of yours.

Algernon. If it was my business, I wouldn't talk about it. [Begins to eat muffins.] It is very vulgar to talk about one's business. Only people like stock-brokers do that, and then merely at dinner parties.

Jack. How can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

Algernon. Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

Jack. I say it's perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

Algernon. When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am in really great trouble, as any one who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except food and drink. At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. [Rising.]

Jack. [Rising.] Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. [Takes muffins from**Algernon**.]

Algernon. [Offering tea-cake.] I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

Jack. Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

Algernon. But you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

Jack. I said it was perfectly heartless of you, under the circumstances. That is a very different thing.

Algernon. That may be. But the muffins are the same. [He seizes the muffin-dish from **Jack**.]

Jack. Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.

Algernon. You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. It's absurd. I never go without my dinner. No one ever does, except vegetarians and people like that. Besides I have just made arrangements with Dr. Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six under the name of Ernest.

Jack. My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense the better. I made arrangements this morning with Dr. Chasuble to be christened myself at 5.30, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. Gwendolen would wish it. We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I have ever been christened by anybody. I should think it extremely probable I never was, and so does Dr. Chasuble. It is entirely different in your case. You have been christened already.

Algernon. Yes, but I have not been christened for years.

Jack. Yes, but you have been christened. That is the important thing.

Algernon. Quite so. So I know my constitution can stand it. If you are not quite sure about your ever having been christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your venturing on it now. It might make you very unwell. You can hardly have forgotten that some one very closely connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in Paris by a severe chill.

Jack. Yes, but you said yourself that a severe chill was not hereditary.

Algernon. It usen't to be, I know—but I daresay it is now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.

Jack. [Picking up the muffin-dish.] Oh, that is nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

Algernon. Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. [Takes them.] I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

Jack. But I hate tea-cake.

Algernon. Why on earth then do you allow tea-cake to be served up for your guests? What ideas you have of hospitality!

Jack. Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. Why don't you go!

Algernon. I haven't quite finished my tea yet! and there is still one muffin left. [**Jack** groans, and sinks into a chair. **Algernon** still continues eating.]

ACT DROP

THIRD ACT

SCENE

Morning-room at the Manor House.

[**Gwendolen** and **Cecily** are at the window, looking out into the garden.]

Gwendolen. The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house, as any one else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

Cecily. They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

Gwendolen. [After a pause.] They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?

Cecily. But I haven't got a cough.

Gwendolen. They're looking at us. What effrontery!

Cecily. They're approaching. That's very forward of them.

Gwendolen. Let us preserve a dignified silence.

Cecily. Certainly. It's the only thing to do now. [Enter **Jack** followed by **Algernon**. They whistle some dreadful popular air from a British Opera.]

Gwendolen. This dignified silence seems to produce an unpleasant effect.

Cecily. A most distasteful one.

Gwendolen. But we will not be the first to speak.

Cecily. Certainly not.

Gwendolen. Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

Cecily. Gwendolen, your common sense is invaluable. Mr. Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

Algernon. In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

Cecily. [To **Gwendolen**.] That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?

Gwendolen. Yes, dear, if you can believe him.

Cecily. I don't. But that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer.

Gwendolen. True. In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity is the vital thing. Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer to me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible?

Jack. Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

Gwendolen. I have the gravest doubts upon the subject. But I intend to crush them. This is not the moment for German scepticism. [Moving to **Cecily**.] Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's. That seems to me to have the stamp of truth upon it.

Cecily. I am more than content with what Mr. Moncrieff said. His voice alone inspires one with absolute credulity.

Gwendolen. Then you think we should forgive them?

Cecily. Yes. I mean no.

Gwendolen. True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one.

Cecily. Could we not both speak at the same time?

Gwendolen. An excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Will you take the time from me?

Cecily. Certainly. [**Gwendolen** beats time with uplifted finger.]

Gwendolen and **Cecily** [Speaking together.] Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!

Jack and **Algernon** [Speaking together.] Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

Gwendolen. [To **Jack**.] For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

Jack. I am.

Cecily. [To **Algernon**.] To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

Algernon. I am!

Gwendolen. How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us.

Jack. We are. [Clasps hands with **Algernon**.]

Cecily. They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.

Gwendolen. [To **Jack**.] Darling!

Algernon. [To **Cecily**.] Darling! [They fall into each other's arms.]

[Enter **Merriman**. When he enters he coughs loudly, seeing the situation.]

Merriman. Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

Jack. Good heavens!

[Enter **Lady Bracknell**. The couples separate in alarm. Exit **Merriman**.]

Lady Bracknell. Gwendolen! What does this mean?

Gwendolen. Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

Lady Bracknell. Come here. Sit down. Sit down immediately. Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. [Turns to **Jack**.] Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid, whose confidence I purchased by means of a small coin, I followed her at once by a luggage train. Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a permanent income on Thought. I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. But of course, you will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.

Jack. I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen Lady Bracknell!

Lady Bracknell. You are nothing of the kind, sir. And now, as regards Algernon! . . . Algernon!

Algernon. Yes, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell. May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr. Bunbury resides?

Algernon. [Stammering.] Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

Lady Bracknell. Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

Algernon. [Airily.] Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

Lady Bracknell. What did he die of?

Algernon. Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded.

Lady Bracknell. Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage? I was not aware that Mr. Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity.

Algernon. My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died.

Lady Bracknell. He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind at the last to some definite course of action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now that we have finally got rid of this Mr. Bunbury, may I ask, Mr. Worthing, who is that young person whose hand my nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

Jack. That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward. [**Lady Bracknell** bows coldly to **Cecily**.]

Algernon. I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell. I beg your pardon?

Cecily. Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell. [With a shiver, crossing to the sofa and sitting down.] I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this particular part of Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary inquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus. [**Jack** looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself.]

Jack. [In a clear, cold voice.] Miss Cardew is the grand-daughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew of 149 Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporran, Fifeshire, N.B.

Lady Bracknell. That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen. But what proof have I of their authenticity?

Jack. I have carefully preserved the Court Guides of the period. They are open to your inspection, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell. [Grimly.] I have known strange errors in that publication.

Jack. Miss Cardew's family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby, and Markby.

Lady Bracknell. Markby, Markby, and Markby? A firm of the very highest position in their profession. Indeed I am told that one of the Mr. Markby's is occasionally to be seen at dinner parties. So far I am satisfied.

Jack. [Very irritably.] How extremely kind of you, Lady Bracknell! I have also in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism, whooping cough, registration, vaccination, confirmation, and the measles; both the German and the English variety.

Lady Bracknell. Ah! A life crowded with incident, I see; though perhaps somewhat too exciting for a young girl. I am not myself in favour of premature experiences. [Rises, looks at her watch.] Gwendolen! the time approaches for our departure. We have not a moment to lose. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

Jack. Oh! about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the Funds. That is all. Goodbye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

Lady Bracknell. [Sitting down again.] A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. [To **Cecily**.] Come over here, dear. [**Cecily** goes across.] Pretty child! your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A thoroughly experienced French maid produces a really marvellous result in a very brief space of time. I remember recommending one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own husband did not know her.

Jack. And after six months nobody knew her.

Lady Bracknell. [Glares at **Jack** for a few moments. Then bends, with a practised smile, to **Cecily**.] Kindly turn round, sweet child. [**Cecily** turns completely round.] No, the side view is what I want. [**Cecily** presents her profile.] Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your profile. The two weak points in our age are its want of principle and its want of profile. The chin a little higher, dear. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn. They are worn very high, just at present. Algernon!

Algernon. Yes, Aunt Augusta!

Lady Bracknell. There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

Algernon. Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care twopence about social possibilities.

Lady Bracknell. Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. [To**Cecily**.] Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend upon. But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

Algernon. Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell. Cecily, you may kiss me!

Cecily. [Kisses her.] Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell. You may also address me as Aunt Augusta for the future.

Cecily. Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell. The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

Algernon. Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Cecily. Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell. To speak frankly, I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

Jack. I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

Lady Bracknell. Upon what grounds may I ask? Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?

Jack. It pains me very much to have to speak frankly to you, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but the fact is that I do not approve at all of his moral character. I suspect him of being untruthful. [**Algernon** and **Cecily** look at him in indignant amazement.]

Lady Bracknell. Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian.

Jack. I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon during my temporary absence in London on an important question of romance, he obtained admission to my house by means of the false pretence of being my brother. Under an assumed name he drank, I've just been informed by my butler, an entire pint bottle of my Perrier-Jouet, Brut, '89; wine I was specially reserving for myself. Continuing his disgraceful deception, he succeeded in the course of the afternoon in alienating the affections of my only ward. He subsequently stayed to tea, and devoured every single muffin. And what makes his conduct all the more heartless is, that he was perfectly well aware from the first that I have no brother, that I never had a brother, and that I don't intend to have a brother, not even of any kind. I distinctly told him so myself yesterday afternoon.

Lady Bracknell. Ahem! Mr. Worthing, after careful consideration I have decided entirely to overlook my nephew's conduct to you.

Jack. That is very generous of you, Lady Bracknell. My own decision, however, is unalterable. I decline to give my consent.

Lady Bracknell. [To **Cecily**.] Come here, sweet child. [**Cecily** goes over.] How old are you, dear?

Cecily. Well, I am really only eighteen, but I always admit to twenty when I go to evening parties.

Lady Bracknell. You are perfectly right in making some slight alteration. Indeed, no woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating . . . [In a meditative manner.] Eighteen, but admitting to twenty at evening parties. Well, it will not be very long before you are of age and free from the restraints of tutelage. So I don't think your guardian's consent is, after all, a matter of any importance.

Jack. Pray excuse me, Lady Bracknell, for interrupting you again, but it is only fair to tell you that according to the terms of her grandfather's will Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

Lady Bracknell. That does not seem to me to be a grave objection. Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years. Lady Dumbleton is an instance in point. To my own knowledge she has been thirty-five ever since she arrived at the age of forty, which was many years ago now. I see no reason why our dear Cecily should not be even still more attractive at the age you mention than she is at present. There will be a large accumulation of property.

Cecily. Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

Algernon. Of course I could, Cecily. You know I could.

Cecily. Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I couldn't wait all that time. I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. It always makes me rather cross. I am not punctual myself, I know, but I do like punctuality in others, and waiting, even to be married, is quite out of the question.

Algernon. Then what is to be done, Cecily?

Cecily. I don't know, Mr. Moncrieff.

Lady Bracknell. My dear Mr. Worthing, as Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five—a remark which I am bound to say seems to me to show a somewhat impatient nature—I would beg of you to reconsider your decision.

Jack. But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter is entirely in your own hands. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will most gladly allow your nephew to form an alliance with my ward.

Lady Bracknell. [Rising and drawing herself up.] You must be quite aware that what you propose is out of the question.

Jack. Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.

Lady Bracknell. That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. [Pulls out her watch.] Come, dear, [**Gwendolen** rises] we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform.

[Enter **Dr. Chasuble**.]

Chasuble. Everything is quite ready for the christenings.

Lady Bracknell. The christenings, sir! Is not that somewhat premature?

Chasuble. [Looking rather puzzled, and pointing to **Jack** and **Algernon**.] Both these gentlemen have expressed a desire for immediate baptism.

Lady Bracknell. At their age? The idea is grotesque and irreligious! Algernon, I forbid you to be baptized. I will not hear of such excesses. Lord Bracknell would be highly displeased if he learned that that was the way in which you wasted your time and money.

Chasuble. Am I to understand then that there are to be no christenings at all this afternoon?

Jack. I don't think that, as things are now, it would be of much practical value to either of us, Dr. Chasuble.

Chasuble. I am grieved to hear such sentiments from you, Mr. Worthing. They savour of the heretical views of the Anabaptists, views that I have completely refuted in four of my unpublished sermons. However, as your present mood seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will return to the church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed by the pew-opener that for the last hour and a half Miss Prism has been waiting for me in the vestry.

Lady Bracknell. [Starting.] Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

Chasuble. Yes, Lady Bracknell. I am on my way to join her.

Lady Bracknell. Pray allow me to detain you for a moment. This matter may prove to be one of vital importance to Lord Bracknell and myself. Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education?

Chasuble. [Somewhat indignantly.] She is the most cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.

Lady Bracknell. It is obviously the same person. May I ask what position she holds in your household?

Chasuble. [Severely.] I am a celibate, madam.

Jack. [Interposing.] Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion.

Lady Bracknell. In spite of what I hear of her, I must see her at once. Let her be sent for.

Chasuble. [Looking off.] She approaches; she is nigh.

[Enter **Miss Prism** hurriedly.]

Miss Prism. I was told you expected me in the vestry, dear Canon. I have been waiting for you there for an hour and three-quarters. [Catches sight of **Lady Bracknell**, who has fixed her with a stony glare. **Miss Prism** grows pale and quails. She looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape.]

Lady Bracknell. [In a severe, judicial voice.] Prism! [**Miss Prism** bows her head in shame.] Come here, Prism! [**Miss Prism** approaches in a humble manner.] Prism! Where is that baby? [General consternation. The **Canon** starts back in horror. **Algernon** and **Jack** pretend to be anxious to shield **Cecily** and **Gwendolen** from hearing the details of a terrible public scandal.] Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house, Number 104, Upper Grosvenor Street, in charge of a perambulator that contained a baby of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigations of the Metropolitan police, the perambulator was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. [**Miss Prism** starts in involuntary indignation.] But the baby was not there! [Every one looks at **Miss Prism**.] Prism! Where is that baby? [A pause.]

Miss Prism. Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the basinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

Jack. [Who has been listening attentively.] But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

Miss Prism. Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

Jack. Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.

Miss Prism. I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

Jack. What railway station?

Miss Prism. [Quite crushed.] Victoria. The Brighton line. [Sinks into a chair.]

Jack. I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

Gwendolen. If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life. [Exit **Jack** in great excitement.]

Chasuble. What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

Lady Bracknell. I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position strange coincidences are not supposed to occur. They are hardly considered the thing.

[Noises heard overhead as if some one was throwing trunks about. Every one looks up.]

Cecily. Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

Chasuble. Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

Lady Bracknell. This noise is extremely unpleasant. It sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.

Chasuble. [Looking up.] It has stopped now. [The noise is redoubled.]

Lady Bracknell. I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

Gwendolen. This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last. [Enter **Jack** with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.]

Jack. [Rushing over to **Miss Prism**.] Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

Miss Prism. [Calmly.] It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

Jack. [In a pathetic voice.] Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

Miss Prism. [Amazed.] You?

Jack. [Embracing her.] Yes . . . mother!

Miss Prism. [Recoiling in indignant astonishment.] Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

Jack. Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. [Tries to embrace her again.]

Miss Prism. [Still more indignant.] Mr. Worthing, there is some error. [Pointing to **Lady Bracknell**.] There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

Jack. [After a pause.] Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

Lady Bracknell. I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

Jack. Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother? [Seizes hold of **Algernon**.] Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. Miss Prism,

my unfortunate brother. Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algy, you young scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect in the future. You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

Algernon. Well, not till to-day, old boy, I admit. I did my best, however, though I was out of practice.

[Shakes hands.]

Gwendolen. [To **Jack**.] My own! But what own are you? What is your Christian name, now that you have become some one else?

Jack. Good heavens! . . . I had quite forgotten that point. Your decision on the subject of my name is irrevocable, I suppose?

Gwendolen. I never change, except in my affections.

Cecily. What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!

Jack. Then the question had better be cleared up at once. Aunt Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, had I been christened already?

Lady Bracknell. Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.

Jack. Then I was christened! That is settled. Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

Lady Bracknell. Being the eldest son you were naturally christened after your father.

Jack. [Irritably.] Yes, but what was my father's Christian name?

Lady Bracknell. [Meditatively.] I cannot at the present moment recall what the General's Christian name was. But I have no doubt he had one. He was eccentric, I admit. But only in later years. And that was the result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestion, and other things of that kind.

Jack. Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's Christian name was?

Algernon. My dear boy, we were never even on speaking terms. He died before I was a year old.

Jack. His name would appear in the Army Lists of the period, I suppose, Aunt Augusta?

Lady Bracknell. The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life. But I have no doubt his name would appear in any military directory.

Jack. The Army Lists of the last forty years are here. These delightful records should have been my constant study. [Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out.] M. Generals . . . Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, what ghastly names they have—Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian names, Ernest John. [Puts book very quietly down and speaks quite calmly.] I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.

Lady Bracknell. Yes, I remember now that the General was called Ernest, I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

Gwendolen. Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name!

Jack. Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?

Gwendolen. I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

Jack. My own one!

Chasuble. [To **Miss Prism**.] Lætitia! [Embraces her]

Miss Prism. [Enthusiastically.] Frederick! At last!

Algernon. Cecily! [Embraces her.] At last!

Jack. Gwendolen! [Embraces her.] At last!

Lady Bracknell. My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

Jack. On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

TABLEAU

Contributors and Attributions

Public domain content

- The Importance of Being Earnest. **Authored by**: Oscar Wilde. **Located at**: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/844/844-h/844-h.htm. **License**: *Public Domain: No Known Copyright*

7.6: Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **6.1: Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, 1895** by Lumen Learning is licensed Public Domain.

7.6.1: Critical Reviews of Film Version of The Importance of Being Earnest

Click on the links below to read the following from the 2002 film adaptation of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. As you read, identify relevant passages from each review dealing with differences between Wilde's stage directions and the choices made by Oliver Parker, the film director. While doing so, take note of the general opinion the reviewers have of these changes.

- Review by James Berardinelli from Reel Views
- Review by TCh from Time Out
- "Director Ruins 'Being Earnest'" by Mick LaSalle from SF Gate
- Review by Robert Koehler from *Variety*

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Introduction to Literature. **Provided by**: Extended Learning Institute of Northern Virginia Community College. **Located at**: http://eli.nvcc.edu/. **License**: *CC BY: Attribution*

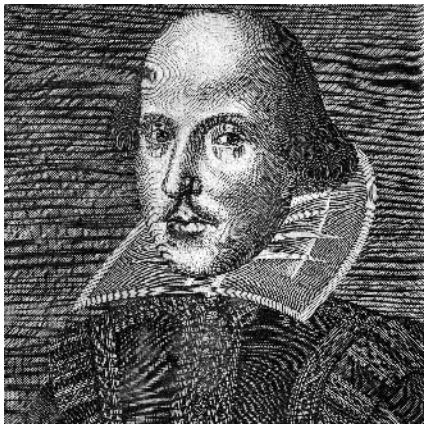
7.6.1: Critical Reviews of Film Version of The Importance of Being Earnest is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **6.2: Critical Reviews of Film Version of The Importance of Being Earnest** by Lumen Learning is licensed Public Domain.

7.7: Featured Playwright - William Shakespeare

Biography

William Shakespeare is widely considered one of the most famous, if not the most famous, writers in the history of the English language.



This engraving of Shakespeare by Martin Droeshout appeared in Shakespeare's first published folio in 1623. It is in the public domain.

Since William Shakespeare lived more than 400 years ago, and many records from that time are lost or never existed in the first place, we don't know everything about his life. For example, we know that he was baptized in Stratford-upon-Avon, 100 miles northwest of London, on April 26, 1564. But we don't know his exact birthdate, which must have been a few days earlier.

We do know that Shakespeare's life revolved around two locations: Stratford and London. He grew up, had a family, and bought property in Stratford, but he worked in London, the center of English theater. As an actor, a playwright, and a partner in a leading acting company, he became both prosperous and well-known. Even without knowing everything about his life, fans of Shakespeare have imagined and reimagined him according to their own tastes.

Birth and Childhood

William Shakespeare was probably born on about April 23, 1564, the date that is traditionally given for his birth. He was John and Mary Shakespeare's oldest surviving child; their first two children, both girls, did not live beyond infancy. Growing up as the big brother of the family, William had three younger brothers, Gilbert, Richard, and Edmund, and two younger sisters: Anne, who died at seven, and Joan.

Their father, John Shakespeare, was a leatherworker who specialized in the soft white leather used for gloves and similar items. A prosperous businessman, he married Mary Arden, of the prominent Arden family. John rose through local offices in Stratford, becoming an alderman and eventually, when William was five, the town bailiff — much like a mayor. Not long after that, however, John Shakespeare stepped back from public life; we don't know why.

Shakespeare, as the son of a leading Stratford citizen, almost certainly attended Stratford's grammar school. Like all such schools, its curriculum consisted of an intense emphasis on the Latin classics, including memorization, writing, and acting classic Latin plays. Shakespeare most likely attended until about age 15.

Marriage and Children

A few years after he left school, in late 1582, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. She was already expecting their first-born child, Susanna, which was a fairly common situation at the time. When they married, Anne was 26 and William was 18. Anne grew up just outside Stratford in the village of Shottery. After marrying, she spent the rest of her life in Stratford.

In early 1585, the couple had twins, Judith and Hamnet, completing the family (interestingly, Hamnet is one letter away from being Hamlet). In the years ahead, Anne and the children lived in Stratford while Shakespeare worked in London, although we don't know when he moved there. Some later observers have suggested that this separation, and the couple's relatively few children, were signs of a strained marriage, but we do not know that, either. Someone pursuing a theater career had no choice but to work in London, and many branches of the Shakespeares had small families.

Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, died in 1596 at the age of 11. His older daughter Susanna later married a well-to-do Stratford doctor, John Hall. Their daughter Elizabeth, Shakespeare's first grandchild, was born in 1608. In 1616, just months before his death, Shakespeare's daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney, a Stratford vintner. The family subsequently died out, leaving no direct descendants of Shakespeare.

London Theater

For several years after Judith and Hamnet's arrival in 1585, nothing is known for certain of Shakespeare's activities: how he earned a living, when he moved from Stratford, or how he got his start in the theater.

Following this gap in the record, the first definite mention of Shakespeare is in 1592 as an established London actor and playwright, mocked by a contemporary as a "Shake-scene." The same writer alludes to one of Shakespeare's earliest history plays, *Henry VI, Part 3*, which must already have been performed. The next year, in 1593, Shakespeare published a long poem, *Venus and Adonis*. The first quarto editions of his early plays appeared in 1594. For more than two decades, Shakespeare had multiple roles in the London theater as an

actor, playwright, and, in time, a business partner in a major acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (renamed the King's Men in 1603). Over the years, he became steadily more famous in the London theater world; his name, which was not even listed on the first quartos of his plays, became a regular feature—clearly a selling point—on later title pages.

Shakespeare prospered financially from his partnership in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men), as well as from his writing and acting. He invested much of his wealth in real-estate purchases in Stratford and bought the second-largest house in town, New Place, in 1597.

Final Years

Among the last plays that Shakespeare worked on was *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which he wrote with a frequent collaborator, John Fletcher, most likely in 1613. He died on April 23, 1616 — the traditional date of his birthday, though his precise birthdate is unknown. We also do not know the cause of his death. His brother-in-law had died a week earlier, which could imply infectious disease, but Shakespeare's health may have had a longer decline.

The memorial bust of Shakespeare at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford is considered one of two authentic likenesses, because it was approved by people who knew him. (The bust in the Folger's Paster Reading Room is a copy of this statue.) The other such likeness is the engraving by Martin Droeshout in the 1623 First Folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, produced seven years after his death by his friends and colleagues from the King's Men.

Hip-Hop and Shakespeare

While Shakespeare's life may seem distant or like we cannot relate to it, and his writing may be difficult to understand, the reality is that his writing has endured the ages because it is not as different as it first seems. In fact, there are a surprising number of similarities between Shakespeare's life and work and our modern understandings of the world. Check out the video below to learn more.



In the video above, rapper Akala discusses the similarities between Shakespeare and hip-hop. Click on the video to enable closed-captioning options.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from "Shakespeare's Life" on the Folger Shakespeare Library's Website, 1996-2019, CC BY-SA 4.0

This page titled 7.7: Featured Playwright - William Shakespeare is shared under a CC BY-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **8.4: Featured Playwright - William Shakespeare** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

7.7.1: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 1 (1623)

Act I, Scene 1

A desert place.

[Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches]

- **First Witch.** When shall we three meet again
  In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
- **Second Witch.** When the hurlyburly's done,
  When the battle's lost and won.
- **Third Witch.** That will be ere the set of sun.
- **First Witch.** Where the place?
- **Second Witch.** Upon the heath.
- **Third Witch.** There to meet with Macbeth.
- **First Witch.** I come, Graymalkin!
- **Second Witch.** Paddock calls.
- **Third Witch.** Anon.
- **All.** Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
  Hover through the fog and filthy air.

[Exeunt]

Act I, Scene 2

A camp near Forres.

[Alarum within. Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN,] [p]LENNOX, with Attendants, meeting a bleeding Sergeant]

- **Duncan.** What bloody man is that? He can report,
  As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt
  The newest state.
- **Malcolm.** This is the sergeant
  Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
  'Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!
  Say to the king the knowledge of the broil
  As thou didst leave it.
- **Sergeant.** Doubtful it stood;
  As two spent swimmers, that do cling together
  And choke their art. The merciless Macdonwald—
  Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
  The multiplying villanies of nature
  Do swarm upon him—from the western isles
  Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied;
  And fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,
  Show'd like a rebel's whore: but all's too weak:
  For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name—
  Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
  Which smoked with bloody execution,
  Like valour's minion carved out his passage
  Till he faced the slave;

Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

- **Duncan.** O valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!
- **Sergeant.** As whence the sun 'gins his reflection
Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders break,
So from that spring whence comfort seem'd to come
Discomfort swells. Mark, king of Scotland, mark:
No sooner justice had with valour arm'd
Compell'd these skipping kerns to trust their heels,
But the Norweyan lord surveying vantage,
With furbish'd arms and new supplies of men
Began a fresh assault.
- **Duncan.** Dismay'd not this
Our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?
- **Sergeant.** Yes;
As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion.
If I say sooth, I must report they were
As cannons overcharged with double cracks, so they
Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe:
Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds,
Or memorise another Golgotha,
I cannot tell.
But I am faint, my gashes cry for help.
- **Duncan.** So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;
They smack of honour both. Go get him surgeons.
[Exit Sergeant, attended]
Who comes here?

[Enter ROSS]

- **Malcolm.** The worthy thane of Ross.
- **Lennox.** What a haste looks through his eyes! So should he look
That seems to speak things strange.
- **Ross.** God save the king!
- **Duncan.** Whence camest thou, worthy thane?
- **Ross.** From Fife, great king;
Where the Norweyan banners flout the sky
And fan our people cold. Norway himself,
With terrible numbers,
Assisted by that most disloyal traitor
The thane of Cawdor, began a dismal conflict;
Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapp'd in proof,
Confronted him with self-comparisons,
Point against point rebellious, arm 'gainst arm.
Curbing his lavish spirit: and, to conclude,
The victory fell on us.
- **Duncan.** Great happiness!

- **Ross.** That now
  Sweno, the Norways' king, craves composition:
  Nor would we deign him burial of his men
  Till he disbursed at Saint Colme's inch
  Ten thousand dollars to our general use.
- **Duncan.** No more that thane of Cawdor shall deceive
  Our bosom interest: go pronounce his present death,
  And with his former title greet Macbeth.
- **Ross.** I'll see it done.
- **Duncan.** What he hath lost noble Macbeth hath won.

[Exeunt]

Act I, Scene 3

A heath near Forres.

[Thunder. Enter the three Witches]

- **First Witch.** Where hast thou been, sister?
- **Second Witch.** Killing swine.
- **Third Witch.** Sister, where thou?
- **First Witch.** A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,
  And munch'd, and munch'd, and munch'd:—
  "Give me," quoth I:
  "Aroint thee, witch!" the rump-fed ronyon cries.
  Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger:
  But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
  And, like a rat without a tail,
  I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.
- **Second Witch.** I'll give thee a wind.
- **First Witch.** Thou'rt kind.
- **Third Witch.** And I another.
- **First Witch.** I myself have all the other,
  And the very ports they blow,
  All the quarters that they know
  I' the shipman's card.
  I will drain him dry as hay:
  Sleep shall neither night nor day
  Hang upon his pent-house lid;
  He shall live a man forbid:
  Weary se'nnights nine times nine
  Shall he dwindle, peak and pine:
  Though his bark cannot be lost,
  Yet it shall be tempest-tost.
  Look what I have.
- **Second Witch.** Show me, show me.
- **First Witch.** Here I have a pilot's thumb,
  Wreck'd as homeward he did come.

[Drum within]

- **Third Witch.** A drum, a drum!
  Macbeth doth come.

- **All.** The weird sisters, hand in hand,
  Posters of the sea and land,
  Thus do go about, about:
  Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
  And thrice again, to make up nine.
  Peace! the charm's wound up.

[Enter MACBETH and BANQUO]

- **Macbeth.** So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

- **Banquo.** How far is't call'd to Forres? What are these
  So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
  That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
  And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught
  That man may question? You seem to understand me,
  By each at once her chappy finger laying
  Upon her skinny lips: you should be women,
  And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
  That you are so.

- **Macbeth.** Speak, if you can: what are you?

- **First Witch.** All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

- **Second Witch.** All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

- **Third Witch.** All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!

- **Banquo.** Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear
  Things that do sound so fair? I' the name of truth,
  Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
  Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
  You greet with present grace and great prediction
  Of noble having and of royal hope,
  That he seems rapt withal: to me you speak not.
  If you can look into the seeds of time,
  And say which grain will grow and which will not,
  Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
  Your favours nor your hate.

- **First Witch.** Hail!

- **Second Witch.** Hail!

- **Third Witch.** Hail!

- **First Witch.** Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

- **Second Witch.** Not so happy, yet much happier.

- **Third Witch.** Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none:
  So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

- **First Witch.** Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

- **Macbeth.** Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more:
  By Sinel's death I know I am thane of Glamis;
  But how of Cawdor? the thane of Cawdor lives,
  A prosperous gentleman; and to be king

Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence
You owe this strange intelligence? or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge you.

[Witches vanish]

- **Banquo.** The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
  And these are of them. Whither are they vanish'd?
- **Macbeth.** Into the air; and what seem'd corporal melted
  As breath into the wind. Would they had stay'd!
- **Banquo.** Were such things here as we do speak about?
  Or have we eaten on the insane root
  That takes the reason prisoner?
- **Macbeth.** Your children shall be kings.
- **Banquo.** You shall be king.
- **Macbeth.** And thane of Cawdor too: went it not so?
- **Banquo.** To the selfsame tune and words. Who's here?

[Enter ROSS and ANGUS]

- **Ross.** The king hath happily received, Macbeth,
  The news of thy success; and when he reads
  Thy personal venture in the rebels' fight,
  His wonders and his praises do contend
  Which should be thine or his: silenced with that,
  In viewing o'er the rest o' the selfsame day,
  He finds thee in the stout Norweyan ranks,
  Nothing afeard of what thyself didst make,
  Strange images of death. As thick as hail
  Came post with post; and every one did bear
  Thy praises in his kingdom's great defence,
  And pour'd them down before him.
- **Angus.** We are sent
  To give thee from our royal master thanks;
  Only to herald thee into his sight,
  Not pay thee.
- **Ross.** And, for an earnest of a greater honour,
  He bade me, from him, call thee thane of Cawdor:
  In which addition, hail, most worthy thane!
  For it is thine.
- **Banquo.** What, can the devil speak true?
- **Macbeth.** The thane of Cawdor lives: why do you dress me
  In borrow'd robes?
- **Angus.** Who was the thane lives yet;
  But under heavy judgment bears that life
  Which he deserves to lose. Whether he was combined
  With those of Norway, or did line the rebel
  With hidden help and vantage, or that with both
  He labour'd in his country's wreck, I know not;

But treasons capital, confess'd and proved,
Have overthrown him.

- **Macbeth.** *[Aside]* Glamis, and thane of Cawdor!
The greatest is behind.
[To ROSS and ANGUS]
Thanks for your pains.
[To BANQUO]
Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them?

- **Banquo.** That trusted home
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides the thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.
Cousins, a word, I pray you.

- **Macbeth.** *[Aside]*. Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.—I thank you, gentlemen.
[Aside] This supernatural soliciting]
Cannot be ill, cannot be good: if ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings:
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not.

- **Banquo.** Look, how our partner's rapt.

- **Macbeth.** *[Aside]* If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me,
Without my stir.

- **Banquo.** New horrors come upon him,
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould
But with the aid of use.

- **Macbeth.** *[Aside]* Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.

- **Banquo.** Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure.

- **Macbeth.** Give me your favour: my dull brain was wrought
With things forgotten. Kind gentlemen, your pains
Are register'd where every day I turn
The leaf to read them. Let us toward the king.
Think upon what hath chanced, and, at more time,

The interim having weigh'd it, let us speak
Our free hearts each to other.

- **Banquo.** Very gladly.
- **Macbeth.** Till then, enough. Come, friends.

[Exeunt]

Act I, Scene 4

Forres. The palace.

[Flourish. Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, LENNOX, and Attendants]

- **Duncan.** Is execution done on Cawdor? Are not
  Those in commission yet return'd?
- **Malcolm.** My liege,
  They are not yet come back. But I have spoke
  With one that saw him die: who did report
  That very frankly he confess'd his treasons,
  Implored your highness' pardon and set forth
  A deep repentance: nothing in his life
  Became him like the leaving it; he died
  As one that had been studied in his death
  To throw away the dearest thing he owed,
  As 'twere a careless trifle.
- **Duncan.** There's no art
  To find the mind's construction in the face:
  He was a gentleman on whom I built
  An absolute trust.
  [Enter MACBETH, BANQUO, ROSS, and ANGUS]
  O worthiest cousin!
  The sin of my ingratitude even now
  Was heavy on me: thou art so far before
  That swiftest wing of recompense is slow
  To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,
  That the proportion both of thanks and payment
  Might have been mine! only I have left to say,
  More is thy due than more than all can pay.
- **Macbeth.** The service and the loyalty I owe,
  In doing it, pays itself. Your highness' part
  Is to receive our duties; and our duties
  Are to your throne and state children and servants,
  Which do but what they should, by doing every thing
  Safe toward your love and honour.
- **Duncan.** Welcome hither:
  I have begun to plant thee, and will labour
  To make thee full of growing. Noble Banquo,
  That hast no less deserved, nor must be known
  No less to have done so, let me enfold thee
  And hold thee to my heart.
- **Banquo.** There if I grow,
  The harvest is your own.

- **Duncan.** My plenteous joys,
  Wanton in fulness, seek to hide themselves
  In drops of sorrow. Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
  And you whose places are the nearest, know
  We will establish our estate upon
  Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
  The Prince of Cumberland; which honour must
  Not unaccompanied invest him only,
  But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
  On all deservers. From hence to Inverness,
  And bind us further to you.
- **Macbeth.** The rest is labour, which is not used for you:
  I'll be myself the harbinger and make joyful
  The hearing of my wife with your approach;
  So humbly take my leave.
- **Duncan.** My worthy Cawdor!
- **Macbeth.** *[Aside]* The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step
  On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
  For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
  Let not light see my black and deep desires:
  The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
  Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

[Exit]

- **Duncan.** True, worthy Banquo; he is full so valiant,
  And in his commendations I am fed;
  It is a banquet to me. Let's after him,
  Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome:
  It is a peerless kinsman.

[Flourish. Exeunt]

Act I, Scene 5

Inverness. Macbeth's castle.

[Enter LADY MACBETH, reading a letter]

- **Lady Macbeth.** "They met me in the day of success: and I have
  learned by the perfectest report, they have more in
  them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire
  to question them further, they made themselves air,
  into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in
  the wonder of it, came missives from the king, who
  all-hailed me 'Thane of Cawdor;' by which title,
  before, these weird sisters saluted me, and referred
  me to the coming on of time, with 'Hail, king that
  shalt be!' This have I thought good to deliver
  thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou
  mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being
  ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it
  to thy heart, and farewell."
  Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
  What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;

It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'ldst have, great Glamis,
That which cries "Thus thou must do, if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone." Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.
[Enter a Messenger]
What is your tidings?

- **Messenger.** The king comes here to-night.
- **Lady Macbeth.** Thou'rt mad to say it:
  Is not thy master with him? who, were't so,
  Would have inform'd for preparation.
- **Messenger.** So please you, it is true: our thane is coming:
  One of my fellows had the speed of him,
  Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more
  Than would make up his message.
- **Lady Macbeth.** Give him tending;
  He brings great news.
  [Exit Messenger]
  The raven himself is hoarse
  That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
  Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
  That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
  And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
  Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
  Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
  That no compunctious visitings of nature
  Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
  The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
  And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
  Wherever in your sightless substances
  You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
  And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
  That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
  Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
  To cry "Hold, hold!"
  [Enter MACBETH]
  Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
  Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
  Thy letters have transported me beyond
  This ignorant present, and I feel now
  The future in the instant.

- **Macbeth.** My dearest love,
  Duncan comes here to-night.
- **Lady Macbeth.** And when goes hence?
- **Macbeth.** To-morrow, as he purposes.
- **Lady Macbeth.** O, never
  Shall sun that morrow see!
  Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
  May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
  Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
  Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
  But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
  Must be provided for: and you shall put
  This night's great business into my dispatch;
  Which shall to all our nights and days to come
  Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.
- **Macbeth.** We will speak further.
- **Lady Macbeth.** Only look up clear;
  To alter favour ever is to fear:
  Leave all the rest to me.

[Exeunt]

Act I, Scene 6

Before Macbeth's castle.

[Hautboys and torches. Enter DUNCAN, MALCOLM,] [p]DONALBAIN, BANQUO, LENNOX, MACDUFF, ROSS, ANGUS, and Attendants]

- **Duncan.** This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
  Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
  Unto our gentle senses.
- **Banquo.** This guest of summer,
  The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
  By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
  Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
  Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
  Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle:
  Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,
  The air is delicate.

[Enter LADY MACBETH]

- **Duncan.** See, see, our honour'd hostess!
  The love that follows us sometime is our trouble,
  Which still we thank as love. Herein I teach you
  How you shall bid God 'ild us for your pains,
  And thank us for your trouble.
- **Lady Macbeth.** All our service
  In every point twice done and then done double
  Were poor and single business to contend
  Against those honours deep and broad wherewith
  Your majesty loads our house: for those of old,

And the late dignities heap'd up to them,
We rest your hermits.

- **Duncan.** Where's the thane of Cawdor?
We coursed him at the heels, and had a purpose
To be his purveyor: but he rides well;
And his great love, sharp as his spur, hath holp him
To his home before us. Fair and noble hostess,
We are your guest to-night.

- **Lady Macbeth.** Your servants ever
Have theirs, themselves and what is theirs, in compt,
To make their audit at your highness' pleasure,
Still to return your own.

- **Duncan.** Give me your hand;
Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly,
And shall continue our graces towards him.
By your leave, hostess.

[Exeunt]

Act I, Scene 7

Macbeth's castle.

[Hautboys and torches. Enter a Sewer, and divers] [p]Servants with dishes and service, and pass over the stage. Then enter MACBETH]

- **Macbeth.** If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'ld jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other.

[Enter LADY MACBETH]
How now! what news?

- **Lady Macbeth.** He has almost supp'd: why have you left the chamber?
- **Macbeth.** Hath he ask'd for me?
- **Lady Macbeth.** Know you not he has?
- **Macbeth.** We will proceed no further in this business:
  He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
  Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
  Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
  Not cast aside so soon.
- **Lady Macbeth.** Was the hope drunk
  Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?
  And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
  At what it did so freely? From this time
  Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
  To be the same in thine own act and valour
  As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
  Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
  And live a coward in thine own esteem,
  Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
  Like the poor cat i' the adage?
- **Macbeth.** Prithee, peace:
  I dare do all that may become a man;
  Who dares do more is none.
- **Lady Macbeth.** What beast was't, then,
  That made you break this enterprise to me?
  When you durst do it, then you were a man;
  And, to be more than what you were, you would
  Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
  Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
  They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
  Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
  How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
  I would, while it was smiling in my face,
  Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
  And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
  Have done to this.
- **Macbeth.** If we should fail?
- **Lady Macbeth.** We fail!
  But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
  And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep—
  Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
  Soundly invite him—his two chamberlains
  Will I with wine and wassail so convince
  That memory, the warder of the brain,
  Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
  A limbeck only: when in swinish sleep
  Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
  What cannot you and I perform upon

The unguarded Duncan? what not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?

- **Macbeth.** Bring forth men-children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males. Will it not be received,
When we have mark'd with blood those sleepy two
Of his own chamber and used their very daggers,
That they have done't?

- **Lady Macbeth.** Who dares receive it other,
As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar
Upon his death?

- **Macbeth.** I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

[Exeunt]

7.7.1: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 1 (1623) is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **9.4: Shakespeare, William. MacBeth Act 1 (1623)** has no license indicated.

7.7.2: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 2 (1623)

		Act II, Scene 1 ***Court of Macbeth's castle.***		

[Enter BANQUO, and FLEANCE bearing a torch before him]

- **Banquo.** How goes the night, boy?
- **Fleance.** The moon is down; I have not heard the clock.**570**
- **Banquo.** And she goes down at twelve.
- **Fleance.** I take't, 'tis later, sir.
- **Banquo.** Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven;
  Their candles are all out. Take thee that too.
  A heavy summons lies like lead upon me, **575**
  And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers,
  Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
  Gives way to in repose!
  [Enter MACBETH, and a Servant with a torch]
  Give me my sword. **580**
  Who's there?
- **Macbeth.** A friend.
- **Banquo.** What, sir, not yet at rest? The king's a-bed:
  He hath been in unusual pleasure, and
  Sent forth great largess to your offices. **585**
  This diamond he greets your wife withal,
  By the name of most kind hostess; and shut up
  In measureless content.
- **Macbeth.** Being unprepared,
  Our will became the servant to defect; **590**
  Which else should free have wrought.
- **Banquo.** All's well.
  I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters:
  To you they have show'd some truth.
- **Macbeth.** I think not of them: **595**
  Yet, when we can entreat an hour to serve,
  We would spend it in some words upon that business,
  If you would grant the time.
- **Banquo.** At your kind'st leisure.
- **Macbeth.** If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis, **600**
  It shall make honour for you.
- **Banquo.** So I lose none
  In seeking to augment it, but still keep
  My bosom franchised and allegiance clear,
  I shall be counsell'd.**605**
- **Macbeth.** Good repose the while!
- **Banquo.** Thanks, sir: the like to you!

[Exeunt BANQUO and FLEANCE]

- **Macbeth.** Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready,
  She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed. **610**
  [Exit Servant]

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible **615**
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw. **620**
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood, **625**
Which was not so before. There's no such thing:
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one halfworld
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates **630**
Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth, **635**
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives. **640**
[A bell rings]
I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.
[Exit]

Act II, Scene 2

The same.

[Enter LADY MACBETH]

- **Lady Macbeth.** That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold;
  What hath quench'd them hath given me fire.
  Hark! Peace!
  It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman, **650**
  Which gives the stern'st good-night. He is about it:
  The doors are open; and the surfeited grooms
  Do mock their charge with snores: I have drugg'd
  their possets,
  That death and nature do contend about them, **655**
  Whether they live or die.
- **Macbeth.** *[Within]* Who's there? what, ho!

- **Lady Macbeth.** Alack, I am afraid they have awaked,
  And 'tis not done. The attempt and not the deed
  Confounds us. Hark! I laid their daggers ready; **660**
  He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled
  My father as he slept, I had done't.
  [Enter MACBETH]
  My husband!
- **Macbeth.** I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?**665**
- **Lady Macbeth.** I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.
  Did not you speak?
- **Macbeth.** When?
- **Lady Macbeth.** Now.
- **Macbeth.** As I descended?**670**
- **Lady Macbeth.** Ay.
- **Macbeth.** Hark!
  Who lies i' the second chamber?
- **Lady Macbeth.** Donalbain.
- **Macbeth.** This is a sorry sight.**675**

[Looking on his hands]

- **Lady Macbeth.** A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.
- **Macbeth.** There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried
  'Murder!'
  That they did wake each other: I stood and heard them: **680**
  But they did say their prayers, and address'd them
  Again to sleep.
- **Lady Macbeth.** There are two lodged together.
- **Macbeth.** One cried 'God bless us!' and 'Amen' the other;
  As they had seen me with these hangman's hands. **685**
  Listening their fear, I could not say 'Amen,'
  When they did say 'God bless us!'
- **Lady Macbeth.** Consider it not so deeply.
- **Macbeth.** But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?
  I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen' **690**
  Stuck in my throat.
- **Lady Macbeth.** These deeds must not be thought
  After these ways; so, it will make us mad.
- **Macbeth.** Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!
  Macbeth does murder sleep', the innocent sleep, **695**
  Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
  The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
  Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
  Chief nourisher in life's feast,—
- **Lady Macbeth.** What do you mean?**700**
- **Macbeth.** Still it cried 'Sleep no more!' to all the house:
  'Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
  Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more.'
- **Lady Macbeth.** Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
  You do unbend your noble strength, to think **705**
  So brainsickly of things. Go get some water,
  And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
  Why did you bring these daggers from the place?

They must lie there: go carry them; and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.**710**

- **Macbeth.** I'll go no more:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on't again I dare not.
- **Lady Macbeth.** Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead **715**
Are but as pictures: 'tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal;
For it must seem their guilt.

[Exit. Knocking within]

- **Macbeth.** Whence is that knocking?
How is't with me, when every noise appals me?
What hands are here? ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather **725**
The multitudinous seas in incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

[Re-enter LADY MACBETH]

- **Lady Macbeth.** My hands are of your colour; but I shame
To wear a heart so white. **730**
[Knocking within]
I hear a knocking
At the south entry: retire we to our chamber;
A little water clears us of this deed:
How easy is it, then! Your constancy **735**
Hath left you unattended.
[Knocking within]
Hark! more knocking.
Get on your nightgown, lest occasion call us,
And show us to be watchers. Be not lost **740**
So poorly in your thoughts.
- **Macbeth.** To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.
[Knocking within]
Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!

[Exeunt]

		Act II, Scene 3 ***The same.***		

[Knocking within. Enter a Porter]

- **Porter.** Here's a knocking indeed! If a
man were porter of hell-gate, he should have
old turning the key.
[Knocking within] **750**
Knock,
knock, knock! Who's there, i' the name of
Beelzebub? Here's a farmer, that hanged
himself on the expectation of plenty: come in
time; have napkins enow about you; here **755**

you'll sweat for't.
[Knocking within]
Knock,
knock! Who's there, in the other devil's
name? Faith, here's an equivocator, that could **760**
swear in both the scales against either scale;
who committed treason enough for God's sake,
yet could not equivocate to heaven: O, come
in, equivocator.
[Knocking within] **765**
Knock,
knock, knock! Who's there? Faith, here's an
English tailor come hither, for stealing out of
a French hose: come in, tailor; here you may
roast your goose. **770**
[Knocking within]
Knock,
knock; never at quiet! What are you? But
this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter
it no further: I had thought to have let in **775**
some of all professions that go the primrose
way to the everlasting bonfire.
[Knocking within]
Anon, anon! I pray you, remember the porter.

[Opens the gate]

[Enter MACDUFF and LENNOX]

- **Macduff.** Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed,
  That you do lie so late?
- **Porter.** 'Faith sir, we were carousing till the
  second cock: and drink, sir, is a great **785**
  provoker of three things.
- **Macduff.** What three things does drink especially provoke?
- **Porter.** Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep, and
  urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes, and unprovokes;
  it provokes the desire, but it takes **790**
  away the performance: therefore, much drink
  may be said to be an equivocator with lechery:
  it makes him, and it mars him; it sets
  him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him,
  and disheartens him; makes him stand to, and **795**
  not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him
  in a sleep, and, giving him the lie, leaves him.
- **Macduff.** I believe drink gave thee the lie last night.
- **Porter.** That it did, sir, i' the very throat on
  me: but I requited him for his lie; and, I **800**
  think, being too strong for him, though he took
  up my legs sometime, yet I made a shift to cast
  him.
- **Macduff.** Is thy master stirring?
  [Enter MACBETH] **805**
  Our knocking has awaked him; here he comes.
- **Lennox.** Good morrow, noble sir.

- **Macbeth.** Good morrow, both.
- **Macduff.** Is the king stirring, worthy thane?
- **Macbeth.** Not yet.**810**
- **Macduff.** He did command me to call timely on him:
  I have almost slipp'd the hour.
- **Macbeth.** I'll bring you to him.
- **Macduff.** I know this is a joyful trouble to you;
  But yet 'tis one.**815**
- **Macbeth.** The labour we delight in physics pain.
  This is the door.
- **Macduff.** I'll make so bold to call,
  For 'tis my limited service.

[Exit]

- **Lennox.** Goes the king hence to-day?
- **Macbeth.** He does: he did appoint so.
- **Lennox.** The night has been unruly: where we lay,
  Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
  Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death, **825**
  And prophesying with accents terrible
  Of dire combustion and confused events
  New hatch'd to the woeful time: the obscure bird
  Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
  Was feverous and did shake.**830**
- **Macbeth.** 'Twas a rough night.
- **Lennox.** My young remembrance cannot parallel
  A fellow to it.

[Re-enter MACDUFF]

- **Macduff.** O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart **835**
  Cannot conceive nor name thee!
- **Macbeth.** *[with Lennox]* What's the matter.
- **Macduff.** Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!
  Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
  The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence **840**
  The life o' the building!
- **Macbeth.** What is 't you say? the life?
- **Lennox.** Mean you his majesty?
- **Macduff.** Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight
  With a new Gorgon: do not bid me speak; **845**
  See, and then speak yourselves.
  [Exeunt MACBETH and LENNOX]
  Awake, awake!
  Ring the alarum-bell. Murder and treason!
  Banquo and Donalbain! Malcolm! awake! **850**
  Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,
  And look on death itself! up, up, and see
  The great doom's image! Malcolm! Banquo!
  As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,
  To countenance this horror! Ring the bell.**855**

[Bell rings]

[Enter LADY MACBETH]

- **Lady Macbeth.** What's the business,
  That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley

The sleepers of the house? speak, speak!**860**

- **Macduff.** O gentle lady,
  'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:
  The repetition, in a woman's ear,
  Would murder as it fell.
  [Enter BANQUO] **865**
  O Banquo, Banquo,
  Our royal master's murder'd!
- **Lady Macbeth.** Woe, alas!
  What, in our house?
- **Banquo.** Too cruel any where. **870**
  Dear Duff, I prithee, contradict thyself,
  And say it is not so.

[Re-enter MACBETH and LENNOX, with ROSS]

- **Macbeth.** Had I but died an hour before this chance,
  I had lived a blessed time; for, from this instant, **875**
  There 's nothing serious in mortality:
  All is but toys: renown and grace is dead;
  The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
  Is left this vault to brag of.

[Enter MALCOLM and DONALBAIN]

- **Donalbain.** What is amiss?
- **Macbeth.** You are, and do not know't:
  The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood
  Is stopp'd; the very source of it is stopp'd.
- **Macduff.** Your royal father 's murder'd.**885**
- **Malcolm.** O, by whom?
- **Lennox.** Those of his chamber, as it seem'd, had done 't:
  Their hands and faces were an badged with blood;
  So were their daggers, which unwiped we found
  Upon their pillows: **890**
  They stared, and were distracted; no man's life
  Was to be trusted with them.
- **Macbeth.** O, yet I do repent me of my fury,
  That I did kill them.
- **Macduff.** Wherefore did you so?**895**
- **Macbeth.** Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious,
  Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man:
  The expedition my violent love
  Outrun the pauser, reason. Here lay Duncan,
  His silver skin laced with his golden blood; **900**
  And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature
  For ruin's wasteful entrance: there, the murderers,
  Steep'd in the colours of their trade, their daggers
  Unmannerly breech'd with gore: who could refrain,
  That had a heart to love, and in that heart **905**
  Courage to make 's love known?
- **Lady Macbeth.** Help me hence, ho!
- **Macduff.** Look to the lady.
- **Malcolm.** *[Aside to DONALBAIN]* Why do we hold our tongues,
  That most may claim this argument for ours?**910**

- **Donalbain.** *[Aside to MALCOLM]* What should be spoken here,
  where our fate,
  Hid in an auger-hole, may rush, and seize us?
  Let 's away;
  Our tears are not yet brew'd.**915**
- **Malcolm.** *[Aside to DONALBAIN]* Nor our strong sorrow
  Upon the foot of motion.
- **Banquo.** Look to the lady:
  [LADY MACBETH is carried out]
  And when we have our naked frailties hid, **920**
  That suffer in exposure, let us meet,
  And question this most bloody piece of work,
  To know it further. Fears and scruples shake us:
  In the great hand of God I stand; and thence
  Against the undivulged pretence I fight **925**
  Of treasonous malice.
- **Macduff.** And so do I.
- **All.** So all.
- **Macbeth.** Let's briefly put on manly readiness,
  And meet i' the hall together.**930**
- **All.** Well contented.

[Exeunt all but Malcolm and Donalbain.]

- **Malcolm.** What will you do? Let's not consort with them:
  To show an unfelt sorrow is an office
  Which the false man does easy. I'll to England.**935**
- **Donalbain.** To Ireland, I; our separated fortune
  Shall keep us both the safer: where we are,
  There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood,
  The nearer bloody.
- **Malcolm.** This murderous shaft that's shot **940**
  Hath not yet lighted, and our safest way
  Is to avoid the aim. Therefore, to horse;
  And let us not be dainty of leave-taking,
  But shift away: there's warrant in that theft
  Which steals itself, when there's no mercy left.**945**

[Exeunt]

		Act II, Scene 4 ***Outside Macbeth's castle.***		

[Enter ROSS and an old Man]

- **Old Man.** Threescore and ten I can remember well:
  Within the volume of which time I have seen
  Hours dreadful and things strange; but this sore night **950**
  Hath trifled former knowings.
- **Ross.** Ah, good father,
  Thou seest, the heavens, as troubled with man's act,
  Threaten his bloody stage: by the clock, 'tis day,
  And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp: **955**
  Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,

That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it?

- **Old Man.** 'Tis unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last, **960**
A falcon, towering in her pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.
- **Ross.** And Duncan's horses—a thing most strange and certain—
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out, **965**
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make
War with mankind.
- **Old Man.** 'Tis said they eat each other.
- **Ross.** They did so, to the amazement of mine eyes
That look'd upon't. Here comes the good Macduff. **970**
[Enter MACDUFF]
How goes the world, sir, now?
- **Macduff.** Why, see you not?
- **Ross.** Is't known who did this more than bloody deed?
- **Macduff.** Those that Macbeth hath slain.**975**
- **Ross.** Alas, the day!
What good could they pretend?
- **Macduff.** They were suborn'd:
Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's two sons,
Are stol'n away and fled; which puts upon them **980**
Suspicion of the deed.
- **Ross.** 'Gainst nature still!
Thriftless ambition, that wilt ravin up
Thine own life's means! Then 'tis most like
The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth.**985**
- **Macduff.** He is already named, and gone to Scone
To be invested.
- **Ross.** Where is Duncan's body?
- **Macduff.** Carried to Colmekill,
The sacred storehouse of his predecessors, **990**
And guardian of their bones.
- **Ross.** Will you to Scone?
- **Macduff.** No, cousin, I'll to Fife.
- **Ross.** Well, I will thither.
- **Macduff.** Well, may you see things well done there: adieu! **995**
Lest our old robes sit easier than our new!
- **Ross.** Farewell, father.
- **Old Man.** God's benison go with you; and with those
That would make good of bad, and friends of foes!

[Exeunt]

This page titled 7.7.2: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 2 (1623) is shared under a Public Domain license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **9.5: Shakespeare, William. MacBeth Act 2 (1623)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed Public Domain.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: Writing About Literature

8.1: The Writing Process for Literary Essays
8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays
8.3: Literary Thesis Statements
8.4: Essay as Argument
8.5: Summary vs. Analysis
8.6: Comparing and Contrasting Literature
8.7: Writing About Fiction and Creative Nonfiction
8.8: Writing About Poetry
8.9: Analyzing Poetry
8.9.1: Robert Browning's Memorablia
8.10: Compare and Contrast Poetry Assignments
8.11: Writing About Drama
8.12: Literary Research
8.13: How to Perform Literary Research (Navigating Secondary Sources and Library Databases)
8.14: What Does My Professor Want?
8.15: Sample Student Literary Analysis Essays

This page titled 8: Writing About Literature is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

8.1: The Writing Process for Literary Essays

Why Follow the Writing Process?

Even the most talented writers rarely get a piece right in their first draft. What's more, few writers create a first draft through a single, sustained effort. Instead, the best writers understand that writing is a process: it takes time; sustained attention; and a willingness to change, expand, and even delete words as one writes. Good writing also takes a willingness to seek feedback from peers and mentors and to accept and use the advice they give. In this book, we will refer to and model the **writing process**, showing how student writers like yourself worked toward compelling papers about literary works. Watch the video below where author Salman Rushdie talks about some misconceptions new writers sometimes have about what it takes to write effectively. Though he is discussing novels specifically, the same concepts apply to literary essays.

Your process



The following are a few famous writers' pieces of advice when it comes to following the writing process:

- "For me and most of the other writers I know, writing is not rapturous. In fact, the only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts"—Anne Lamott
- "The key to writing is concentration, not inspiration"—Salman Rushdie
- "By the time I am nearing the end of a story, the first part will have been reread and altered and corrected at least one hundred and fifty times. I am suspicious of both facility and speed. Good writing is essentially rewriting. I am positive of this." —Roald Dahl (Vander Hook)
- "I don't write easily or rapidly. My first draft usually has only a few elements worth keeping. I have to find what those are and build from them and throw out what doesn't work, or what simply is not alive." —Susan Sontag (Lee)

Take it from the writing experts: following the writing process is the key to writing success. Following this process can be liberatory in the sense that you don't have to feel an immense pressure to write brilliantly. The best writing takes time, incremental effort, and resilience.

As I often tell my students:

"There is no such thing as bad writers, only writers who give up too soon. There is no such thing as bad writing, just writing in need of revision." This means anyone can write a strong essay if they follow the writing process!

Shortcuts. While some students may be able to get away with writing a passing essay this way, most cannot. Besides, by completing the readings, you actually learn!

Prewriting

Many of the questions and activities peppered throughout sections of this book will be **prewriting** activities. We'll ask you to reflect on your reading, to make connections between your experiences and our text, and to jot down ideas spurred by your engagement with the theories presented here. It's from activities like these that writers often get their ideas for writing. The more engaged you are as a reader, the more engaged you'll be when the time comes to write.

Researching

This book will also help you start the research process, in which you hone in on those aspects of a given literary text that interest you and seek out a deeper understanding of those aspects. Literary researchers read not only literary texts but also the work of other literary scholars and even sources that are indirectly related to literature, such as primary historical documents and biographies. In other words, they seek a wide range of texts that can supplement their understanding of the story, poem, play, or other text they want to write about. As you research, you should keep prewriting, keeping a record of what you agree with, what you disagree with, and what you feel needs further exploration in the texts you read.

Outlining

To write well, you should have a plan. As you write, that plan may change while you learn more about your topic and begin to fully understand your own ideas. However, papers are easier to tackle when you first sketch out the broad outline of your ideas, a general arc or path you want your paper to follow. Committing those ideas to paper will help you see how different ideas relate to one another (or don't relate to one another). Don't be afraid to revise your outline — play around with the sequence of your ideas and evidence until you find the most logical progression.

Drafting

The most important way to improve your writing is to start writing! Because you're treating writing as a process, it's not important that every word you type be perfectly chosen, or that every sentence be exquisitely crafted. When you're drafting, the most important thing is that you get words on paper. Follow your outline and write. If ideas come to you as you're writing, but do not quite fit in that section of the paper, make note of it! You don't have to use it, but few things are more frustrating than forgetting an idea that might work perfectly for your paper.

Revising

After you've committed words to paper (or, more accurately, to your computer screen), you can go back and shape them more deliberately through **revision**. Cognitive research has shown that a significant portion of reading is actually remembering. As a result, if you read your work immediately after writing it, you probably won't notice any of the potential problems with it. Your brain will "fill in the gaps" of poor grammar, misspelling, or faulty reasoning. Because of this, you should give yourself some time in between drafting and revising—the more time the better. As you revise, try to approach your text as your readers will. Ask yourself skeptical questions (e.g., Are there clear connections between the different claims I'm making in this paper? Do I provide enough evidence to convince someone to believe my claims?). Revisions can often be substantial: you may need to rearrange your points, delete significant portions of what you've written, or rewrite sentences and paragraphs to better reflect the ideas you have developed while writing. Don't be afraid to cut the parts of your paper that aren't working, even if you like a particular fact or anecdote. Don't be afraid to, as they say, "Kill your darlings." Everything in your paper should, on some level, work towards the purpose of your claim. Most importantly, you should revise your introduction several times. Writers often work into their strongest ideas, which then appear in their conclusions but not (if they do not revise) their introductions. Make sure that your introduction reflects the more nuanced claims that appear in the body and conclusion of your paper.

Seeking Feedback

Even after years of practice revising your writing, you'll never be able to see it in an entirely objective light. To really improve your writing, you need feedback from others who can identify where your ideas are not as clear as they should be. You can seek feedback in a number of ways: you can make an appointment in your college's writing center, you can participate in class peer-review workshops, or you can talk to your instructor during his or her office hours. If you will have a chance to revise your paper after your instructor grades it, his or her comments on that graded draft should be considered essential feedback as you revise.

Re-revising

Once you've garnered feedback on your writing, you should use that feedback to revise your paper yet again. You should not, however, simply make every change that your colleagues or instructor recommended. You should think about the suggestions they've made and ensure that their suggestions will help you make the argument you want to make. You may decide to incorporate some suggestions and not others. Not all feedback is helpful or applicable. It takes some critical thinking to determine whether the feedback will improve the essay. When you treat writing as a process, it should become a genuine dialogue between you and your readers.

Publishing

Finally, you will submit your paper to an audience for review. As college students, this primarily means the paper you turn in to your instructor for evaluation.

Writing Process Not Linear, But a Cycle

The preceding categories suggest that writing is a linear process — that is, that you will follow these steps in the following order:

prewriting → researching → outlining → drafting → revising → feed back → re-revising → publishing.

The reality of the writing process, however, is that as you write you shuttle back and forth in these stages. For example, as you

begin writing your thesis paragraph, the beginning of your essay, you will write and revise many times before you are satisfied with your opening; once you have a complete draft, you will more than likely return to the introduction to revise it again to better match the contents of the completed essay. This shuttling highlights the recursive nature of the writing process and can be diagrammed as follows:

prewriting ↔ researching ↔ outlining ↔ drafting ↔ revising ↔ feed back ↔ re-revising ↔ publishing.

This is a good thing. If you are too rigid in your process, it's easier to get stuck on insisting an idea or claim that might not be working, rather than discovering one or coming to an informed, well-reasoned conclusion. Furthermore, you should be aware that each writer has a unique writing process: some will be diligent outliners, while others may discover ideas as they write. There is no right way to write (so to speak), but the key is the notion of process — all strong writers engage in the writing process and recognize the importance of feedback and revision in the process.

Your process

1. Describe your current writing process.
2. Do you normally engage in the stages listed previously?
3. If not, why? If so, what part of the process do you find most helpful?

Share your process with the class to discover the variety of approaches writers take. Always be willing to try new methods of approaching the writing process. You might find a new tool or habit that works well for you!

Works Cited

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. Random House, 1994.

Lee, Martin. *Telling Stories: The Craft of Narrative and Writing Life*. University of Nebraska Press, 2012.

Rushdie, Salman. "Inspiration is Nonsense." *The Big Think*, 2011. https://bigthink.com/videos/inspiration-is-nonsense

Vander Hook, Sue. *Writing Notable Narrative Nonfiction*. Lerner Publishing Group, 2016.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from "What is the Writing Process?" from *Creating Literary Analysis* by Ryan Cordell and John Pennington, CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0

This page titled 8.1: The Writing Process for Literary Essays is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.2: The Writing Process for Literary Essays** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays

Outlining Basics

The purpose of an outline is twofold: first, to help you organize your ideas. Second, to help readers follow along with your ideas. Think of an outline as a map for your essay. An essay without some kind of structure often flounders because readers get lost. The following are basic principles of essay organization that should help you craft logically organized papers that keep readers (and you!) on track.

- **Always include a clear thesis**. Think of this as the essay's destination. It essentially tells readers where the essay is going. Without a clear destination, readers might wonder why they are there, reading the essay in the first place!
- **Keep one main idea per paragraph.** Including a topic sentence—a one-sentence summary of the paragraph's main idea—is an effective way to keep the paragraph focused. Think of each topic sentence as a mini-thesis in support of the essay's overall thesis.
- **Include evidence to support all claims.** Usually, one quote or paraphrase per paragraph is an effective use of evidence. Spend at least 2-3 sentences analyzing and explaining each quote.
- **Be flexible.** An essay changes over time. Be willing to adapt and adjust the outline to fit the needs of the essay. If it doesn't serve your essay, let it go.

General Essay Template

This essay template is not meant to be prescriptive (the end all, be all), but to provide a commonly used essay structure students can adapt to write their own essays. As with any learning resource, students should choose organizational methods to enhance their learning and writing process.

Paragraph 1: Introduction

Sentence 1: **Hook**

Captures readers' attention and interest through a quote from the literary work, startling contextual information, or a question.

Sentence 2-3: **Context/Background**

Helps readers understand where the essay fits into the scholarly discourse by providing background information on the essay topic. For example, you might briefly summarize the literary work (for a close reading essay), or research on your topic (what other people/scholars have said about your topic) or you might give historical background on your topic, depending on the essay prompt.

Sentence 4: (The) Thesis statement

Articulates the main argument of the essay. It should be short, specific, debatable, and clear.

Sentence 5: **Essay map/sign post**

Uses the last sentence(s) of the introduction to transition into body paragraphs. This may look like a "map" where you state the main arguments you will make in your essay. For example, this argument is true because of reason X, reason Y, and reason Z. Basically, you give readers an idea of where the essay is going.

Paragraphs 2-10+: Body Paragraphs

Sentence 1: **Topic sentence**

Summarizes the main argument or point of the paragraph.

Sentence 2: Present e**vidence**

Present evidence in the form of quotes or paraphrasing from authoritative primary or secondary sources, which supports the paragraph main idea, as well as the thesis main idea. The more scholarly the source, the better; check with your librarian if you are unfamiliar with in-text citations.

Sentence 3: **Analyze, interpret, and e**xplain evidence

Use your own words to do so. While what the information means may be clear to you, the writer, you should not assume that readers will understand the information. Explain everything within reason.

Sentence 4: Contextualize **evidence**

Show how evidence relates to and supports your thesis statement

Sentence 5: Transition

Introduce the next paragraph topic by using a linking word, phrase, or idea. This will improve your essay's organization and "flow."

Final Paragraph: Conclusion

Sentence 1: **Restate thesis statement**

State the thesis using new words. This helps readers remember the focus of the essay.

Sentence 2-3: **Briefly summarize main arguments**

Present a summary of the essay's main arguments. Again, this reminds readers of your main points in case they have forgotten.

Sentence 4-5: **Explain the significance**

Indicate the significance of your analysis and/or research to other scholars in your field/scholars of the subject or topic/society in general. This is also called the "takeaway." Your readers should feel like they learned something new or are seeing the literature in a new light.

General Essay Advice

1. Be as specific as possible.
2. Stay on topic. All information in the essay should work towards proving your argument. (Use it or lose it.)
3. Use the known-new contract. Every sentence should "flow" into the next sentence, unless intentionally breaking the flow to make a point. This is achieved by using repeated words, ideas, or phrases from one sentence to the next.
4. **Practice ethical attribution. Do not plagiarize.** Plagiarism can result in an F for the essay and the course, and can even result in expulsion. When in doubt, ask your professor or librarian. Using ethical attribution is the best way to avoid plagiarism, as it also helps you build credibility as a writer and literary scholar.
5. For more information on essay writing—specifically works cited/references, citation, and formatting (MLA)—please visit the chapter on Ethical Attribution.

This page titled 8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.5: Outlining for Literary Essays** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

8.3: Literary Thesis Statements

The Literary Thesis Statement

Literary essays are argumentative or persuasive essays. Their purpose is primarily analysis, but analysis for the purposes of showing readers your interpretation of a literary text. So the thesis statement is a one to two sentence summary of your essay's main argument, or interpretation.

Just like in other argumentative essays, the thesis statement should be a kind of opinion based on observable fact about the literary work.

Thesis Statements Should Be

- **Debatable**
  - Ex: "While most people reading *Hamlet* think he is the **tragic hero**, Ophelia is the real **hero** of the play as demonstrated through her critique of Elsinore's court through the language of flowers."
    - This thesis takes a position. There are clearly those who could argue against this idea.
- **Rooted in observations about literary devices, genres, or forms**
  - Ex: "Hawthorne's use of **symbolism** in *The Scarlet Letter* falters and ultimately breaks down with the introduction of the **character** Pearl, which shows the perceived danger of female sexuality in a puritanical society."
    - Look at the text in bold. See the strong emphasis on how form (literary devices like symbolism and character) acts as a foundation for the interpretation (perceived danger of female sexuality).
- **Specific**
  - Ex: "Through its **contrasting river and shore scene**s, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* suggests that to find the true expression of American ideals, one must leave 'civilized' society and go back to nature" ("Thesis Statements")
    - Through this specific yet concise sentence, readers can anticipate the text to be examined (*Huckleberry Finn)*, the author (Mark Twain), the literary device that will be focused upon (river and shore scenes) and what these scenes will show (true expression of American ideals can be found in nature).

Thesis Statements Should NOT Be

- **Overly broad or generalized**
  - Ex: "I am going to be writing about "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe."
    - While we know what text and author will be the focus of the essay, we know nothing about what aspect of the essay the author will be focusing upon, nor is there an argument here.
- **More about society than the work of literature**
  - Ex: "Gender roles are bad and should be abolished."
    - This may be well and true, but this thesis does not appear to be about a work of literature. This could be turned into a thesis statement if the writer is able to show how this is the theme of a literary work (like "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid) and root that interpretation in observable data from the story in the form of literary devices.
- **A summary or obvious statement about the text**
  - Ex: "Hamlet is about a prince whose father dies."
    - Yes, this is true. But it is not debatable. You would be hard-pressed to find someone who could argue with this statement. Yawn, boring.
- **A judgment about the quality of the work**
  - Ex: "'La Migra' by Pat Mora is a really good/powerful poem"
    - This may very well be true. But the purpose of a literary critic is not to judge the quality of a literary work, but to make analyses and interpretations of the work based on observable structural aspects of that work.
- **About the author (biographical) rather than literature**
  - Ex: "Edgar Allan Poe and Washington Irving were both creepy towards women in their personal lives but in different ways"

- Again, this might be true, and might make an interesting essay topic, but unless it is rooted in textual analysis, it is not within the scope of a literary analysis essay. **Be careful not to conflate author and speaker! Author, speaker, and narrator are all different entities! See: intentional fallacy.**

Thesis Statement Formula

One way I find helpful to explain literary thesis statements is through a "formula":

Thesis statement = Observation + Analysis + Significance

- Observation: usually regarding the form or structure of the literature. This can be a pattern, like recurring literary devices. For example, "I noticed the poems of Rumi, Hafiz, and Kabir all use **symbols** such as **the lover's longing and Tavern of Ruin**"
- Analysis: You could also call this an opinion. This explains what you think your observations show or mean. "I think these recurring symbols all **represent the human soul's desire."** This is where your debatable argument appears.
- Significance: this explains what the significance or relevance of the interpretation might be. Human soul's desire to do what? Why should readers care that they represent the human soul's desire? "I think these recurring symbols all show the human soul's desire **to connect with God.**" This is where your argument gets more specific.

Thesis statement: The works of ecstatic love poets Rumi, Hafiz, and Kabir use **symbols** such as a lover's longing and the Tavern of Ruin **to illustrate** the **human soul's desire to connect with God**.

Thesis Examples

SAMPLE THESIS STATEMENTS

These sample thesis statements are provided as guides, not as required forms or prescriptions.

The Literary Device Thesis Statement

The thesis may focus on an analysis of one of the elements of fiction, drama, poetry or nonfiction as expressed in the work: character, plot, structure, idea, theme, symbol, style, imagery, tone, etc.

Example 1:

In "A Worn Path," Eudora Welty creates a fictional character in Phoenix Jackson whose determination, faith, and cunning illustrate the indomitable human spirit.

Note that the work, author, and character to be analyzed are identified in this thesis statement. The thesis relies on a strong verb (creates). It also identifies the element of fiction that the writer will explore (character) and the characteristics the writer will analyze and discuss (determination, faith, cunning).

Example 2:

The character of the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet serves as a foil to young Juliet, delights us with her warmth and earthy wit, and helps realize the tragic catastrophe.

The Genre / Theory Thesis Statement

The thesis may focus on illustrating how a work reflects the particular genre's forms, the characteristics of a philosophy of literature, or the ideas of a particular school of thought.

Example 1:

Samuel Beckett's Endgame reflects characteristics of Theatre of the Absurd in its minimalist stage setting, its seemingly meaningless dialogue, and its apocalyptic or nihilist vision.

Example 2:

A close look at dialogue, characterization, and paragraph structure in "The Story of an Hour" reveals how language, institutions, and expected demeanor suppress the natural desires and aspirations of women.

Generative Questions

One way to come up with a riveting thesis statement is to start with a generative question. The question should be open-ended and, hopefully, prompt some kind of debate.

- What is the effect of [choose a literary device that features prominently in the chosen text] in this work of literature, and how does it relate to a theme?
- How does this work of literature conform or resist its genre, and to what effect?
- How does this work of literature portray the environment, and to what effect?
- How does this work of literature portray race, and to what effect?
- How does this work of literature portray gender, and to what effect?
- What historical context is this work of literature engaging with, and how might it function as a commentary on this context?

These are just a few common of the common kinds of questions literary scholars engage with. As you write, you will want to refine your question to be even more specific. Eventually, you can turn your generative question into a statement. And, in the essay body paragraphs, you will provide evidence in support of your thesis statement in the form of quotations, paraphrase, and/or summary from the text.

Expert Examples

While nobody expects you to write professional-quality thesis statements in an undergraduate literature class, it can be helpful to examine some examples. As you view these examples, consider the structure of the thesis statement. You might also think about what kinds of questions the scholar wondered that led to this statement!

- *"Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (Achebe 3).
- "...I argue that the approach to time and causality in Boethius' sixth-century *Consolation of Philosophy* can support abolitionist objectives to dismantle modern American policing and carceral systems" (Chaganti 144).
- "I seek to expand our sense of the musico-poetic compositional practices available to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, focusing on the metapoetric dimensions of *Much Ado About Nothing*. In so doing, I work against the tendency to isolate writing as an independent or autonomous feature the work of early modern poets and dramatists who integrated bibliographic texts with other, complementary media" (Trudell 371).

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa" *Research in African Literatures 9.1*, Indiana UP, 1978. 1-15.

Chaganti, Seeta. "Boethian Abolition" *PMLA 137.1* Modern Language Association, January 2022. 144-154.

"Thesis Statements in Literary Analysis Papers" Author unknown. https://resources.finalsite.net/imag...handout__1.pdf

Trudell, Scott A. "Shakespeare's Notation: Writing Sound in *Much Ado about Nothing*" *PMLA 135.2*, Modern Language Association, March 2020. 370-377.

Contributors and Attributions

Thesis Examples. Authored by: University of Arlington Texas. License: CC BY-NC

This page titled 8.3: Literary Thesis Statements is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.6: Literary Thesis Statements** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

8.4: Essay as Argument

Argument

What is an argument, and why do you need one in your essays on literary analysis?

Arguments are everywhere

You may be surprised to hear that the word “argument” does not have to be written anywhere in your assignment for it to be an important part of your task. In fact, making an argument—expressing a point of view on a subject and supporting it with evidence—is often the aim of academic writing. Your instructors may assume that you know this and thus may not explain the importance of arguments in class.

Most material you learn in college is or has been debated by someone, somewhere, at some time. Even when the material you read or hear is presented as a simple fact, it may actually be one person’s interpretation of a set of information. Instructors may call on you to examine that interpretation and defend it, refute it, or offer some new view of your own. In writing assignments, you will almost always need to do more than just summarize information that you have gathered or regurgitate facts that have been discussed in class. You will need to develop a point of view on or interpretation of that material and provide evidence for your position.

Consider an example. For nearly 2000 years, educated people in many Western cultures believed that bloodletting—deliberately causing a sick person to lose blood—was the most effective treatment for a variety of illnesses. The claim that bloodletting is beneficial to human health was not widely questioned until the 1800s, and some physicians continued to recommend bloodletting as late as the 1920s. Medical practices have now changed because some people began to doubt the effectiveness of bloodletting; these people argued against it and provided convincing evidence. Human knowledge grows out of such differences of opinion, and scholars like your instructors spend their lives engaged in debates over what claims may be counted as accurate in their fields. In their courses, they want you to engage in similar kinds of critical thinking and debate.

Writing on literary texts is no different. You take a stance and make an argument in your essay with the needed support to back up your points.

Argumentation is not just what your instructors do. We all use argumentation on a daily basis, and you probably already have some skill at crafting an argument. The more you improve your skills in this area, the better you will be at thinking critically, reasoning, making choices, and weighing evidence. These are leadership skills that hone the mind and are highly sought after abilities, regardless of what field you choose to enter.

Making a claim

What is an argument? In academic writing, an argument is usually a main idea, often called a “claim” or “thesis statement,” backed up with evidence that supports the idea. In a majority of college papers, you will need to make some sort of claim and use evidence to support it, and your ability to do this well will separate your papers from those of students who see assignments as mere accumulations of fact and detail. In other words, gone are the happy days of being given a “topic” about which you can write anything. It is time to stake out a position and prove why it is a good position for a thinking person to hold. See our handout on thesis statements.

Claims can be as simple as, “Protons are positively charged, and electrons are negatively charged,” with evidence such as, “In this experiment, protons and electrons acted in such and such a way.” Claims can also be as complex as “The end of the South African system of apartheid was inevitable,” using reasoning and evidence such as, “Every successful revolution in the modern era has come about after the government in power has given and then removed small concessions to the uprising group.” In either case, the rest of your paper will detail the reasoning and evidence that have led you to believe that your position is best.

When beginning to write a paper, ask yourself, “What is my point?” For example, the point of this handout is to help you become a better writer, and we are arguing that an important step in the process of writing effective arguments is understanding the concept of argumentation. If your papers do not have a main point, they cannot be arguing for anything. Asking yourself what your point is can help avoid a mere “information dump.” Consider this: your instructors probably know a lot more than you do about your subject matter. Why, then, would you want to provide them with material they already know? **Instructors are usually looking for two things:**

1. Proof that you understand the material

2. A demonstration of your ability to use or apply materials in ways that go beyond what you have read or heard

This second part can be done in many ways: you can critique the material, apply it to something else, or even just explain it in a different way. In order to succeed at this second step, though, you must have a particular point to argue.

Arguments in academic writing are usually complex and take time to develop. Your argument will need to be more than a simple or obvious statement, such as “Frank Lloyd Wright was a great architect.” Such a statement might capture your initial impressions of Wright as you have studied him in class; however, you need to look deeper and express specifically what caused that “greatness.” Your instructor will probably expect something more complicated, such as “Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture combines elements of European modernism, Asian aesthetic form, and locally found materials to create a unique new style,” or “There are many strong similarities between Wright’s building designs and those of his mother, which suggests that he may have borrowed some of her ideas.” To develop your argument, you would then define your terms and prove your claim with evidence from Wright’s drawings and buildings and those of the other architects you mention.

Evidence

Do not stop with having a point. You have to back up your point with evidence. The strength of your evidence, and your use of it, can make or break your argument. See our handout on evidence. You already have the natural inclination for this type of thinking, if not in an academic setting. Think about how you talked your parents into letting you borrow the family car. Did you present them with lots of instances of your past trustworthiness? Did you make them feel guilty because your friends’ parents all let them drive? Did you whine until they just wanted you to shut up? Did you look up statistics on teen driving and use them to show how you didn’t fit the dangerous-driver profile? These are all types of argumentation, and they exist in academia in similar forms.

Every field has slightly different requirements for acceptable evidence, so familiarize yourself with some arguments from within that field instead of just applying whatever evidence you like best. Pay attention to your textbooks and your instructor’s lectures. What types of arguments and evidence are they using? The type of evidence that sways an English instructor may not work to convince a sociology instructor. Find out what counts as proof that something is true in that field. Is it statistics, a logical development of points, something from the object being discussed (artwork, text, culture, or atom), the way something works, or some combination of more than one of these things?

Be consistent with your evidence. Unlike negotiating for the use of your parents’ car, a college paper is not the place for an all-out blitz of every type of argument. You can often use more than one type of evidence within a paper, but make sure that within each section, you are providing the reader with evidence appropriate to each claim. So, if you start a paragraph or section with a statement like, “Putting the student seating area closer to the basketball court will raise player performance,” do not follow with your evidence on how much more money the university could raise by letting more students attend games for free. Information about how fan support raises player morale, which then results in better play, would be a better follow-up. Your next section could offer clear reasons why undergraduates have as much or more right to attend an undergraduate event as wealthy alumni—but this information would not go in the same section as the fan support stuff. You cannot convince a confused person, so keep things tidy and ordered.

Counterargument

One way to strengthen your argument and show that you have a deep understanding of the issue you are discussing is to anticipate and address counterarguments or objections. By considering what someone who disagrees with your position might have to say about your argument, you show that you have thought things through, and you dispose of some of the reasons your audience might have for not accepting your argument. Recall our discussion of student seating in the Dean Dome. To make the most effective argument possible, you should consider not only what students would say about seating but also what alumni who have paid a lot to get good seats might say.

You can generate counterarguments by asking yourself how someone who disagrees with you might respond to each of the points you’ve made or your position as a whole. **If you can’t immediately imagine another position, here are some strategies to try:**

- Do some research. It may seem to you that no one could possibly disagree with the position you are arguing, but someone probably has. For example, some people argue that the American Civil War never ended. If you are making an argument concerning, for example, the outcomes of the Civil War, you might wish to see what some of these people have to say.
- Talk with a friend or with your teacher. Another person may be able to imagine counterarguments that haven’t occurred to you.
- Consider your conclusion or claim and the premises of your argument and imagine someone who denies each of them. For example, if you argued, “Cats make the best pets. This is because they are clean and independent,” you might imagine someone

saying, “Cats do not make the best pets. They are dirty and needy.”

Once you have thought up some counterarguments, consider how you will respond to them—will you concede that your opponent has a point but explain why your audience should nonetheless accept your argument? Will you reject the counterargument and explain why it is mistaken? Either way, you will want to leave your reader with a sense that your argument is stronger than opposing arguments.

When you are summarizing opposing arguments, be charitable. Present each argument fairly and objectively, rather than trying to make it look foolish. You want to show that you have considered the many sides of the issue. If you simply attack or caricature your opponent (also referred to as presenting a “straw man”), you suggest that your argument is only capable of defeating an extremely weak adversary, which may undermine your argument rather than enhance it.

It is usually better to consider one or two serious counterarguments in some depth, rather than to give a long but superficial list of many different counterarguments and replies.

Be sure that your reply is consistent with your original argument. If considering a counterargument changes your position, you will need to go back and revise your original argument accordingly.

Audience

Audience is a very important consideration in argument. Take a look at our handout on audience. A lifetime of dealing with your family members has helped you figure out which arguments work best to persuade each of them. Maybe whining works with one parent, but the other will only accept cold, hard statistics. Your kid brother may listen only to the sound of money in his palm. It’s usually wise to think of your audience in an academic setting as someone who is perfectly smart but who doesn’t necessarily agree with you. You are not just expressing your opinion in an argument (“It’s true because I said so”), and in most cases, your audience will know something about the subject at hand—so you will need sturdy proof. At the same time, do not think of your audience as capable of reading your mind. You have to come out and state both your claim and your evidence clearly. Do not assume that because the instructor knows the material, he or she understands what part of it you are using, what you think about it, and why you have taken the position you’ve chosen.

Critical reading

Critical reading is a big part of understanding argument. Although some of the material you read will be very persuasive, do not fall under the spell of the printed word as authority. Very few of your instructors think of the texts they assign as the last word on the subject. Remember that the author of every text has an agenda, something that he or she wants you to believe. This is OK—everything is written from someone’s perspective—but it’s a good thing to be aware of. For more information on objectivity and bias and on reading sources carefully, read our handouts on evaluating print sources and reading to write.

Take notes either in the margins of your source (if you are using a photocopy or your own book) or on a separate sheet as you read. Put away that highlighter! Simply highlighting a text is good for memorizing the main ideas in that text—it does not encourage critical reading. Part of your goal as a reader should be to put the author’s ideas in your own words. Then you can stop thinking of these ideas as facts and start thinking of them as arguments.

When you read, ask yourself questions like, “What is the author trying to prove?” and, “What is the author assuming I will agree with?” Do you agree with the author? Does the author adequately defend her argument? What kind of proof does she use? Is there something she leaves out that you would put in? Does putting it in hurt her argument? As you get used to reading critically, you will start to see the sometimes hidden agendas of other writers, and you can use this skill to improve your own ability to craft effective arguments.

Works consulted

We consulted these works while writing this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout’s topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the UNC Libraries citation tutorial. We revise these tips periodically and welcome feedback.

Anson, Chris M., and Robert A. Schwegler. *The Longman Handbook for Writers and Readers.* 6th ed. New York: Longman, 2010.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. FitzGerald. *The Craft of Research.* 4th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Ede, Lisa. *Work in Progress.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

Gage, John T. *The Shape of Reason: Argumentative Writing in College.* 4th ed. New York: Longman, 2005.

Lunsford, Andrea, and John Ruszkiewicz. *Everything's an Argument.* 7th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016.

Rosen, Leonard J., and Laurence Behrens. *The Allyn & Bacon Handbook.* 5th ed. New York: Longman, 2003.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 License.
You may reproduce it for non-commercial use if you use the entire handout and attribute the source: The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

---

This page titled 8.4: Essay as Argument is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.7: Essay as Argument** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap has no license indicated.

8.5: Summary vs. Analysis

Summary: Using it Wisely

Page ID
101135

Knowing how to summarize something you have read, seen, or heard is a valuable skill, one you have probably used in many writing assignments. It is important, though, to recognize when you must go beyond describing, explaining, and restating texts and offer a more complex analysis. This handout will help you distinguish between summary and analysis and avoid inappropriate summary in your academic writing.

Is summary a bad thing?

Not necessarily. But it's important that your keep your assignment and your audience in mind as you write. If your assignment requires an argument with a thesis statement and supporting evidence—as many academic writing assignments do—then you should limit the amount of summary in your paper. You might use summary to provide background, set the stage, or illustrate supporting evidence, but keep it very brief: a few sentences should do the trick. Most of your paper should focus on your argument. (Our handout on argument will help you construct a good one.)

Writing a summary of what you know about your topic before you start drafting your actual paper can sometimes be helpful. If you are unfamiliar with the material you're analyzing, you may need to summarize what you've read in order to understand your reading and get your thoughts in order. Once you figure out what you know about a subject, it's easier to decide what you want to argue.

You may also want to try some other pre-writing activities that can help you develop your own analysis. Outlining, freewriting, and mapping make it easier to get your thoughts on the page. (Check out our handout on brainstorming for some suggested techniques.)

Why is it so tempting to stick with summary and skip analysis?

Many writers rely too heavily on summary because it is what they can most easily write. If you're stalled by a difficult writing prompt, summarizing the plot of The Great Gatsby may be more appealing than staring at the computer for three hours and wondering what to say about F. Scott Fitzgerald's use of color symbolism. After all, the plot is usually the easiest part of a work to understand. Something similar can happen even when what you are writing about has no plot: if you don't really understand an author's argument, it might seem easiest to just repeat what he or she said.

To write a more analytical paper, you may need to review the text or film you are writing about, with a focus on the elements that are relevant to your thesis. If possible, carefully consider your writing assignment before reading, viewing, or listening to the material about which you'll be writing so that your encounter with the material will be more purposeful. (We offer a handout on reading towards writing.)

How do I know if I'm summarizing?

As you read through your essay, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I stating something that would be obvious to a reader or viewer?
- Does my essay move through the plot, history, or author's argument in chronological order, or in the exact same order the author used?
- Am I simply describing what happens, where it happens, or to whom it happens?

A "yes" to any of these questions may be a sign that you are summarizing. **If you answer yes to the questions below, though, it is a sign that your paper may have more analysis (which is usually a good thing):**

- Am I making an original argument about the text?
- Have I arranged my evidence around my own points, rather than just following the author's or plot's order?
- Am I explaining why or how an aspect of the text is significant?

Certain phrases are warning signs of summary. **Keep an eye out for these:**

- "[This essay] is about…"
- "[This book] is the story of…"
- "[This author] writes about…"
- "[This movie] is set in…"

Here's an example of an introductory paragraph containing unnecessary summary. **Sentences that summarize are in italics:**

- The Great Gatsby *is the story of a mysterious millionaire, Jay Gatsby, who lives alone on an island in New York. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote the book, but the narrator is Nick Carraway. Nick is Gatsby's neighbor, and he chronicles the story of Gatsby and his circle of friends, beginning with his introduction to the strange man and ending with Gatsby's tragic death. In the story, Nick describes his environment through various colors, including green, white, and grey. Whereas white and grey symbolize false purity and decay, respectively, the color green offers a symbol of hope.*

Here's how you might change the paragraph to make it a more effective introduction:

- In The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald provides readers with detailed descriptions of the area surrounding East Egg, New York. In fact, Nick Carraway's narration describes the setting with as much detail as the characters in the book. Nick's description of the colors in his environment presents the book's themes, symbolizing significant aspects of the post-World War I era. Whereas white and grey symbolize the false purity and decay of the 1920s, the color green offers a symbol of hope.

This version of the paragraph mentions the book's title, author, setting, and narrator so that the reader is reminded of the text. And that sounds a lot like summary—but the paragraph quickly moves on to the writer's own main topic: the setting and its relationship to the main themes of the book. The paragraph then closes with the writer's specific thesis about the symbolism of white, grey, and green.

How do I write more analytically?

Analysis requires breaking something—like a story, poem, play, theory, or argument—into parts so you can understand how those parts work together to make the whole. Ideally, you should begin to analyze a work as you read or view it instead of waiting until after you're done—it may help you to jot down some notes as you read. Your notes can be about major themes or ideas you notice, as well as anything that intrigues, puzzles, excites, or irritates you. Remember, analytic writing goes beyond the obvious to discuss questions of how and why—so ask yourself those questions as you read.

The St. Martin's Handbook encourages readers to take the following steps in order to analyze a text:

- Identify evidence that supports or illustrates the main point or theme as well as anything that seems to contradict it.
- Consider the relationship between the words and the visuals in the work. Are they well integrated, or are they sometimes at odds with one another? What functions do the visuals serve? To capture attention? To provide more detailed information or illustration? To appeal to readers' emotions?
- Decide whether the sources used are trustworthy.
- Identify the work's underlying assumptions about the subject, as well as any biases it reveals. (Lunsford 38)

Once you have written a draft, some questions you might want to ask yourself about your writing are, "What's my point?" or, "What am I arguing in this paper?" If you can't answer these questions, then you haven't gone beyond summarizing. You may also want to think about how much of your writing comes from your own ideas or arguments. If you're only reporting someone else's ideas, you probably aren't offering an analysis.

What strategies can help me avoid excessive summary?

- Read the assignment (the prompt) as soon as you get it. Make sure to reread it before you start writing. Go back to your assignment often while you write. (Check out our handout on reading assignments).
- Formulate an argument (including a good thesis) and be sure that your final draft is structured around it, including aspects of the plot, story, history, background, etc. only as evidence for your argument. (You can refer to our handout on constructing thesis statements).
- Read critically—imagine having a dialogue with the work you are discussing. What parts do you agree with? What parts do you disagree with? What questions do you have about the work? Does it remind you of other works you've seen?
- Make sure you have clear topic sentences that make arguments in support of your thesis statement. (Read our handout on paragraph development if you want to work on writing strong paragraphs).
- Use two different highlighters to mark your paper. With one color, highlight areas of summary or description. With the other, highlight areas of analysis. For many college papers, it's a good idea to have lots of analysis and minimal summary/description.
- Ask yourself: What part of the essay would be obvious to a reader/viewer of the work being discussed? What parts (words, sentences, paragraphs) of the essay could be deleted without loss? In most cases, your paper should focus on points that are essential, and will be interesting to people who have already read or seen the work you are writing about.

Works consulted

We consulted these works while writing this handout. This is not a comprehensive list of resources on the handout's topic, and we encourage you to do your own research to find the latest publications on this topic. Please do not use this list as a model for the format of your own reference list, as it may not match the citation style you are using. For guidance on formatting citations, please see the UNC Libraries citation tutorial.

Barnet, Sylvan and William E. Cain. *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature.* 12th ed. New York: Pearson, 2011.

Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film.* 9th ed. New York: Pearson, 2014.

Lunsford, Andrea A. *The St. Martin's Handbook.* 5th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003.

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well.* 6th ed. New York: Quill, 2001.

Contributors and Attributions

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 License.
You may reproduce it for non-commercial use if you use the entire handout and attribute the source: The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

This page titled 8.5: Summary vs. Analysis is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.8: Summarizing vs. Analyzing Literary Works** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap has no license indicated.

8.6: Comparing and Contrasting Literature

Compare and Contrast Essay Basics

The Compare and Contrast Essay is a literary analysis essay, but, instead of examining one work, it examines two or more works. These works must be united by a common theme or thesis statement. For example, while a literary analysis essay might explore the significance of ghosts in William Shakespeare's Hamlet, a compare/contrast essay might explore the significance of the supernatural in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

Literary Analysis Thesis Statement:

While Horatio seems to think the ghost of Old Hamlet is a demon trying to lead Hamlet to death, and Gertrude and Claudius think it is a figment of Hamlet's insanity, Hamlet's status as an unreliable narrator and the ghost actually symbolizes the oppression of Catholics during Shakespeare's time period.

Compare and Contrast Thesis Statement:

The unreliable narrators paired with the ghosts in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* symbolize the oppression of Catholics in Shakespeare's time period.

Essay Genre Expectations

- **Tone:** formal, scholarly
  - Use first-person pronouns sparingly (you, me, we, our)
  - Avoid colloquialisms
  - Spell out contractions
  - Use subject-specific terminology, such as naming literary devices
- **Texts:** two or more
- **Avoid summary.** Aim for analysis and interpretation
- **MLA formatting and citations**

Organization

While the literary analysis essay follows a fairly simple argumentative essay structure, the compare and contrast essay is slightly more complicated. It might be arranged by:

- Literary work (the block method)
- Topics/subtopics (the point-by-point method)

In general, ensure each paragraph supports the thesis statement and that both literary works receive equal attention. Include as many body paragraphs as needed to build your argument.

First Option for Organization: The Block Method

In this first option for organization, you will need to discuss both literary works in the introduction and thesis statement, but then the body of the paper will be divided in half. The first half of the body paragraphs should focus on one literary work, while the second half of the body paragraphs should focus on the other literary work.

1. Introduction
    1. Background of topic
    2. Background of works related to topic
    3. Thesis Statement
2. Body paragraphs in first half of the essay analyzing one literary work
    1. Topic sentence
    2. Introduction of evidence
    3. Evidence from the first literary work
    4. Explanation of evidence
    5. Analysis of evidence
    6. Transition
3. Body paragraphs in second half of the essay analyzing the other literary work
    1. Topic sentence
    2. Introduction of evidence
    3. Evidence from the second literary work
    4. Explanation of evidence
    5. Analysis of evidence
4. Conclusion
    1. Restatement of thesis in new words
    2. Summary of essay arguments
    3. Take-away

Second Option for Organization: The Point-by-Point Method

With this second option for organization, you may decide to write about both literary works within the same body paragraph every time, or you may choose to consistently alternate back and forth between the literary works in separate body paragraphs.

1. Introduction
    1. Background of topic
    2. Background of works related to topic
    3. Thesis Statement
2. 1-2 body paragraphs making a point of comparison or contrast between both literary works
    1. Topic sentence
    2. Introduction of evidence
    3. Evidence from both literary works
    4. Explanation of evidence
    5. Analysis of evidence
    6. Transition
3. 1-2 body paragraphs making another point of comparison or contrast between both literary works
    1. Topic sentence

2. Introduction of evidence
3. Evidence from both literary works
4. Explanation of evidence
5. Analysis of evidence

4. Conclusion
    1. Restatement of thesis in new words
    2. Summary of essay arguments
    3. Take-away

This page titled 8.6: Comparing and Contrasting Literature is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

8.7: Writing About Fiction and Creative Nonfiction

Demystifying the Process

Writing an analysis of a piece of fiction can be a mystifying process. First, literary analyses (or papers that offer an interpretation of a story) rely on the assumption that stories must mean something. How does a story mean something? Isn't a story just an arrangement of characters and events? And if the author wanted to convey a meaning, wouldn't he or she be much better off writing an essay just telling us what he or she meant?

It's pretty easy to see how at least some stories convey clear meanings or morals. Just think about a parable like the prodigal son or a nursery tale about "crying wolf." Stories like these are reduced down to the bare elements, giving us just enough detail to lead us to their main points, and because they are relatively easy to understand and tend to stick in our memories, they're often used in some kinds of education.

But if the meanings were always as clear as they are in parables, who would really need to write a paper analyzing them? Interpretations of fiction would not be interesting if the meanings of the stories were clear to everyone who reads them. Thankfully (or perhaps regrettably, depending on your perspective) the stories we're asked to interpret in our classes are a good bit more complicated than most parables. They use characters, settings, and actions to illustrate issues that have no easy resolution. They show different sides of a problem, and they can raise new questions. In short, the stories we read in class have meanings that are arguable and complicated, and it's our job to sort them out.

It might seem that the stories do have specific meanings, and the instructor has already decided what those meanings are. Not true. Instructors can be pretty dazzling (or mystifying) with their interpretations, but that's because they have a lot of practice with stories and have developed a sense of the kinds of things to look for. Even so, the most well-informed professor rarely arrives at conclusions that someone else wouldn't disagree with. In fact, most professors are aware that their interpretations are debatable and actually love a good argument. But let's not go to the other extreme. To say that there is no one answer is not to say that anything we decide to say about a novel or short story is valid, interesting, or valuable. Interpretations of fiction are often opinions, but not all opinions are equal.

So what makes a valid and interesting opinion? A good interpretation of fiction will:

- avoid the obvious (in other words, it won't argue a conclusion that most readers could reach on their own from a general knowledge of the story)
- support its main points with strong evidence from the story
- use careful reasoning to explain how that evidence relates to the main points of the interpretation.

The following steps are intended as a guide through the difficult process of writing an interpretive paper that meets these criteria. Writing tends to be a highly individual task, so adapt these suggestions to fit your own habits and inclinations.

Writing an Essay on Fiction in 9 Steps

1. Become familiar with the text

There's no substitute for a good general knowledge of your story. A good paper inevitably begins with the writer having a solid understanding of the work that they interpret. Being able to have the whole book, short story, or play in your head—at least in a general way—when you begin thinking through ideas will be a great help and will actually allow you to write the paper more quickly in the long run. It's even a good idea to spend some time just thinking about the story. Flip back through the book and consider what interests you about this piece of writing—what seemed strange, new, or important?

2. Explore potential topics

Perhaps your instructor has given you a list of topics to choose, or perhaps you have been asked to create your own. Either way, you'll need to generate ideas to use in the paper—even with an assigned topic, you'll have to develop your own interpretation. Let's assume for now that you are choosing your own topic.

After reading your story, a topic may just jump out at you, or you may have recognized a pattern or identified a problem that you'd like to think about in more detail. What is a pattern or a problem?

A pattern can be the recurrence of certain kinds of imagery or events. Usually, repetition of particular aspects of a story (similar events in the plot, similar descriptions, even repetition of particular words) tends to render those elements more conspicuous. Let's say I'm writing a paper on Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. In the course of reading that book, I keep noticing the author's use of biblical imagery: Victor Frankenstein anticipates that "a new species would bless me as its creator and source" (52) while the monster is not sure whether to consider himself as an Adam or a Satan. These details might help me interpret the way characters think about themselves and about each other, as well as allow me to infer what the author might have wanted her reader to think by using the Bible as a frame of reference. On another subject, I also notice that the book repeatedly refers to types of education. The story mentions books that its characters read and the different contexts in which learning takes place.

A problem, on the other hand, is something in the story that bugs you or that doesn't seem to add up. A character might act in some way that's unaccountable, a narrator may leave out what we think is important information (or may focus on something

that seems trivial), or a narrator or character may offer an explanation that doesn't seem to make sense to us. Not all problems lead in interesting directions, but some definitely do and even seem to be important parts of the story. In *Frankenstein*, Victor works day and night to achieve his goal of bringing life to the dead, but once he realizes his goal, he is immediately repulsed by his creation and runs away. Why? Is there something wrong with his creation, something wrong with his goal in the first place, or something wrong with Victor himself? The book doesn't give us a clear answer but seems to invite us to interpret this problem.

If nothing immediately strikes you as interesting or no patterns or problems jump out at you, don't worry. Just start making a list of whatever you remember from your reading, regardless of how insignificant it may seem to you now. Consider a character's peculiar behavior or comments, the unusual way the narrator describes an event, or the author's placement of an action in an odd context. (Step 5 will cover some further elements of fiction that you might find useful at this stage as well.)

There's a good chance that some of these intriguing moments and oddities will relate to other points in the story, eventually revealing some kind of pattern and giving you potential topics for your paper. Also keep in mind that if you found something peculiar in the story you're writing about, chances are good that other people will have been perplexed by these moments in the story as well and will be interested to see how you make sense of it all. It's even a good idea to test your ideas out on a friend, a classmate, or an instructor since talking about your ideas will help you develop them and push them beyond obvious interpretations of the story. And it's only by pushing those ideas that you can write a paper that raises interesting issues or problems and that offers creative interpretations related to those issues.

3. Select a topic with a lot of evidence

If you're selecting from a number of possible topics, narrow down your list by identifying how much evidence or how many specific details you could use to investigate each potential issue. Do this step just off the top of your head. Keep in mind that persuasive papers rely on ample evidence and that having a lot of details to choose from can also make your paper easier to write.

It might be helpful at this point to jot down all the events or elements of the story that have some bearing on the two or three topics that seem most promising. This can give you a more visual sense of how much evidence you will have to work with on each potential topic. It's during this activity that having a good knowledge of your story will come in handy and save you a lot of time. Don't launch into a topic without considering all the options first because you may end up with a topic that seemed promising initially but that only leads to a dead end.

4. Write out a working thesis

Based on the evidence that relates to your topic—and what you anticipate you might say about those pieces of evidence—come up with a working thesis. Don't spend a lot of time composing this statement at this stage since it will probably change (and a changing thesis statement is a good sign that you're starting to say more interesting and complex things on your subject). At this point in my *Frankenstein* project, I've become interested in ideas on education that seem to appear pretty regularly, and I have a general sense that aspects of Victor's education lead to tragedy. Without considering things too deeply, I'll just write something like, "Victor Frankenstein’s tragic ambition was fueled by a faulty education."

5. Make an extended list of evidence

Once you have a working topic in mind, skim back over the story and make a more comprehensive list of the details that relate to your point. For my paper about education in *Frankenstein*, I'll want to take notes on what Victor Frankenstein reads at home, where he goes to school and why, what he studies at school, what others think about those studies, etc. And even though I'm primarily interested in Victor's education, at this stage in the writing, I'm also interested in moments of education in the novel that don't directly involve this character. These other examples might provide a context or some useful contrasts that could illuminate my evidence relating to Victor. With this goal in mind, I'll also take notes on how the monster educates himself, what he reads, and what he learns from those he watches. As you make your notes keep track of page numbers so you can quickly find the passages in your book again and so you can easily document quoted passages when you write without having to fish back through the book.

At this point, you want to include anything, anything, that might be useful, and you also want to avoid the temptation to arrive at definite conclusions about your topic. Remember that one of the qualities that makes for a good interpretation is that it avoids the obvious. You want to develop complex ideas, and the best way to do that is to keep your ideas flexible until you’ve considered the evidence carefully. A good gauge of complexity is whether you feel you understand more about your topic than you did when you began (and even just reaching a higher state of confusion is a good indicator that you’re treating your topic in a complex way).

When you jot down ideas, you can focus on the observations from the narrator or things that certain characters say or do. These elements are certainly important. It might help you come up with more evidence if you also take into account some of the broader components that go into making fiction, things like plot, point of view, character, setting, and symbols.

Plot is the string of events that go into the narrative. Think of this as the "who did what to whom" part of the story. Plots can be significant in themselves since chances are pretty good that some action in the story will relate to your main idea. For my paper on education in *Frankenstein*, I'm interested in Victor's going to the University of Ingolstadt to realize his father's wish that Victor attend school where he could learn about a another culture. Plots can also allow you to make connections between the story you're interpreting and some other stories, and those connections might be useful in your interpretation. For example, the plot of *Frankenstein*, which involves a man who desires to bring life to the dead and creates a monster in the process, bears some similarity to the ancient Greek story of Icarus who flew too close to the sun on his wax wings. Both tell the story of a character who reaches too ambitiously after knowledge and suffers dire consequences.

Your plot could also have similarities to whole groups of other stories, all having conventional or easily recognizable plots. These types of stories are often called genres. Some popular genres include the gothic, the romance, the detective story, the bildungsroman (this is just a German term for a novel that is centered around the development of its main characters), and the novel of manners (a novel that focuses on the behavior and foibles of a particular class or social group). These categories are often helpful in characterizing a piece of writing, but this approach has its limitations. Many novels don't fit nicely into one genre, and others seem to borrow a bit from a variety of different categories. For example, given my working thesis on education, I am more interested in Victor's development than in relating *Frankenstein* to the gothic genre, so I might decide to treat the novel as a bildungsroman.

And just to complicate matters that much more, genre can sometimes take into account not only the type of plot but the form the novelist uses to convey that plot. A story might be told in a series of letters (this is called an epistolary form), in a sequence of journal entries, or in a combination of forms (*Frankenstein* is actually told as a journal included within a letter).

These matters of form also introduce questions of point of view, that is, who is telling the story and what do they or don't they know. Is the tale told by an omniscient or all-knowing narrator who doesn't interact in the events, or is it presented by one of the characters within the story? Can the reader trust that person to give an objective account, or does that narrator color the story with his or her own biases and interests?

Character refers to the qualities assigned to the individual figures in the plot. Consider why the author assigns certain qualities to a character or characters and how any such qualities might relate to your topic. For example, a discussion of Victor Frankenstein's education might take into account aspects of his character that appear to be developed (or underdeveloped) by the particular kind of education he undertakes. Victor tends to be ambitious, even compulsive about his studies, and I might be able to argue that his tendency to be extravagant leads him to devote his own education to writers who asserted grand, if questionable, conclusions.

Setting is the environment in which all of the actions take place. What is the time period, the location, the time of day, the season, the weather, the type of room or building? What is the general mood, and who is present? All of these elements can reflect on the story's events, and though the setting of a story tends to be less conspicuous than plot and character, setting still colors everything that's said and done within its context. If Victor Frankenstein does all of his experiments in "a solitary chamber, or rather a cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a staircase" (53) we might conclude that there is something anti-social, isolated, and stale, maybe even unnatural about his project and his way of learning.

Obviously, if you consider all of these elements, you'll probably have too much evidence to fit effectively into one paper. Your goal is merely to consider each of these aspects of fiction and include only those that are most relevant to your topic and most interesting to your reader. A good interpretive paper does not need to cover all elements of the story — plot, genre, narrative form, character, and setting. In fact, a paper that did try to say something about all of these elements would be unfocused. You might find that most of your topic could be supported by a consideration of character alone. That's fine. For my *Frankenstein* paper, I'm finding that my evidence largely has to do with the setting, evidence that could lead to some interesting conclusions that my reader probably hasn't recognized on his or her own.

6. Select your evidence

Once you've made your expanded list of evidence, decide which supporting details are the strongest. First, select the facts which bear the closest relation to your thesis statement. Second, choose the pieces of evidence you'll be able to say the most about. Readers tend to be more dazzled with your interpretations of evidence than with a lot of quotes from the book. It would be useful to refer to Victor Frankenstein's youthful reading in alchemy, but my reader will be more impressed by some analysis of how the writings of the alchemists—who pursued magical principles of chemistry and physics—reflect the ambition of his own goals. Select the details that will allow you to show off your own reasoning skills and allow you to help the reader see the story in a way he or she may not have seen it before.

7. Refine your thesis

Now it's time to go back to your working thesis and refine it so that it reflects your new understanding of your topic. This step and the previous step (selecting evidence) are actually best done

at the same time, since selecting your evidence and defining the focus of your paper depend upon each other. Don't forget to consider the scope of your project: how long is the paper supposed to be, and what can you reasonably cover in a paper of that length? In rethinking the issue of education in *Frankenstein*, I realize that I can narrow my topic in a number of ways: I could focus on education and culture (Victor's education abroad), education in the sciences as opposed to the humanities (the monster reads Milton, Goethe, and Plutarch), or differences in learning environments (e.g. independent study, university study, family reading). Since I think I found some interesting evidence in the settings that I can interpret in a way that will get my reader's attention, I'll take this last option and refine my working thesis about Victor's faulty education to something like this: "Victor Frankenstein's education in unnaturally isolated environments fosters his tragic ambition."

8. Organize your evidence

Once you have a clear thesis you can go back to your list of selected evidence and group all the similar details together. The ideas that tie these clusters of evidence together can then become the claims that you'll make in your paper. As you begin thinking about what claims you can make (i.e. what kinds of conclusion you can come to) keep in mind that they should not only relate to all the evidence but also clearly support your thesis. Once you're satisfied with the way you've grouped your evidence and with the way that your claims relate to your thesis, you can begin to consider the most logical way to organize each of those claims. To support my thesis about *Frankenstein*, I've decided to group my evidence chronologically. I'll start with Victor's education at home, then discuss his learning at the University, and finally address his own experiments. This arrangement will let me show that Victor was always prone to isolation in his education and that this tendency gets stronger as he becomes more ambitious.

There are certainly other organizational options that might work better depending on the type of points I want to stress. I could organize a discussion of education by the various forms of education found in the novel (for example, education through reading, through classrooms, and through observation), by specific characters (education for Victor, the monster, and Victor's bride, Elizabeth), or by the effects of various types of education (those with harmful, beneficial, or neutral effects).

9. Interpret your evidence

Avoid the temptation to load your paper with evidence from your story. Each time you use a specific reference to your story, be sure to explain the significance of that evidence in your own words. To get your readers' interest, you need to draw their attention to elements of the story that they wouldn't necessarily notice or understand on their own. If you're quoting passages without interpreting them, you're not demonstrating your reasoning skills or helping the reader. In most cases, interpreting your evidence merely involves putting into your paper what is already in your head. Remember that we, as readers, are lazy — all of us. We don't want to have to figure out a writer's reasoning for ourselves; we want all the thinking to be done for us in the paper.

General Hints

The previous nine steps are intended to give you a sense of the tasks usually involved in writing a good interpretive paper. What follows are just some additional hints that might help you find an interesting topic and maybe even make the process a little more enjoyable.

1. Make your thesis relevant to your readers

You'll be able to keep your readers' attention more easily if you pick a topic that relates to daily experience. Avoid writing a paper that identifies a pattern in a story but doesn't quite explain why that pattern leads to an interesting interpretation. Identifying the biblical references in *Frankenstein* might provide a good start to a paper—Mary Shelley does use a lot of biblical allusions—but a good paper must also tell the reader why those references are meaningful. So what makes an interesting paper topic? Simply put, it has to address issues that we can use in our own lives. Your thesis should be able to answer the brutal question "So what?" Does your paper tell your reader something relevant about the context of the story you're interpreting or about the human condition?

Some categories, like race, gender, and social class, are dependable sources of interest. This is not to say that all good papers necessarily deal with one of these issues. My thesis on education in *Frankenstein* does not. But a lot of readers would probably be less interested in reading a paper that traces the instances of water imagery than in reading a paper that compares male or female stereotypes used in a story or that takes a close look at relationships between characters of different races. Again, don't feel compelled to write on race, gender, or class. The main idea is that you ask yourself whether the topic you've selected connects with a major human concern, and there are a lot of options here (for example, issues that relate to economics, family dynamics, education, religion, law, politics, sexuality, history, and psychology, among others).

Also, don't assume that as long as you address one of these issues, your paper will be interesting. As mentioned in step 2, you need to address these big topics in a complex way. Doing this requires that you don't go into a topic with a preconceived notion of what you'll find. Be prepared to challenge your own ideas about what gender, race, or class mean in a particular text.

2. Select a topic of interest to you

Though you may feel like you have to select a topic that sounds like something your instructor would be interested in, don't

overlook the fact that you'll be more invested in your paper and probably get more out of it if you make the topic something pertinent to yourself. Pick a topic that might allow you to learn about yourself and what you find important.

Of course, your topic can't entirely be of your choosing. We're always at the mercy of the evidence that's available to us. For example, your interest may really be in political issues, but if you're reading *Frankenstein*, you might face some difficulties in finding enough evidence to make a good paper on that kind of topic. If, on the other hand, you're interested in ethics, philosophy, science, psychology, religion, or even geography, you'll probably have more than enough to write about and find yourself in the good position of having to select only the best pieces of evidence.

3. Make your thesis specific

The effort to be more specific almost always leads to a thesis that will get your reader's attention, and it also separates you from the crowd as someone who challenges ideas and looks into topics more deeply. A paper about education in general in *Frankenstein* will probably not get my reader's attention as much as a more specific topic about the impact of the learning environment on the main character. My readers may have already thought to some extent about ideas of education in the novel, if they have read it, but the chance that they have thought through something more specific like the educational environment is slim.

Contributors and Attributions

Adapted from Literature (Fiction). Provided by: UNC College of Arts and Sciences Writing Center. License: *CC BY-NC-ND*.

This page titled 8.7: Writing About Fiction and Creative Nonfiction is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.4: Writing About Fiction and Creative Nonfiction** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

8.8: Writing About Poetry

Overview

When your teachers or professors ask you to analyze a literary text, they often look for something frequently called close reading. Close reading is a deep analysis of how a literary text works; it is both a reading process and something you include in a literary analysis paper, though in a refined form.

Fiction writers and poets build texts out of many central components, including subject, form, and specific word choices. Literary analysis involves examining these components, which allows us to find, in small parts of the text, clues to help us understand the whole. For example, if an author writes a novel in the form of a personal journal about a character's daily life, but that journal reads like a series of lab reports, what do we learn about that character? What is the effect of picking a word like "tome" instead of "book"? In effect, you are putting the author's choices under a microscope.

The process of close reading should produce a lot of questions. It is when you begin to answer these questions that you are ready to participate thoughtfully in class discussion or write a literary analysis paper that makes the most of your close reading work.

Close reading sometimes feels like over-analyzing, but don't worry. Close reading is a process of finding as much information as you can in order to form as many questions as you can. When it is time to write your paper and formalize your close reading, you will sort through your work to figure out what is most convincing and helpful to the argument you hope to make and, conversely, what seems like a stretch. This guide imagines you are sitting down to read a text for the first time on your way to developing an argument about a text and writing a paper. To give one example of how to do this, we will read the poem, "Design," by famous American poet Robert Frost and attend to four major components of literary texts: subject, form, word choice (diction), and theme.

The Poem

As our guide to reading poetry suggests, have a pencil out when you read a text. Make notes in the margins, underline important words, place question marks where you are confused by something. Of course, if you are reading in a library book, you should keep all your notes on a separate piece of paper. If you are not making marks directly on, in, and beside the text, be sure to note line numbers or even quote portions of the text, so you have enough context to remember what you found interesting.

RobertFrost.jpg

Robert Frost, 1941. Library of Congress.

Design
I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—
Assorted characters of death and blight
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth—
A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.
What had that flower to do with being white,
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?
What brought the kindred spider to that height,
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
What but design of darkness to appall?—
If design govern in a thing so small.

Subject

The subject of a literary text is simply what the text is about. What is its plot? What is its most important topic? What image does it describe? It's easy to think of novels and stories as having plots, but sometimes it helps to think of poetry as having a kind of plot as well. When you examine the subject of a text, you want to develop some preliminary ideas about the text and make sure you understand its major concerns before you dig deeper.

Observations

In "Design," the speaker describes a scene: a white spider holding a moth on a white flower. The flower is a heal-all, the blooms of which are usually violet-blue. This heal-all is unusual. The speaker then poses a series of questions, asking why this heal-all is white instead of blue and how the spider and moth found this particular flower. How did this situation arise?

Questions

The speaker's questions seem simple, but they are actually fairly nuanced. We can use them as a guide for our own as we go forward with our close reading.

- Furthering the speaker's simple "how did this happen," we might ask, is the scene in this poem a manufactured

situation?

- The white moth and white spider each use the atypical white flower as camouflage in search of sanctuary and supper, respectively. Did these flora and fauna come together for a purpose?
- Does the speaker have a stance about whether there is a purpose behind the scene? If so, what is it?
- How will other elements of the text relate to the unpleasantness and uncertainty in our first look at the poem's subject?

After thinking about local questions, we have to zoom out. Ultimately, what is this text about?

Form

Form is how a text is put together. When you look at a text, observe how the author has arranged it. If it is a novel, is it written in the first person? How is the novel divided? If it is a short story, why did the author choose to write short-form fiction instead of a novel or novella? How does the chosen form impact the story (how does the form inform the piece)? How would the piece be different if it were in a different form? Examining the form of a text can help you develop a starting set of questions in your reading, which may then guide further questions stemming from even closer attention to the specific words the author chooses. A little background research on form and what different forms can mean makes it easier to figure out why and how the author's choices are important.

Observations

Most poems follow rules or principles of form; even free verse poems are marked by the author's choices in line breaks, rhythm, and rhyme—even if none of these exists, which is a notable choice in itself. Here's an example of thinking through these elements in "Design."

In "Design," Frost chooses an Italian (or Petrarchan) sonnet form: fourteen lines in iambic pentameter consisting of an octave (a stanza of eight lines) and a sestet (a stanza of six lines). We will focus on rhyme scheme and stanza structure rather than meter (a pattern of syllabic emphasis) for the purposes of this guide. A typical Italian sonnet has a specific rhyme scheme for the octave:

a b b a a b b a

There's more variation in the sestet rhymes, but one of the more common schemes is

c d e c d e

Conventionally, the octave introduces a problem or question which the sestet then resolves. The point at which the sonnet goes from the problem/question to the resolution is called the volta, or turn. (Note that we are speaking only in generalities here; there is a great deal of variation.)

Frost uses the usual octave scheme with "-ite"/"-ight" (a) and "oth" (b) sounds: "white," "moth," "cloth," "blight," "right," "broth," "froth," "kite." However, his sestet follows an unusual scheme with "-ite"/"-ight" and "all" sounds:

a c a a c c

Questions

Now, we have a few questions with which we can start:

- Why use an Italian sonnet?
- Why use an unusual scheme in the sestet?
- What problem/question and resolution (if any) does Frost offer?
- What is the volta in this poem?
- In other words, what is the point?

Italian sonnets have a long tradition; many careful readers recognize the form and know what to expect from his octave, volta, and sestet. Frost seems to do something fairly standard in the octave in presenting a situation; however, the turn Frost makes is not to resolution, but to questions and uncertainty. A white spider sitting on a white flower has killed a white moth.

- How did these elements come together?
- Was the moth's death random or by design?
- Is one worse than the other?

We can guess right away that Frost's disruption of the usual purpose of the sestet has something to do with his disruption of its rhyme scheme. Looking even more closely at the text will help us refine our observations and guesses.

Word Choice, Or Diction

Looking at the word choice of a text helps us "dig in" ever more deeply. If you are reading something longer, are there certain words that come up again and again? Are there words that stand out? While you are going through this process, it is best for you to assume that every word is important—again, you can decide whether something is really important later.

Read with a pencil and make notes. Mark the words that stand out, and perhaps write the questions you have in the margins or on a separate piece of paper. If you have ideas that may possibly answer your questions, write those down, too.

Observations

Let's take a look at the first line of "Design":

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white

The poem starts with something unpleasant: a spider. Then, as we look more closely at the adjectives describing the spider, we may see connotations of something that sounds unhealthy or unnatural. When we imagine spiders, we do not generally picture them dimpled and white; it is an uncommon and decidedly creepy image. There is dissonance between the spider

and its descriptors, i.e., what is wrong with this picture? Already we have a question: what is going on with this spider?

We should look for additional clues further on in the text. The next two lines develop the image of the unusual, unpleasant-sounding spider:

On a white heal-all, holding up a moth
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—

Now we have a white flower (a heal-all, which usually has a violet-blue flower) and a white moth in addition to our white spider. Heal-alls have medicinal properties, as their name suggests, but this one seems to have a genetic mutation—perhaps like the spider? Does the mutation that changes the heal-all's color also change its beneficial properties—could it be poisonous rather than curative? A white moth doesn't seem remarkable, but it is "Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth," or like manmade fabric that is artificially "rigid" rather than smooth and flowing like we imagine satin to be. We might think for a moment of a shroud or the lining of a coffin, but even that is awry, for neither should be stiff with death.

Questions

The first three lines of the poem's octave introduce unpleasant natural images "of death and blight" (as the speaker puts it in line four). The flower and moth disrupt expectations: the heal-all is white instead of "blue and innocent," and the moth is reduced to "rigid satin cloth" or "dead wings carried like a paper kite." We might expect a spider to be unpleasant and deadly; the poem's spider also has an unusual and unhealthy appearance.

- The focus on whiteness in these lines has more to do with death than purity—can we understand that whiteness as being corpse-like rather than virtuous?

Well before the volta, Frost makes a "turn" away from nature as a retreat and haven; instead, he unearths its inherent dangers, making nature menacing. From three lines alone, we have a number of questions:

- Will whiteness play a role in the rest of the poem?
- How does "design"—an arrangement of these circumstances—fit with a scene of death?
- What other juxtapositions might we encounter?

These disruptions and dissonances recollect Frost's alteration to the standard Italian sonnet form: finding the ways and places in which form and word choice go together will help us begin to unravel some larger concepts the poem itself addresses.

Theme

Put simply, themes are major ideas in a text. Many texts, especially longer forms like novels and plays, have multiple themes. That's good news when you are close reading because it means there are many different ways you can think through the questions you develop.

Observations

So far, in our reading of "Design," our questions revolve around disruption: disruption of form, disruption of expectations in the description of certain images. Discovering a concept or idea that links multiple questions or observations you have made is the beginning of discovering theme.

Questions

What is happening with disruption in "Design"? What point is Frost making? Observations about other elements in the text help you address the idea of disruption in more depth. Here is where we look back at the work we have already done: What is the text about? What is notable about the form, and how does it support or undermine what the words say? Does the specific language of the text highlight, or redirect, certain ideas?

In this example, we are looking to determine what kind(s) of disruption the poem contains or describes. We want to see what kind of disruption, or whether indeed Frost uses disruptions in form and language to communicate something opposite: design.

Sample Analysis

After you make notes, formulate questions, and set tentative hypotheses, you must analyze the subject of your close reading. Literary analysis is another process of reading (and writing!) that allows you to make a claim about the text. It is also the point at which you turn a critical eye to your earlier questions and observations to find the most compelling points and discard the ones that are a "stretch" or are fascinating but have no clear connection to the text as a whole. (We recommend a separate document for recording the brilliant ideas that don't quite fit this time around.)

Here follows an excerpt from a brief analysis of "Design" based on the close reading above. By commenting on the different elements of close reading we have discussed, it takes the results of our close reading and offers one particular way into the text. This example focuses on some lines in great detail in order to unpack the meaning and significance of the poem's language. In the first quote, notice how a slash (/) is included. When quoting multiple lines of poetry in your own essays, use a slash (/) at the end of each line (with a space preceding and following the slash). If a stanza break occurs during the quotation, use a double slash (//).

Excerpt

Frost's speaker brews unlikely associations in the first stanza of the poem. The "Assorted characters of death and blight / Mixed ready to begin the morning right" make of the grotesque scene an equally grotesque mockery of a breakfast cereal (4 – 5). These lines are almost singsong in meter, and it is easy to imagine them set to a radio jingle. A pun on "right"/"rite" slides the "characters of death and blight" into their expected

concoction: a “witches’ broth” (6). These juxtapositions—a healthy breakfast that is also a potion for dark magic—are borne out when our “fat and white” spider becomes “a snow-drop”—an early spring flower associated with renewal—and the moth as “dead wings carried like a paper kite” (1, 7, 8). Like the mutant heal-all that hosts the moth’s death, the spider becomes a deadly flower; the harmless moth becomes a child’s toy, but as “dead wings,” more like a puppet made of a skull.

The volta offers no resolution for our unsettled expectations. Having observed the scene and detailed its elements in all their unpleasantness, the speaker turns to questions rather than answers. How did “The wayside blue and innocent heal-all” end up white and bleached like a bone (10)? How did its “kindred spider” find the white flower, which was its perfect hiding place (11)? Was the moth, then, also searching for camouflage, only to meet its end?

Using another question as a disguise, the speaker offers a hypothesis: “What but design of darkness to appall?” (13). This question sounds rhetorical, as though the only reason for such an unlikely combination of flora and fauna is some “design of darkness.” Some force, the speaker suggests, assembled the white spider, flower, and moth to snuff out the moth’s life. Such a design appalls, or horrifies. We might also consider the speaker asking what other force but dark design could use something as simple as appalling in its other sense (making pale or white) to effect death.

However, the poem does not close with a question, but with a statement. The speaker’s “If design govern in a thing so small” establishes a condition for the octave’s questions after the fact (14). There is no point in considering the dark design that brought together “assorted characters of death and blight” if such an event is too minor, too physically small to be the work of some force unknown. Ending on an “if” clause has the effect of rendering the poem still more uncertain in its conclusions: not only are we faced with unanswered questions, we are now not even sure those questions are valid in the first place.

Behind the speaker and the disturbing scene, we have Frost and his defiance of our expectations for a Petrarchan sonnet. Like whatever designer may have altered the flower and attracted the spider to kill the moth, the poet built his poem “wrong” with a purpose in mind. Design surely governs in a poem, however small; does Frost also have a dark design? Can we compare a scene in nature to a carefully constructed sonnet?

A Note on Organization

Your goal in a paper about literature is to communicate your best and most interesting ideas to your reader. Depending on the type of paper you have been assigned, your ideas may need to be organized in service of a thesis to which everything should link back. It is best to ask your instructor about the expectations for your paper.

Knowing how to organize these papers can be tricky, in part because there is no single right answer—only more and less effective answers. You may decide to organize your paper thematically, or by tackling each idea sequentially; you may choose to order your ideas by their importance to your argument or to the poem. If you are comparing and contrasting two texts, you might work thematically or by first addressing one text and then the other. One way to approach a text may be to start with the beginning of the novel, story, play, or poem, and work your way toward its end. For example, here is the rough structure of the example above: The author of the sample decided to use the poem itself as an organizational guide, at least for this part of the analysis.

- A paragraph about the octave.
- A paragraph about the volta.
- A paragraph about the penultimate line (13).
- A paragraph about the final line (14).
- A paragraph addressing form that suggests a transition to the next section of the paper.

You will have to decide for yourself the best way to communicate your ideas to your reader. Is it easier to follow your points when you write about each part of the text in detail before moving on? Or is your work clearer when you work through each big idea—the significance of whiteness, the effect of an altered sonnet form, and so on—sequentially?

We suggest you write your paper however is easiest for you, then move things around during revision if you need to.

Contributors:

Taken with permission from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Writer's Handbook: https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/closereading/

This page titled 8.8: Writing About Poetry is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

8.9: Analyzing Poetry

Poetry is a form of expression. The poet uses his/her own personal and private language, which leaves poetry open to different interpretations. Although the poet may have had one specific idea or purpose in mind, the reader's response may be completely different. All readers bring with them their various backgrounds and experiences. What might be interpreted one way by one person, may be be interpreted entirely differently by another. Nevertheless, this does not mean that you may interpret poetry any way you wish. All interpretations must be supported by direct reference to the text. As with any type of literary analysis, you need a basic knowledge of the elements of poetry. The following guide and questions will help you.

- Read the poem in its entirety three times.
  - Read it aloud once, so you can hear and feel the sounds of the words. Don't stop to try and understand it, just read.
  - Read it a second time to get a general impression.
    - What's happening in the poem?
    - What is the title of the poem?
    - Who is the speaker or narrative voice of the poem?
    - To whom is the speaker speaking?
    - What is the tone of the poem? Sad, happy, melancholy, bitter?
  - Read the poem a third time to dig deeper into its potential meanings.
    - What is the poem about?
    - What is the poem trying to convey (a mood, a feeling, an event, an idea, etc.)?
    - What is the purpose of the poem: to describe, amuse, entertain, criticize, narrate, inform, express grief, celebrate, or commemorate?
    - How does the poem convey what you think it's trying to convey?
    - How does the poem function? What makes it work? Not work?

Contributors:

ndla.no/en/subjects/subject:39/topic:1:189087/resource:1:14814

This page titled 8.9: Analyzing Poetry is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.16: Analyzing Poetry** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

8.9.1: Robert Browning's Memorablia

Memorabilia

BY ROBERT BROWNING

Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,

And did he stop and speak to you?

And did you speak to him again?

How strange it seems, and new!

But you were living before that,

And you are living after,

And the memory I started at—

My starting moves your laughter!

I crossed a moor, with a name of its own

And a certain use in the world no doubt,

Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone

'Mid the blank miles round about:

For there I picked up on the heather

And there I put inside my breast

A moulted feather, an eagle-feather—

Well, I forget the rest.

1) Read the poem given above. Who is speaking, and who is being addressed?

From the evidence of the poem, we know that the speaker once walked across a moor, found an eagle's feather, and has high regard for the poet Shelley (1792–1822). The person being addressed is not named, but we discover that he (or she) once met Shelley, and this alone confers status by association. The word 'you' ('your' in one instance) is repeated in 6 out of the first 8 lines. 'You' becomes a rhyming word at the end of the second line, so when we reach the word 'new' in line four—one of the two lines in the first stanzas that doesn't contain 'you'—the echo supplies the deficiency. 'You' clearly represents an important focus in the first half of the poem, but who exactly is 'you'?

Thinking about this apparently straightforward question of who is being addressed takes us into an important area of critical debate: for each one of us who has just read the poem has, in one sense, become a person who not only knows who Shelley is (which may not necessarily be the case) but lived when he did, met him, listened to him, and indeed exchanged at least a couple of words with him. Each of us reads the poem as an individual, but the poem itself constructs a reader who is not identical to any of us. We are so used to adopting 'reading' roles dictated by texts like this that, often, we don't even notice the way in which the text has manipulated us.

2) Now read the poem again, this time asking yourself if the speaking voice changes in the last two stanzas, and if the person who is being addressed remains the same.

If the first half of the poem is characterized by the repetition of 'you' and the sense of an audience that pronoun creates, then the second half seems quite different in content and tone. The speaker is trying to find a parallel in his experience to make sense of and explain his feeling of awe; the change of tone is subtle. Whereas someone is undoubtedly being addressed directly in the first stanza, in the third and fourth, readers overhear—as if the speaker is talking to himself.

At first, the connection between the man who met Shelley and the memory of finding an eagle's feather may not be obvious, but there is a point of comparison. As stanza 2 explains, part of the speaker's sense of wonder stems from the fact that time did not stand still: 'you were living before that, / And also you are living after.' The moor in stanza 3, like the listener, is anonymous—it has 'a name of its own… no doubt'—but where it is or what it is called is unimportant: only one 'hand's-breadth' is memorable, the

spot that ‘shines alone’ where the feather was found. The poem is about moments that stand out in our memories while the ordinary daily stuff of life fades. It also acknowledges that we don’t all value the same things.

3) Taking another look at the poem, how would you describe its form, and what does this say about the poem's meaning?

The structure of the poem is perfectly balanced: of the four quatrains, two deal with each memory, so, although the nature of each seems quite different, implicitly, the form invites us to compare them. Think about the way in which Browning introduces the eagle feather. How does he convince us that this is a rare find?

To begin with, the third and fourth stanzas make up one complete sentence, with a colon at the end of the third announcing the fourth; this helps achieve a sense of building up towards something important. Then, we move from the visual image of a large spacious moor to the very circumscribed or restricted place where the feather is found, but the reason why this ‘hand’s-breadth’ shines out is delayed for the next two lines. ‘For there I picked up on the heather’—Okay, what did you pick up?—‘And there I put inside my breast’—still don't know what you picked up—‘A moulted feather’—ah, I see! Notice the internal rhyme of ‘feather’ with ‘heather,’ which draws attention to, and emphasizes the harmony of, the moment. Also, the word ‘feather’ is repeated and expanded: ‘an eagle-feather.’ Clearly, the feather of no other bird would do, for, ultimately, the comparison is of the eagle to the poet; Browning knows Shelley through his poetry as he knows the eagle through its feather, and that feather presents a striking visual image.

There is an immediacy to the conversational opening of the poem, which, I have suggested, deliberately moves into a more contemplative tone, possibly in the second stanza (What do you think?), but certainly by the third. We have considered some of the poetic techniques that Browning employs to convince us of the rarity of his find in the third and fourth stanzas. You might like to think more analytically about the word sounds, not just the rhyme but, for example, the repeated ‘ae’ sound in ‘breadth,’ ‘heather,’ ‘breast,’ and ‘feather,’ What, however, do you make of the tone of the last line? Try saying the last lines of each stanza out loud. Whether you can identify the meter with technical language or not is beside the point. The important thing is that ‘Well, I forget the rest,’ sounds deliberately lame. After the intensity of two extraordinary memories, everything else pales into insignificance, and, to reiterate this, the rhythm tails off. While the tone throughout is informal, the last remark is deliberately casual.

Contributors:

https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-americanlit1/chapter/reading-approaching-poetry/

This page titled 8.9.1: Robert Browning's Memorablia is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.18: Robert Browning's Memorablia** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

8.10: Compare and Contrast Poetry Assignments

Comparing and Contrasting

Frequently, you will find that an assignment asks you to ‘compare and contrast’ poems. There’s a very good reason for this, for, often, it is only by considering different treatments of similar subjects that we become aware of a range of possibilities, and begin to understand why particular choices have been made. You may have noticed that, in the previous discussions, I’ve used a similar strategy. When I showed, for example, how we can describe the rhyme scheme of ‘Love From the North’ as simple, once we have looked at the more intricate patterning of Keats’s, ‘The Eve of St Agnes,’ or Tennyson’s, ‘Mariana.’ Anne Brontë’s, ‘Home,’ and Grace Nichols’s, ‘Wherever I Hang,’ treat the subject of exile in quite different ways—and looking at one, can sharpen our understanding of what the other does.

Consider examples in everyday life, whether it's sports, music, etc. If you take, for example, football or basketball (or almost any sport, really), an offensive-minded team and a defensive-minded team will, despite playing the same sport under the same rules and principles, have completely different philosophical approaches. These different approaches are made even clearer when we compare and contrast them from each other, allowing us to learn more about both types of teams and the sport as a whole. Looking at music, it's the same thing. Think about the similarities and differences—and how these similarities and differences highlight respective traits—between jazz and rock, metal and classical, hip hop and punk.

1) Read the opening lines from these two poems given below about death. How might you explain why they sound so very different?

Lycidas by John Milton (1637)

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear,
I com to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
And with forc'd fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year. [5]
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due:
For *Lycidas* is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young *Lycidas*, and hath not left his peer:

Felix Randal by Gerard Manley Hopkins (written between 1876-1889)

Felix Randal the farrier, O is he dead then? my duty all ended,

Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy-handsome

Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it, and some

Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended?

Discussion

If I had to identify one thing, I would say that the first begins more elaborately and with a more formal tone than the second. ‘Felix Randal’ tends to use language in an unusual way, but you would probably agree that the first sentence is quite straightforward and sounds colloquial (or informal), as if the speaker has just overheard someone talking about Randal’s death and wants to confirm his impression. ‘Lycidas’ opens quite differently. It is not immediately apparent what evergreens have to do with anything (in fact, they work to establish an appropriately melancholy atmosphere or tone), and it isn’t until line 8 that we learn of a death. The word ‘dead’ is repeated, and the following line tells us that Lycidas was a young man. While ‘Felix Randal’ has an immediacy, the speaker of ‘Lycidas’ seems to find it hard to get going.

Both poems are elegies—poems written to commemorate/mourn a death—and both poets are aware of writing within this convention, although they treat it differently.

2) What do the titles of the poems tell us about each poem, and how might they help us understand the different uses of the elegiac convention?

I think it would be apparent to most readers that ‘Felix Randall’ is simply a man’s name, while ‘Lycidas’ is more mysterious. In fact, Lycidas is a traditional pastoral



name, but unless you know something about the classical pastoral tradition, it might mean very little to you. The young man whose death Milton was commemorating was actually called Edward King. However, at the time he was writing, elegies were formal, public, and impersonal poems, rather than private expressions of grief. ‘Lycidas’ commemorates a member of a prominent family rather than a close friend of the poet’s. Over two hundred years later, Hopkins, while working loosely within the same elegiac convention, adapts it. Felix Randal is an ordinary working man, not a public figure. In the seventeenth century, it would have been unlikely that he would have been considered worthy of a poem like this.

If you were making a special study of elegies, there would be a great deal more to say. That’s not the idea here, though. By comparing and contrasting the tone of the opening lines and titles, and considering when the poems were written, we have come up with several significant differences. These differences help offer insight into each poem.

https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-americanlit1/chapter/reading-approaching-poetry/

This page titled 8.10: Compare and Contrast Poetry Assignments is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.17: Compare and Contrast Poetry Assignments** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

8.11: Writing About Drama

When you read a play, your job is to imagine it as a stage production. In your mind, have a good sense of how a “standard” production might look, complete with a sense of what the characters might look like, the type of costuming that might be used, a suitable set design, and an appropriate rendering of the theme and tone of the work.

You can also think like a director, determining where you might deviate from your concept of a “standard” production if you were in control of the performance. You may want to consider some of the following:

- Why the choice of costumes, and why the set design?
- How would the actors deliver their lines (seriously, comically, realistically, formally)? Are there any significant actions or gestures that contribute to the play’s meaning?
- Should any “special effects” be utilized (consider lighting, sound, audience participation, machinery)?

After you read the play, you can begin writing a formal analysis of it by focusing on the following components: theme, plot, characterization, setting, and symbolism.

Theme and Plot

As with poetry and fiction, pay attention to the themes in a play. Since plays were meant to be viewed by live audiences during the time in which they were written and produced, consider potential messages and social commentary that the playwright might have included for those audiences. Also consider how the play addresses timeless themes that still attract audiences today.

If a play adheres to the **classical unities of drama**, specifically **unity of action**, the play will have one principal action. However, a play could also have a variety of subplots in addition to the main plot. When writing about plot, be careful not to focus too much on summarizing the action. Identifying important plot points should be a way of supporting your analysis of the play and its themes.

Characterization

Plays are primarily made up of **dialogue** between characters. **Stage directions** may be provided in some plays to describe how actors should move around and deliver lines, but much is left open to interpretation for the director and actors. When analyzing the words and movements of characters, try to imagine them as real people on a stage or even as friends and acquaintances you might see in your daily life. You already have lots of practice reading people around you. During conversations, you might consider other people's thoughts and motives based on what they say and do. Apply those analytical skills to the people who make up a play.

Setting and Symbolism

Stage directions might also reference staging, sets, and props. **Sets** provide decorations and scenery to give a sense of the overall setting, but once again much is left open to interpretation. Even when elaborate sets are included on stage, the audience still must imagine the time and place in which the play occurs. Plays adhering to the classical unities of drama will take place within one day (**unity of time**) and in a single physical location (**unity of place**).

Plays also frequently include **props**, articles or objects on the stage that may be mentioned in stage directions or in dialogue. Sometimes props are simply another means of conveying the setting, moving forward with the action, or providing characterization when the object belongs to someone. Consider whether the props are also symbolic, especially if the prop is used often or plays a significant role in the plot. Does the physical object also represent an abstract concept?

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Classical Unities. **Provided by**: Wikipedia. **Located at**: https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_unities. **License**: *CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike*

This page titled 8.11: Writing About Drama is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

8.12: Literary Research

The Research Essay

The research essay is basically a literary analysis essay supported by research. Usually, this research takes the form of literary criticism. For more on literary criticism, check out the literary criticism chapter.

Finding a Topic

Often times, instructors will assign a research topic. Be sure to consult with your instructor and/or the assignment prompt given by the instructor. If, however, the assignment is open-ended, then that is exciting news! You can write an essay about your interests in literature. It is like an adventure! However, too much choice can be debilitating. You want an essay that is large enough in scope that you can write an entire essay about it, but you don't want too large of a topic as you may not be able to feasibly cover it in the short amount of time you have. Therefore, a good way to find a "Goldilocks" topic—not too big and not too small—is to start with a simple formula and adjust as you go.

1. Find the literary text you want to write about. For example, "Bajadas" by Francisco Cantu or *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare.
2. Find an aspect or angle about that text which interests you. For example, when writing about "Bajadas," you might want to write about the ecology of the border desert, the use of animal symbolism, or the history of border politics and how it may have informed the story. When writing about *Hamlet*, you might be interested in the way female characters like Ophelia and Gertrude are treated, about the symbolism behind Ophelia's flowers, or about espionage on the part of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Finding a topic formula

Topic = angle + text

Example:

Topic = Espionage + *Hamlet*

Working thesis statement: In this essay, I will be exploring espionage in *Hamlet*

Brainstorming

Once you come up with a topic, start brainstorming. Yes, brainstorm before you perform research. The reason for this is because your instructor is interested in your original ideas about the text, not the ideas of scholars. **Secondary sources should only be used to support your own original ideas.** If you start with research, it is much more difficult to come up with your own ideas, because all of your ideas are going to sound a lot like the articles you read. So start with your initial impressions of your topic.

Brainstorming Example:

Espionage in Hamlet is interesting to me because it seems like everyone in Elsinore is spying on each other. For example, Claudius sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Ophelia to spy on Hamlet. Polonius dies because he is spying on Hamlet. In turn, Hamlet spies on Claudius during the play within the play. Spying seems to play a huge part in the play, and I wonder why. Was there espionage in Shakespeare's London? Might it have influenced or inspired his writing?

Outlining

Once you get some of your basic ideas down, you might start outlining the "big ideas" of your essay. This will help when it comes to writing the essay and organizing your ideas. It will also help you when it comes time to research.

Outlining Example

1. Background of espionage in Hamlet
2. Espionage in Shakespeare's Time
3. Analysis of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Spying scene
4. Analysis of Ophelia spying scene
5. Analysis of Polonius spying scene
6. Analysis of Claudius/Hamlet spying scene
7. Analysis of Hamlet conducting counter-espionage against Claudius
8. How might these scenes have been influenced by espionage in Shakespeare's time?
9. Conclusion

Writing

Before you begin researching, write what you can on your own. For example, write a literary analysis essay where you simply examine and analyze the literature without input from outside sources. This will allow you to solidify your ideas. It will also make it easier to find search terms when you are ready to research.

Researching

Once you have a solid topic and writing, it's time to research your essay topic. Starting with some questions about your topic is a great way to start. See the chapter on navigating scholarly sources for a more detailed look at how to find research material.

Annotated Bibliography

As you read, keep track of your sources using an Annotated Bibliography or Research Log. Basically, an Annotated Bibliography is just like a regular Works Cited page, except

every source is summarized after the bibliographical entry. Because you will be reading a lot of different sources, some 20+ pages in length, it can be difficult to keep track of the ideas of each source. An Annotated Bibliography is a tool to help you keep track of your research. This also can help you avoid plagiarism! When taking notes on your sources, be sure to clearly mark summary, paraphrase, and quotation so that you ethically attribute words and ideas to their author.

Annotated Bibliography Example

Lastname 1

Student first name Last name

Professor Soandso

English 2

30 March 2019

Annotated Bibliography: Espionage in Hamlet

Working title: Elizabethan Spy Culture Reflected in Hamlet

Working thesis: for this essay I will explore how Elizabethan spy culture might have influenced Hamlet. For example, I will look at how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are used to spy on Hamlet, and how it seems like everyone is watching everyone in Elsinore: perhaps Claudius is a stand-in for the English monarchy, a critique of its corruption?

Honan, Park. *Christopher Marlowe: Poet & Spy.* OUP Oxford, 2005. EBSCOhost, ezproxy.solano.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.as...&site=eds-live.

Christopher Marlowe was a contemporary of Shakespeare. He was also his competitor as a fellow playwright and poet. This text is a scholarly biography of Marlowe's life as a spy and poet. This source gives a picture of the cultural context of Shakespeare: of particular relevance to my research is the chapter describing Marlowe and Shakespeare's relationship (187-196). Though this gives interesting background information, it might solely be useful to note that Shakespeare regularly rubbed elbows with a spy, Marlowe, so he was at least somewhat familiar with Elizabethan spy culture, though how much he knew is a mystery. Otherwise, this text may not be very useful because it only briefly mentions Shakespeare.

Sample Student Research Essay

Text: "The Hunting of the Hare" by Margaret Cavendish

Topic: Symbol & Theme: Humanity's Attraction to Destruction and Violence

Rebekah's research essay on Margaret Cavendish's poem "The Hunting of the Hare" illustrates several of the principles discussed in this chapter:

- How to integrate scholarly secondary sources without relinquishing control of the argument
- How to make it clear whose ideas are whose through use of tag words and phrases
- How to employ parenthetical in-text citations according to MLA guidelines
- How to construct a Works Cited page according to MLA guidelines

The parts where the author engages with scholarly criticism are **in bold.** Pay close attention to how and where student Rebekah Fish incorporates primary and secondary sources.

Rebekah Fish

English 3460

Human Nature in Margaret Cavendish's "The Hunting of the Hare"

Margaret Cavendish's 1653 poem "The Hunting of the Hare" relates the cruel fate of a hare that has fallen prey to a group of hunters. A study of this poem suggests that Cavendish can be viewed as one of the first supporters for animal rights as she criticizes the cruelty of men who kill animals for sport. On a more personal level, Cavendish could have closely identified with the hare, which is ostensibly humanlike, and also with its fear. She might have even intended to parallel her critics to the dogs and the hunters within the poem. On a grander scale, Cavendish might be making the critical judgment that humankind seeks enjoyment through violent competition with others. Through a study of the many different thematic levels of the poem, Margaret Cavendish's "The Hunting of the Hare" seems to have an overarching theme of humanity's destructive attraction to violence in order to achieve supremacy.

It is evident through the poet's portrayal of the hare that it is meant to be seen as a significant and even a symbolic figure, beginning in the first line of the poem where the hare is granted the name "Wat." He is humanlike, "glaring" across the landscape as his "Haires blew up behind" him in the wind instead of his fur (4 and 6). The hare is also described as "wise" instead of merely being a sentient creature, and Cavendish makes its humanlike features even more evident as the hare "walks about" rather than hopping or crawling (Cavendish 7 and 11). Another way the rabbit is seemingly anthropomorphized is through the continual use of the personal pronoun "him" in the poem, which is used instead of "it." To indicate her disapproval of the unethical treatment of all animals, near the very end of the poem Cavendish grants all creatures the same humanlike quality as the hare by saying that creatures are being "murdered" (100) by men instead of "killed." The word "murder" connotes unlawfulness and makes a connection between that illicitness and the killing of animals, indicating that all sentient life, that of humans and animals, is important and worthy of being preserved. Some may even argue that Cavendish was trying to make a point that humankind should not express dominant authority over other creatures through the

use of violence, because, within the last lines of the poem, man is portrayed not only as murderous but also as an oppressive tyrant that rules over all other living creatures.

Cavendish's humanlike portrayal of the hare might raise concerns for some readers. **Bruce Thomas Boehrer discusses some critics' objection to an author's anthropomorphizing nonhuman characters. To anthropomorphize is to project one's own tendencies and traits onto another species. Some critics argue that this act ignores a nonhuman species' real behaviors and traits and illustrates humans' feeling of dominance over nature. However, as Boehrer explains, many animal characters in literature "challenge the human-animal divide" (5) and force people to examine their values, especially those related to nature. Donna Landry supports the view that "The Hunting of the Hare" raises these issues. She argues that in Cavendish's work, she promotes the "democratizing of relations between humans and other species" (471). Rather than emphasizing the superiority of human emotions by anthropomorphizing the hare, Cavendish humanizes him in order to bridge the gap between the reader and the hare. Paul Salzman states that Cavendish's main goal as a writer was "to enter into an empathetic relationship with the world around her" (142). In "The Hunting of the Hare," Cavendish portrays the hare with empathy in order to persuade the reader that committing unnecessary violence on animals is cruel and terrible.**

In addition, the description of the hare is used to form and emphasize the strong connection between the hare and Cavendish, who was similarly being pursued by her critics as a female writer. **This criticism is clearly shown through the description of Cavendish by Mary Evelyn, who portrayed her as extravagant and vain and said that her discourse was "as airy, empty, whimsical, and rambling as her books" (Qtd. in Damrosch and Dettmar 2058-9).** Many people of Cavendish's time viewed her as outrageous, partly because publicly recognized women writers were rare during the seventeenth century. **Although scholars seriously study Cavendish's work now, Emma L.E. Rees says that because of the harsh critics of her time, "The impression which lasted for many years was of an eccentric, disturbed and arrogant woman" (11). "The Hunting of the Hare" could be interpreted as a response to this criticism.** Her critics, paralleled by both the "cruel dogs" (16) and the men in the poem, are often referred to as merciless. The critics are described as nosy through common references to the dogs and how they always "thrust [their] snuffling nose[s]" into things (64). They are also described as loudmouths through the image of dogs who cry out with their "wide mouths" (19). While at times, Cavendish seems to be uncaring as to what the critics say about her, at other times, she seems terrified of the public's opinion of her life and writing, much like the hare's terror of being pursued. She suggests that, in public, she hides her fear of the critics, similarly to the hare when, "Licking his feet, he wiped his ears so clean / That none could tell that Wat had hunted been" (41-2). Although critics continued to pursue her, Cavendish emphasizes through the poem that she will continue to maintain her composure until the very end, like the hare does until his death. Yet, this continual pursuing and killing of hares, which parallels Cavendish's experience, critiques human nature's desire for supremacy over all living things—even each other.

Not only can Cavendish's poem be seen as a response to animal cruelty and the cruelty of critics, but it can also be seen as an assessment of how humankind treats its brethren. In the poem, the men are portrayed as bloodthirsty monsters that thrive off cruelty to others. The men in Cavendish's poem, who "destroy those lives that God did make" (98) solely for "sport or recreation's sake" (97), seek to kill the rabbit, the symbol, through heavy personification, of a fellow human (Cavendish 2062).

Margaret Cavendish's "The Hunting of the Hare" is a comment on human nature and the desire for obtaining dominion over others by any means necessary. Through her extensive use of pathos throughout the poem, her audience at the time was meant to feel a sense of culpability and a desire to change. Despite her portrayal of human nature as inherently evil, the guilt the audience is supposed to feel offers a sense of hope, as it indicates that human nature is capable of being altered and even changed.

Works Cited

Boehrer, Bruce Thomas. Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature, U of Pennsylvania P, 2010.

Cavendish, Margaret. "The Hunting of the Hare." 1653. UC Press E-books Collection, publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=kt7q2nc9xn&chunk.id=ss1.55&toc.depth=100&toc.id=ch09&brand=eschol. Accessed 3 October 2013.

Damrosch, David and Kevin J. H. Dettmar. "Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle." The Longman Anthology: British Literature, edited by David Damrosch and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, Longman, 2010, pp. 2060-63.

Landry, Donna. "Green Languages? Women Poets as Naturalists in 1653 and 1807." Huntington Library Quarterly, vol. 63, no.4, 2000, pp. 467-89. JSTOR. www.jstor.org/stable/3817613. Accessed 2 Oct. 2013.

Rees, Emma L.E. Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile. Manchester UP, 2003. EBSCOHost, libproxy.ung.edu/login?url=search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2004581244&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 8 Nov. 2013.

Salzman, Paul. Reading Early Modern Women's Writing. Oxford UP, 2006.

Contributors and Attributions

- Sample Student Essay reproduced from Writing and Literature: Composition as Inquiry, Learning, Thinking, and Communication by Tanya Long Bennett Professor (English) at University of North Georgia, Sourced from GALILEO Open Learning Materials, CC BY-SA

This page titled 8.12: Literary Research is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.12: Essay Type - Literary Research** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

8.13: How to Perform Literary Research (Navigating Secondary Sources and Library Databases)

Finding Literary Criticism

Have you ever looked up the lyrics of a song you loved? Perhaps you went to Genius or azlyrics.com or another lyrics website. Perhaps you went on Reddit to see what other people have said about the meaning of the song lyrics. In each of these cases, you performed an informal version of literary research! That is, you tried to find out more about a work of literature (song lyrics) by researching what other listeners have said about the topic. When performing research for formal literature essays, the concept is the same, but there expectations are higher in the sense that you are tasked with finding what *experts* have said about a work of literature. In the field of literary studies, these experts are called **literary critics.** The articles they write are called **literary criticism.**

Finding Literary Criticism is similar to doing a Google search. The difference is that, instead of Google, you use your school's library databases specific to the study of literature. Just as you would not go to McDonald's to buy sushi, so too must you consider the places you go to find criticism specific to your research needs. To that end, there are several resources geared towards the study of literature where students can find literary criticism. Each database presents its own benefits and challenges.

Physical Books



"Books and bookshelves" by Jorge Royan (2009) is licensed CC BY-SA 3.0

Campus Library

If you are a student with access to a college campus library, ask the librarian for help finding literary criticism. Generally, college libraries will have access to these kinds of materials. If the material you are looking for is not available at your campus, your librarian may be able to request it through a process called Inter-library Loan (ILL). Talk to your librarian about your options. Be sure to block out enough time to access and read these articles, which often takes longer than students anticipate.

City Library or Library for the General Public

While city libraries or libraries for the general public may not have as much literary criticism as a college library, they do usually have some of the more famous examples. For example, Harold Bloom's *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (2003) is available at most libraries. Again, librarians are your friends in the research process: ask your librarian for help finding materials to support your individual research needs. Increasingly, libraries have access to massive amounts of digital material even if they don't have physical copies.

Online Databases



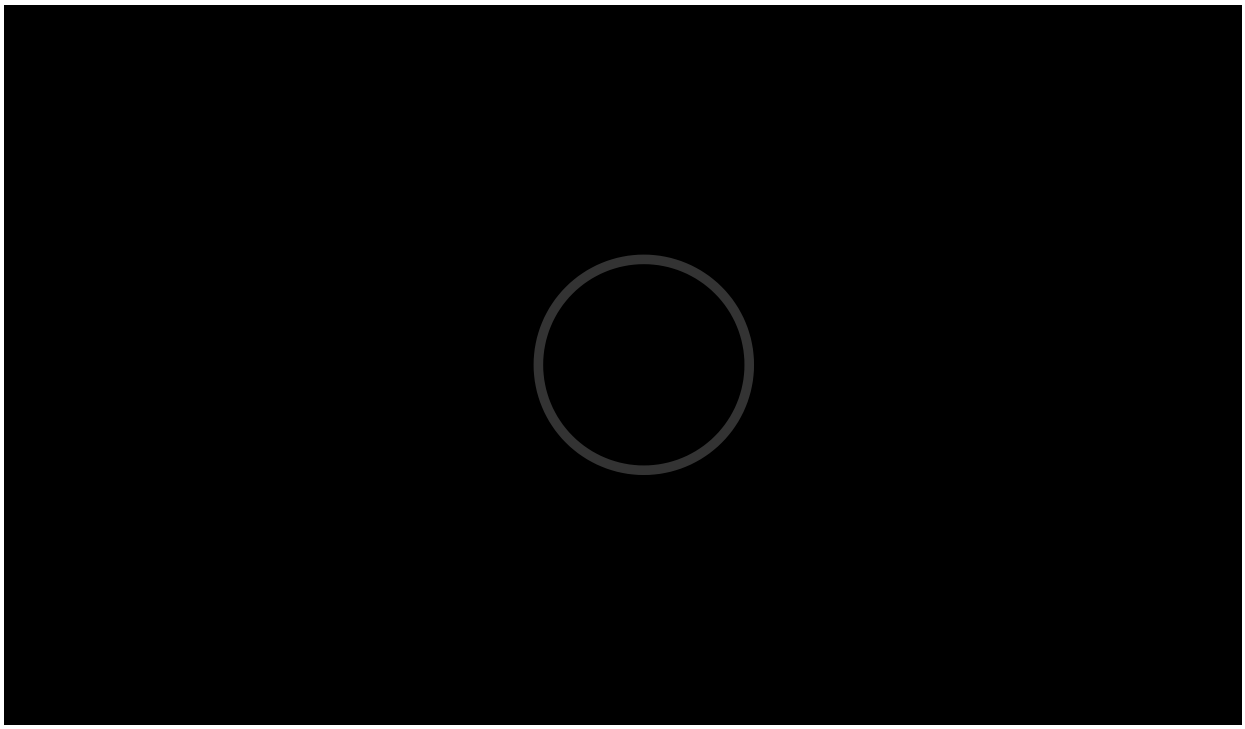
"JSTOR Icon" by Gwillhickers (2018) is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0

If your campus or local library subscribes to databases, the following databases are the most relevant to the study of literature.

Literary Reference Center Plus

This database is probably the most easily accessible and user-friendly database for literary research. It contains primary sources (classic texts), and secondary sources (biographies and literary criticism). It is completely focused on literature, so this database means you do not have to worry about finding material from other disciplines. However, this database is also not as comprehensive as other databases.

MLA International Bibliography



The MLA International Bibliography is an online database containing over 2.8 million articles in over 60 languages from all over the world (MLA). New articles are added every year. This is probably the best place to find the most relevant and current literary criticism. Warning: be careful to avoid Book Reviews which are not considered literary criticism! If you have the ability to filter your search, click "Scholarly" or "Peer Reviewed" to increase likelihood you will find relevant articles.

JSTOR

JSTOR is another large database but is less literature and language-specific as it also contains articles in subjects such as history and psychology. It can be an effective tool for finding older literary criticism and primary source documents. It also provides a free research course to aid students in using databases. However, watch out, because it is such a massive database it also contains a lot of book reviews (which are not literary criticism) and a lot of really, really old literary criticism that may no longer be relevant to the discipline.

Oxford English Dictionary

This is the go-to dictionary for literary critics. It is better for the study of literature than Google or Merriam-Webster because it provides the historical context (etymology) of terms in addition to their current usage, an important consideration for older works such as *Hamlet*, where word meanings have changed significantly over time. When reading a work of literature, have the Oxford English Dictionary open in a separate window so that you can look up words as you read.

- Panopticon Hamlet
- Jail Hamlet
- All of Denmark is a prison
- Elsinore prison
- Elsinore incarceration
- Elsinore jail

Now that I have some search terms, I will try using them in each database.

After performing my searches, the following results popped up, each in a different database:

Ahnert, Ruth. “The Prison in Early Modern Drama.” *Literature Compass*, vol. 9, no. 1, Jan. 2012, pp. 34–47. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1111/j.1741-4113.2011.00860.x.

Hopkins, Lisa. “‘Denmark’s a Prison’: Hamlet and the Earl of Bothwell.” *Hamlet Studies: An International Journal of Research on The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*,

> vol. 19, no. 1–2, 1997, pp. 93–96. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cpid,uid&custid=s4302453&db=mlf&AN=1997065700&site=ehost-live.

Kozusko, Matt. “Monstrous!: Actors, Audiences, Inmates, and the Politics of Reading Shakespeare.” *Shakespeare Bulletin: A Journal of Performance Criticism and Scholarship*,

> vol. 28, no. 2, 2010, pp. 235–251. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,cpid,uid&custid=s4302453&db=mlf&AN=2010582294&site=ehost-live.

Steggle, Matthew. “CRITICAL READINGS: What Kinds of Prison Are in Hamlet?” *Critical Insights: Hamlet*, Jan. 2019, pp. 134–148. *EBSCOhost*,

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lkh&AN=137041969&site=lrc-plus.

I can now begin to read my sources and learn more about my research topic.

Research Log

While researching, you will likely encounter many, many, many different sources. Because there are so many sources, it is easy to lose track of them unless you organize your search process. Otherwise, at best, you might miss out on including a source that is helpful. At worst, you might unintentionally plagiarize and receive a 0 on the assignment.

Thus, to help combat the potential for disorganization during the research process, keep a research log. A research log—or, more formally, an Annotated Bibliography—is basically a document where you keep track of information, such as:

- Search terms used
- Databases explored
- Citations for articles/resources found
- Annotations of these sources

Keeping a research log may seem like extra work, but, in the long run, it is actually more efficient. It helps you keep track of the sources you have already explored so that you do not waste time re-reading articles and performing research steps you already completed. It also makes it easier to pull information when writing the essay and aids you in avoiding plagiarism. Depending on your class, you may be asked to perform a more formal research log called an **Annotated Bibliography.** More on that in the next section.

So what are you waiting for? Enjoy the process of research!

This page titled 8.13: How to Perform Literary Research (Navigating Secondary Sources and Library Databases) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.13: How to Perform Literary Research (Navigating Secondary Sources and Library Databases)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

8.14: What Does My Professor Want?

In your English literature courses, you'll be asked to write a **formal analysis** (sometimes called a "literary analysis," "close reading paper," "rhetorical analysis," or "term paper.") This paper should present an original argument about an aspect or aspects of literature and, depending on the assignment, might engage with **critical sources**. It is important to keep in mind that **this assignment is not a report**. It should not merely rehearse the plot of the literature or the critical arguments that have already been made about your topic. Rather, the argument should be based on your own **close reading** of your chosen text(s) and, at the same time, if the prompt requires it, demonstrate the scholarly maturity that comes with situating this argument in relation to the work of other scholars. Material from these sources should be carefully documented using the **MLA style of documentation**.

Here are some tips:

- All professors will want to see a strong **argument**, cogently advanced and well-supported by **evidence from the literature**.
- **Organization** counts. Make sure you have a focused, detailed **thesis** within your **introductory paragraph**. **Succeeding paragraphs** should state a topic and supply evidence and argument to support that topic. Don't forget the **conclusion**. A strong conclusion leaves your reader with a clear sense of your perspective and helps the reader to recall the most important aspects of your argument.
- If engaging with scholarly articles or literary theory, don't let the critics run away with your paper. **Subordinate their views to your own**, and make sure that the preponderance of the paper is yours. Never cite a critical view that you do not understand.
- Remember to **revise** your work and proof-read carefully. Some professors care more about one aspect of paper writing than others. Some particularly hate to see documentation errors; for others sloppy writing (lots of spelling, punctuation and other mechanical errors) spells doom. Always do your best work, and don't assume that you can neglect any aspect of your essay.
- Your professor will give you specific guidelines for topic selection, but general topics often include: **poetry explication**, analysis of **theme(s)**, exploration of one or more characteristic(s) of an **author's style and approach**, placement of a work or works in **literary historical context**, the **comparison/contrast of works** sharing similarities but written by different authors and/or in different literary periods.
- You may find the **MLA Bibliography tutorial** particularly useful.



Appropriate General Topics

Analysis of theme(s)

A theme is a recurring idea or concept in a text. It is not explicit; therefore, the writer must to look for repeated imagery or symbols, examine the relationships between plot, setting, characters, and structure, and think about the feelings evoked throughout the text. Common themes in literature include love, jealousy, and friendship. If assigned to analyze a theme in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, you could analyze the theme of friendship between Huck and Jim.

Exploration of one or more characteristic(s) of an author's style and approach

Consider analyzing the author's use of imagery or setting:

Analyzing Setting

"Setting refers to the natural or artificial scenery or environment in which characters in literature live and move. Seeing also includes what in the theater would be called props or properties—the implements employed by the characters in various activities. Such things as the time of day and the consequent amount of light at which an event occurs, the flora and fauna, the sounds described, the smells, and the weather are also part of the setting. Paintbrushes, apples, pitchforks, rafts, six-shooters, watches, automobiles, horses and buggies, and innumerable other items belong to the setting. References to clothing, descriptions of physical appearance, and spatial relationships among the characters are also part of setting." (Edgar V. Roberts, Writing Themes about Literature)

In order to create an argument about the function of the setting in a particular work, you need to identify the principal settings and to see how they work. Here are some steps you can take:

1) Read the story and mark references to setting. Start with the place and time of the action and then focus upon recurrent details and objects.

2) Think about what the story is about. What happens? What is its point? Is it a story about love, jealousy, gain, or loss? What is the main experience here?

3) Look through your setting notes and see if they fall into any pattern. What are the interesting shifts and contrasts?

4) Determine how the setting relates to either the main point of the story (step 2) or to some part of it. In other words what does the setting have to do with character or action? What are its effects? Whatever you decide here will be your thesis statement.

5) Make an outline, indicating what aspects of setting you will discuss and what you intend to say about them. Discard notes that are not central to your plan (you don't have to discuss everything). Focus on the four or five key passages in the story that you wish to examine. List them in your outline in the order in which they occur.

Analyzing Imagery

As distinct from character, theme, and plot, imagery occurs primarily in language, in the metaphors (i.e. comparisons), similes (comparisons with "like" or "as"), or other forms of figurative (pictorial) language in a literary work. Sometimes setting, i.e., the locality or placing of scenes, or stage props (like swords, flowers, blood, winecups) can also be considered under the rubric of imagery. But whatever the expression, images primarily are visual and concrete, i.e., things which the reader sees or can imagine seeing. Some examples are flowers, tears, animals, the moon, sun, stars, diseases, floods, metals, darkness and light.

In order to create an argument about the significance of an image in a particular work, identify a principal image or image cluster and to see how it works by following these steps:

1) Read the work and mark recurrent images or image clusters. If you are seeing references to roses, e.g., references to other thorns or to other flowers might also be pertinent parts of a cluster. Look at notes to the images carefully. Take out your microscope. You may also track down occurrences of related words with the help of a concordance (See Marvin Spevack's Concordance to Shakespeare in the library) or electronic word searches. You can use secondary sources for this assignment as well.

2) Think about what the play is about. What happens? What is its point? Is it a play about love, jealousy, gain, or loss? What is the main experience here? Look through your images and image clusters and see if they fall into any pattern. What are the interesting shifts? Do they generally appear in the speeches of certain characters? in certain scenes? Do we have a progression or development? Significant contrasts?

3) Determine how the images or image clusters (step 3) relate to either the main point of the play (step 2) or to some part of it. In other words what do the images have to do with character or action? What are their effects? Whatever you decide here will be your thesis statement.

4) Make an outline, indicating what your image pattern is and what you intend to say about it. Discard images that are not central to your plan (you don't have to discuss everything). Focus on the four or five key passages in the play that you wish to examine. List them in your outline in the order in which they occur.

5) Read criticism and watch films to deepen understanding and refine your thesis. Compile a bibliography. Adjust outline as necessary.

Placement of a work or works in literary historical context

By placing a work in its literary historical context, one can trace the influences a historical period had on an author and/or the creation of his/her work(s). In doing this, a literary historical critic gains insights about the nature of a particular historical period. Using the historical context as a lens through which to read literature allows one to gain an understanding of both larger social issues, as well as the personal struggles that everyday people endured. As Janet E. Gardner explains in *Writing about Literature*,

"We may be able to learn from parish burial records, for example, how common childhood mortality was at a particular time in English history, but only when we read Ben Johnson’s poem 'On My First Son' do we begin to understand how this mortality may have affected the parents who lost their children. Likewise, the few pages of James Joyce's story 'Araby' may tell us more about how adolescent boys lived and thought in turn-of-the-century Dublin than several volumes of social history" (Gardner 147-8).

Comparison/contrast of works sharing similarities but written by different authors and/or in different literary periods

While there are many forms of compare-and-contrast essays, the best ones use the points of comparison and contrast that they identify between the works in order to make a claim about how one text illuminates the other or how they illuminate each other. Rather than a simple delineation of differences and similarities, your essay should use those differences and similarities to make a larger argument about how comparing the two texts reveals some unexpected or non-obvious about one or both of the works.

Most often, such claims work to show how texts do similar things differently. Therefore, often the best structure for this kind of argument is to detail enough similarities between the works (especially works written by vastly different authors and/or in different literary periods) to justify your comparison and to narrow the scope of your discussion. In other words, first show how your two vastly different texts are attempting similar things. Then, focus the remainder of your essay on the nuanced differences between each text's approach to those similar things and the way in which juxtaposing them illuminates our understanding of one or both.

Poetry Explication

Explication, from *explicare* meaning "to unfold," is an exercise in analysis. In it, the writer shows that he or she can read a poem and explain how it the various choices a poet makes shape its message and affect the reader. One writes an explication by paying close attention to the meaning of words, to their sounds, to their placement in lines and sentences. One then explains how the parts contribute to the whole. This exercise trains the ear, eye, and mind. It develops critical faculties and discipline.

1) Read the poem out loud several times. Look up in a dictionary at least 10 words in it for meanings, alternate meanings, and for shades of meaning. Take notes. Jot down some general observations about the poem and your initial reactions.

2) Ask yourself who is the speaker? What is the situation and what is the poem about? Be as precise and as specific as possible. What about tone, diction [level of word choice—high, medium, low, or slang], mood? Jot down your answers.

3) Underline all repetitions or devices of sound that you notice. Pay attention to any surprising shifts of sound or meaning. Ask yourself what effects they have? Jot down your answers.

4) Type the poem out (double-spaced) on a separate sheet of paper. Number the lines and mark all stressed and unstressed syllables. Mark also significant devices of sound: caesuras [breaks within a line, usually signalled by punctuation], alliteration, or assonance ("significant" means important enough for you to discuss later). This does not count in the four pages and must be handed in with the poem.

5) Write in your first paragraph a brief summary of the poem, i.e. a notice of its central statement and constituent parts. Show some emotion or interest here; don’t be flat or effusive (avoid general and meaningless praise: "this is a wonderful or incredible or brilliant poem").

6) Quote the first few lines of the poem (1-4, or whatever you're comfortable with). Talk about the speaker and situation, about what is said, how, and why. Note connotations and overtones, how sound creates or enhances sense. Don't ever notice a poetic device without explaining its effect. Pay attention to sound and sense, to music and meaning.

7) Repeat step 3 for the rest of the poem, working your way through slowly and carefully. Note instances of repetition and their effects; note development of phrases or ideas. Note images and be account for shifts in tone, sound, rhythm, diction, or subject. Discuss the ending of the poem separately.

8) For a conclusion write a brief, specific statement about the effect or meaning or artistry of the poem, about structures or patterns or insights that your analysis has revealed. Look through your opening paragraph for hints that you can now develop in closing. Or revise opening in light of what you have discovered.

Argumentative Thesis

Your thesis must make an argument, not an observation.

An "observation" suggests something that is generally true about the text, like an objective element of the plot or an image used by the author. For example, if we are writing about the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* we might make an observation about the way animal imagery seems to function for the Geat warriors. We might observe that while the Geats feature an image of a boar on their battle helmets (thus seemingly identifying with this ferocious animal), there are other moments in the text when the Geats shun vicious monsters (when they are reluctant to fight the dragon, for example.) Someone who has read the work carefully probably wouldn't disagree with this observation; it refers to an image used by the narrator and a specific plot point. This observation does, however, pose a question or "problem" for the careful reader: what do we as readers make of this apparent contradiction? Why is

this juxtaposition important for the narrative more broadly? What are the consequences of this juxtaposition on plot, theme, or character? *So what*?

An "argument"—your thesis statement—is your solution to this problem. The thesis answers the "so what" question by explaining the significance of the observation and explaining why an invested reader should care about this detail. For example, one might argue that the juxtaposition of the Geats ferocious helmets and their subsequent unwillingness to approach the dragon suggests an inherent difference between the warriors' appearance (outward show) and their actions. This seems to be a theme in the work. The Danish coastguard who greets the Geats when they arrive in Denmark remarks that there is often a difference between "what is said" and "what is done," and at the end of the epic, Wiglaf says that this discrepancy between word and action will ultimately impair the Geats' ability to protect their kingdom. A thesis statement could read: "The difference between the Geats ferocious appearance and their later unwillingness to fight fearful monsters like the dragon suggests a devastating discrepancy between their appearance and their actions—a discrepancy that is responsible for the deterioration of the warrior culture in the epic."

It is important to keep in mind that your thesis statement should argue something with which a reader can disagree. If I argued the thesis above, the body of my essay would not only need to prove that there is, in fact, a contradiction between the Geats' appearance and action, but would also necessarily provide additional textual examples of how this discrepancy contributes to the deterioration of the warrior kingdoms in the epic. And, I'd need to be aware that other readers might not see the same contradiction. For example, another viable thesis statement could read: "As clear from biblical references in the text, humans identify with animals over monsters because animals are more like humans. Both humans and animals were created by God and thereby remind men of Divinity; whereas, monsters are perversions of God's nature and thereby indicate a diabolic presence." Rather than suggesting a contradiction, the imagery on the helmet suggests a righteous identification with God's creation and an equally righteous aversion to things that are not "of God." These two thesis statements offer opposite solutions to the problem posed above; both are viable and could be supported with textual evidence; and both make points with which a careful reader could disagree.

Close Reading

Before a literary scholar can begin writing about a piece of literature, one must engage in the exercise of close reading. As the term suggests, "close reading" means closely examining the words on a page in order to come up with a reading or an interpretation about the greater meaning of a work.

How does one "read closely"?

- The first task involves dissecting a passage or phrase by analyzing literary elements that stick out. For instance, is the tone, diction, syntax, style, imagery, figurative language, theme(s), cultural/historical/religious references, rhyme, rhythm and meter, etc. significant in the passage or stanza? Take notes on whatever seems significant by writing in the margins of your text or keeping a reading journal.
- After taking notes, the second task in close reading is looking for patterns or interruptions of patterns. Gather the evidence collected and think about how each one works together to create the work as a whole or how these elements contribute to or complicate larger issues such as theme, setting, characterization.
- Finally, think about the purpose and the effect of these significant elements/patterns in the work as a whole. This means asking *why* and *how*: Why is an author using a particular metaphor, tone, diction, etc. and how does it affect one's understanding of the passage? How are they all related to one another? How do they help us understand the larger work?

The steps listed above are a pre-writing exercise, designed to help you identify a potential thesis. Once you have formulated a thesis about how to read a larger work, you can use the smaller significant elements as evidence. This evidence will then need to be analyzed in order to support that thesis.

Critical Sources

Defining Literary Criticism

Literary criticism is a disciplined attempt to analyze some aspect or aspects of one or more works of art — for our purposes, mostly literary art (plays, novels, short stories, essays, poems). Serious literary critics study their primary materials very closely and repeatedly, examine the contexts in which the works they are studying were produced, and read widely in the work of other literary critics on their subject before producing their own original analysis of a work or works of literature. Generally, literary criticism is published in one of three forms: in a book; in an article published in a professional journal, whether print-based or online; or in an article published in a book as part of a collection. These formats insure that experts in the appropriate field(s) have reviewed the

literary criticism and judged its accuracy in points of fact, its attention to scholarship in the field, etc. These formats are **peer-reviewed sources** (also known as "refereed sources"). Peer-reviewed means that a source has been rigorously scrutinized by other experts before publication.

Why consult and cite literary criticism?

• Reading a variety of views increases your knowledge of your subject and helps you to demonstrate to your reader that you have considered views other than your own.
• Reading literary criticism enables you to weigh your conclusions against others' to check your logic and to see whether you have covered all significant aspects of your argument.
• Citing others' views makes you appear a more knowledgeable writer to your readers.
• Citing literary critics whose views agree with yours can strengthen your case (although you must still supply the appropriate evidence).
• Taking issue with a critic with whom you disagree can also strengthen your case if you present your counterargument effectively.
• Literary criticism can enable you and your readers to see how evaluations and analyses of literature have changed over time.

Where do I find literary criticism?

Encyclopedia articles do not offer true literary criticism, nor do Cliff's Notes, SparkNotes, or "overviews" of authors, works, or literary topics available online. Some websites post serious scholarship, but many are run by fans or students who may or may not know more than you do (!). Wikipedia, for example, is not a peer-reviewed source; anyone can post and update information on this site and, as a result, it is not a reliable resource. If you find your sources either through the SHARC catalogue or the MLA Bibliography database online (the bibliographical resource of the Modern Language Association), you are unlikely to go wrong:

• Use books and articles from the Loyola/Notre Dame Library or other libraries and articles located via the library databases. Internet material must have been published in a book or journal before being placed online. (Recall your library workshop.)
• Good sources can be found through Project Muse and the MLA Bibliography database, but avoid the "Biographies" and "Overview" tabs in the Literature Resource Center. This information can be useful to provide background for your research, but you should not use it in your paper as one of the documented sources.
• The MLA Bibliography database is the primary research database for researchers in literature. If a this database doesn't supply a .pdf of an article you want to look at, write down the full publication information, and search for the journal in the ejournals section of our library's homepage.

Formal Analysis

Formal analysis involves a close reading of the literary elements of a text. A formal analysis examines elements such as setting, imagery, characters, tone, form/structure, and language. The goal of a formal analysis is to create meaning by exploring how these elements work together in any given text. You can compare parts of a text or you can analyze how parts of a text relate to the whole text.

MLA Style of Documentation

Follow the MLA style of documentation, which is a parenthetical style. Remember that you need a "Works Cited" page and a "Bibliography" page, and these should follow MLA format, not one you create on the spur of the moment or borrow from some other discipline. The "Works Cited" page lists all works you cite in the essay, the "Bibliography" lists all the works you consulted, including all of those cited. You should always note your professor's requirements as to minimum number of sources.

The Department's handbook (*A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker) provides information under the MLA tab about how to provide parenthetical documentation and prepare a bibliography and list of works cited. A quick look at the sample MLA paper in Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* will give you a general sense of how MLA documentation works.

Organization

Every paper must contain an **introduction** (which states the argumentative thesis), **subsequent argument paragraphs**, and a **conclusion**.

Introductory Paragraph

As Janet E. Gardner writes in *Writing About Literature*, "Essentially, an introduction accomplishes two things. First, it gives a sense of both your topic and your approach to that topic, which is why it is common to make your thesis statement a part of the introduction. Second, an introduction compels your readers' interest and makes them want to read on and find out what your paper

has to say. Some common strategies used in effective introductions are to begin with a probing rhetorical question, a vivid description, or an intriguing quotation. Weak introductions tend to speak in generalities or in philosophical ideas that are only tangentially related to the real topic of your paper. Don't spin your wheels: get specific and get to the point right away."

Your introduction is your opportunity to catch your reader's attention and involve that person in the ideas you put forth in your paper. Imagine riding in an elevator with someone you'd like to strike up a conversation with about a specific topic. How do you do it? How do you catch that person's attention before the ride is up? You can't just immediately throw your claims and evidence at that person, yet at the same time, he or she is unlikely to be compelled by vague general statements about "the history of time" or where and when a certain person was born. And you can't stand there all day getting to the point. Instead, you look for compelling point of interest that is both related to where you'd like to go with your discussion, and is of shared interest between you and that person. After raising the topic through this point of common ground, you can then put forth what you will claim about it.

Succeeding Paragraphs

A complete argument paragraph consists of the following components:

1. **Topic Sentence**: Suggests generally what the paragraph is talking about; often includes a transition from previous paragraphs.

2. **Claim**: Makes a very specific claim that the paragraph will argue is true; you'll likely derive this claim from your thesis statement (together,
all your paragraph claims will work to prove your thesis).

3. **Evidence**: Provides the textual support for the claim.

4. **Analysis**: Explains how the evidence actually relates to the argument. This is typically the most challenging part of composing your
paragraph, and it is often forgotten (much to the peril of both reader and writer!). Here, you must articulate how the passage you've just cited supports
the paragraph claim/argument premise. You must explain how the textual evidence means what you think it means. Never rely on the reader to be able to
interpret the evidence on his or her own. That is, if your argument is a statement with which the careful reader can disagree, this means that the evidence
you provide can likely be interpreted in many different ways. You need to guide your reader in interpreting the evidence so as to argue why your claim is
true.

5. **Conclusion**: Offers implications of the argument and evidence, often transitions to the next paragraph. This often answers the "so what?" question. It
articulates why what you've just proven matters and usually articulates how your argument claims relates to/proves the thesis statement.

After the explanation of evidence, a well-developed paragraph might also include:

Additional Evidence/Explanation: What other evidence is there to support your claim?

Concession/ Nonclusion (these are an inseparable pair!): What evidence might contradict your claim? (The concession acknowledges the perceived
opposition (perhaps in the form of another critic) or the skeptical reader). And, why, despite this evidence, is your argument still more effective than the
concession? (The nonclusion is essential — never end a paragraph with a concession; take the concession into account while further proving your argument!)

Conclusion

As Janet E. Gardner points out in *Writing About Literature*, "Your conclusion should give your reader something new to think about, a reason not to just forget your essay. Some writers like to use the conclusion to return to an idea, a quotation, or an image first raised in the introduction, creating a satisfying feeling of completeness and self-containment…. Some writers use the conclusion to show the implications of their claims or the connections between literature and real life. This is your chance to make a good final impression, so don’t waste it with a simple summary and restatement."

This doesn't mean that your conclusion should not restate your thesis. Your conclusion is the place in which you draw together all the threads of your argument and neatly tie them up. When Gardner says not to "waste" your conclusion with "simple summary and restatement," she means don't ONLY summarize and restate. Your should absolutely recap your main points, but a good conclusion ALSO does more. Additionally, treading the path between not giving your reader anything new in the conclusion and introducing more unsupported claims can be tricky. The conclusion is a good place to SUGGEST the further implications of your argument, for life, for literature, for an author's body of work, etc., but be careful that you don't find yourself making new claims your reader is unlikely to agree with. These implications should follow naturally from the structure of your argument and often are best expressed with less-definitive phrasing (i.e. "perhaps," "implies," "suggests," "hints," "may," etc.).

Post-Writing

1) Revise again and again. All good writing is rewriting. Clarify, define, smooth-out rough spots. Work to develop ideas, and round out paragraphs. Try to be more accurate and graceful, to clean up mistakes, and to correct embarrassing errors. Look hard at your evidence. Be tough and cut out the nonsense.

2) Proofread carefully, by means of spell-check and by your own reading. Make sure you have supplied a title, page numbers for the paper. (No decorative bindings; use 12-point type, double spaced, with standard page margins.)

3) Make sure you have provided accurate documentation for every quotation and outside source cited or consulted.

Quoting Critics

• It is a good idea to include a full quotation when the critic says something particularly well. Paraphrase when the idea is important, but the wording is nothing special. (Document both.)

• Don't let the critics run away with your paper. Instead, keep their ideas subordinated to your own and use them to support your own claims. Typically, your paragraphs should begin with your topic sentence, then provide your evidence from the text, and then (perhaps) include a comment or comments from critics. A rare exception might be when you are disagreeing with a critic. In this instance, you may wish to state the opposing idea first, and then follow up by expressing your disagreement and presenting the evidence for your point of view.

• Cited passages should be integrated into your text and be attributed to their originators. For example, "Elgin Slapworthy has observed that 'Dickens remembered this period in his boyhood as both painful and humiliating'" (237). Don't just pop in a quotation without making the context and source of the quotation clear. Attribution in the text makes the essay read more smoothly and cuts down on the amount of parenthetical documentation that must be provided.

• Quotations of more than three lines should be indented and set off in the text. Setting off indicates quotation, so quotation marks are not needed, unless you have a quotation within a quotation.

As Prof. Bladderstock argues:
Austen's prose has often been imitated but never matched. Even my own brilliant Austen parody, Sense and Susceptibility, fell short in regard to dialogue.
Austen's uncanny ability to combine sense and wit, while suiting words and phrasing to character, is difficult, perhaps impossible to reproduce. (132)

• A quotation within a quotation—say you quote a critic who quotes a passage from Dorothy Sayers—should be indicated by using single quotation marks: According to Evangeline Pink, "Sayers' use of the line, 'So, you're one of them,' echoes a statement in the trial of the infamous Madeline Smith" (299).

Evidence from Literature

Just as scientists provide data to support their results, literary critics must use evidence from literature in order to convince their audience that they have a cogent argument. Evidence must be provided in every body paragraph in order to support your claims. Where will you find evidence? First, you must do a close reading of the text. It is much easier to first analyze and think about how the smaller literary elements work together to create the whole work, rather than randomly thumbing through a work to find support for your thesis. When you provide evidence, you are providing proof from the text that shows your audience that your thesis is valid. Critics most commonly provide evidence by quoting a line or a passage from a work. When you provide evidence, it is imperative not to take it out of context. For example, if a character is joking with another character that he will kill himself if he fails his chemistry test and there's no other mention of death in the work, it would be unfair to represent this character as suicidal by

eliminating the context of him joking. Accurately quoting and fairly representing events/characters/etc. adds to your credibility as a writer. If you find evidence that counters your thesis, you should still engage with it. Think about what your critics would say and come up with a response to show how that particular piece of evidence might still support your stance. Once you're done gathering evidence, you can move on to the analysis portion in which you explain how the evidence supports your claims.

Contributors and Attributions

"Tips for Writing Papers." Provided by: Loyola English Department. License: CC BY-NC-SA

8.14: What Does My Professor Want? is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- **12.1: What Does My Professor Want?** has no license indicated.

8.15: Sample Student Literary Analysis Essays

The following examples are essays where student writers focused on close-reading a literary work.

While reading these examples, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the essay's thesis statement, and how do you know it is the thesis statement?
2. What is the main idea or topic sentence of each body paragraph, and how does it relate back to the thesis statement?
3. Where and how does each essay use evidence (quotes or paraphrase from the literature)?
4. What are some of the literary devices or structures the essays analyze or discuss?
5. How does each author structure their conclusion, and how does their conclusion differ from their introduction?

Example 1: Poetry

Victoria Morillo

Instructor Heather Ringo

ENGL 002

3 August 2022

How Nguyen's Structure Solidifies the Impact of Sexual Violence in "The Study"

Stripped of innocence, your body taken from you. No matter how much you try to block out the instance in which these two things occurred, memories surface and come back to haunt you. How does a person, *a young boy*, cope with an event that forever changes his life? Hieu Minh Nguyen deconstructs this very way in which an act of sexual violence affects a survivor. In his poem, "The Study," the poem's speaker recounts the year in which his molestation took place, describing how his memory filters in and out. Throughout the poem, Nguyen writes in free verse, permitting a structural liberation to become the foundation for his message to shine through. While he moves the readers with this poignant narrative, Nguyen effectively conveys the resulting internal struggles of feeling alone and unseen.

The speaker recalls his experience with such painful memory through the use of specific punctuation choices. Just by looking at the poem, we see that the first period doesn't appear until line 14. It finally comes after the speaker reveals to his readers the possible, central purpose for writing this poem: the speaker's molestation. In the first half, the poem makes use of commas, em dashes, and colons, which lends itself to the idea of the speaker stringing along all of these details to make sense of this time in his life. If reading the poem following the conventions of punctuation, a sense of urgency is present here, as well. This is exemplified by the lack of periods to finalize a thought; and instead, Nguyen uses other punctuation marks to connect them. Serving as another connector of thoughts, the two em dashes give emphasis to the role memory plays when the speaker discusses how "no one [had] a face" during that time (Nguyen 9-11). He speaks in this urgent manner until the 14th line, and when he finally gets it off his chest, the pace of the poem changes, as does the more frequent use of the period. This stream-of-consciousness-like section when juxtaposed with the latter half of the poem, causes readers to slow down and pay attention to the details. It also splits the poem in two: a section that talks of the fogginess of memory then transitions into one that remembers it all.

In tandem with the fluctuating nature of memory, the utilization of line breaks and word choice help reflect the damage the molestation has had. Within the first couple of lines of the poem, the poem demands the readers' attention when the line breaks from "floating" to "dead" as the speaker describes his memory of Little Billy (Nguyen 1-4). This line break averts the readers' expectation of the direction of the narrative and immediately shifts the tone of the poem. The break also speaks to the effect his trauma has ingrained in him and how "[f]or the longest time," his only memory of that year revolves around an image of a boy's death. In a way, the speaker sees himself in Little Billy; or perhaps, he's representative of the tragic death of his boyhood, how the speaker felt so "dead" after enduring such a traumatic experience, even referring to himself as a "ghost" that he tries to evict from his conscience (Nguyen 24). The feeling that a part of him has died is solidified at the very end of the poem when the speaker describes himself as a nine-year-old boy who's been "fossilized," forever changed by this act (Nguyen 29). By choosing words associated with permanence and death, the speaker tries to recreate the atmosphere (for which he felt trapped in) in order for readers to understand the loneliness that came as a result of his trauma. With the assistance of line breaks, more attention is drawn to the speaker's words, intensifying their importance, and demanding to be felt by the readers.

Most importantly, the speaker expresses eloquently, and so heartbreakingly, about the effect sexual violence has on a person. Perhaps what seems to be the most frustrating are the people who fail to believe survivors of these types of crimes. This is evident

when he describes “how angry” the tenants were when they filled the pool with cement (Nguyen 4). They seem to represent how people in the speaker's life were dismissive of his assault and who viewed his tragedy as a nuisance of some sorts. This sentiment is bookended when he says, “They say, *give us details*, so I give them my body. / They say, *give us proof*, so I give them my body,” (Nguyen 25-26). The repetition of these two lines reinforces the feeling many feel in these scenarios, as they’re often left to deal with trying to make people believe them, or to even *see* them.

It’s important to recognize how the structure of this poem gives the speaker space to express the pain he’s had to carry for so long. As a characteristic of free verse, the poem doesn’t follow any structured rhyme scheme or meter; which in turn, allows him to not have any constraints in telling his story the way he wants to. The speaker has the freedom to display his experience in a way that evades predictability and engenders authenticity of a story very personal to him. As readers, we abandon anticipating the next rhyme, and instead focus our attention to the other ways, like his punctuation or word choice, in which he effectively tells his story. The speaker recognizes that some part of him no longer belongs to himself, but by writing “The Study,” he shows other survivors that they’re not alone and encourages hope that eventually, they will be freed from the shackles of sexual violence.

Works Cited

Nguyen, Hieu Minh. “The Study” *Poets.Org*. Academy of American Poets, Coffee House Press, 2018, https://poets.org/poem/study-0.

Example 2: Fiction

Todd Goodwin

Professor Stan Matyshak

Advanced Expository Writing

Sept. 17, 20—

Poe’s “Usher”: A Mirror of the Fall of the House of Humanity

Right from the outset of the grim story, “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Edgar Allan Poe enmeshes us in a dark, gloomy, hopeless world, alienating his characters and the reader from any sort of physical or psychological norm where such values as hope and happiness could possibly exist. He fatalistically tells the story of how a man (the narrator) comes from the outside world of hope, religion, and everyday society and tries to bring some kind of redeeming happiness to his boyhood friend, Roderick Usher, who not only has physically and psychologically wasted away but is entrapped in a dilapidated house of ever-looming terror with an emaciated and deranged twin sister. Roderick Usher embodies the wasting away of what once was vibrant and alive, and his house of “insufferable gloom” (273), which contains his morbid sister, seems to mirror or reflect this fear of death and annihilation that he most horribly endures. A close reading of the story reveals that Poe uses mirror images, or reflections, to contribute to the fatalistic theme of “Usher”: each reflection serves to intensify an already prevalent tone of hopelessness, darkness, and fatalism.

It could be argued that the house of Roderick Usher is a “house of mirrors,” whose unpleasant and grim reflections create a dark and hopeless setting. For example, the narrator first approaches “the melancholy house of Usher on a dark and soundless day,” and finds a building which causes him a “sense of insufferable gloom,” which “pervades his spirit and causes an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart, an undiscerned dreariness of thought” (273). The narrator then optimistically states: “I reflected that a mere different arrangement of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression” (274). But the narrator then sees the reflection of the house in the tarn and experiences a “shudder even more thrilling than before” (274). Thus the reader begins to realize that the narrator cannot change or stop the impending doom that will befall the house of Usher, and maybe humanity. The story cleverly plays with the word *reflection*: the narrator sees a physical reflection that leads him to a mental reflection about Usher’s surroundings.

The narrator’s disillusionment by such grim reflection continues in the story. For example, he describes Roderick Usher’s face as distinct with signs of old strength but lost vigor: the remains of what used to be. He describes the house as a once happy and vibrant place, which, like Roderick, lost its vitality. Also, the narrator describes Usher’s hair as growing wild on his rather obtrusive head, which directly mirrors the eerie moss and straw covering the outside of the house. The narrator continually longs to see these bleak reflections as a dream, for he states: “Shaking off from my spirit what *must* have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building” (276). He does not want to face the reality that Usher and his home are doomed to fall, regardless of what he does.

Although there are almost countless examples of these mirror images, two others stand out as important. First, Roderick and his sister, Madeline, are twins. The narrator aptly states just as he and Roderick are entombing Madeline that there is “a striking similitude between brother and sister” (288). Indeed, they are mirror images of each other. Madeline is fading away psychologically and physically, and Roderick is not too far behind! The reflection of “doom” that these two share helps intensify and symbolize the hopelessness of the entire situation; thus, they further develop the fatalistic theme. Second, in the climactic scene where Madeline has been mistakenly entombed alive, there is a pairing of images and sounds as the narrator tries to calm Roderick by reading him a romance story. Events in the story simultaneously unfold with events of the sister escaping her tomb. In the story, the hero breaks out of the coffin. Then, in the story, the dragon’s shriek as he is slain parallels Madeline’s shriek. Finally, the story tells of the clangor of a shield, matched by the sister’s clanging along a metal passageway. As the suspense reaches its climax, Roderick shrieks his last words to his “friend,” the narrator: “Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door” (296).

Roderick, who slowly falls into insanity, ironically calls the narrator the “Madman.” We are left to reflect on what Poe means by this ironic twist. Poe’s bleak and dark imagery, and his use of mirror reflections, seem only to intensify the hopelessness of “Usher.” We can plausibly conclude that, indeed, the narrator is the “Madman,” for he comes from everyday society, which is a place where hope and faith exist. Poe would probably argue that such a place is opposite to the world of Usher because a world where death is inevitable could not possibly hold such positive values. Therefore, just as Roderick mirrors his sister, the reflection in the tarn mirrors the dilapidation of the house, and the story mirrors the final actions before the death of Usher. “The Fall of the House of Usher” reflects Poe’s view that humanity is hopelessly doomed.

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Fall of the House of Usher.” 1839. *Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library*. 1995. Web. 1 July 2012. <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/PoeFall.html>.

Example 3: Poetry

Amy Chisnell

Professor Laura Neary

Writing and Literature

April 17, 20—

Don’t Listen to the Egg!: A Close Reading of Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky”

“You seem very clever at explaining words, Sir,” said Alice. “Would you kindly tell me the meaning of the poem called ‘Jabberwocky’?”

“Let’s hear it,” said Humpty Dumpty. “I can explain all the poems that ever were invented—and a good many that haven’t been invented just yet.” (Carroll 164)

In Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*, Humpty Dumpty confidently translates (to a not so confident Alice) the complicated language of the poem “Jabberwocky.” The words of the poem, though nonsense, aptly tell the story of the slaying of the Jabberwock. Upon finding “Jabberwocky” on a table in the looking-glass room, Alice is confused by the strange words. She is quite certain that “*somebody* killed *something*,” but she does not understand much more than that. When later she encounters Humpty Dumpty, she seizes the opportunity at having the knowledgeable egg interpret—or translate—the poem. Since Humpty Dumpty professes to be able to “make a word work” for him, he is quick to agree. Thus he acts like a New Critic who interprets the poem by performing a close reading of it. Through Humpty’s interpretation of the first stanza, however, we see the poem’s deeper comment concerning the practice of interpreting poetry and literature in general—that strict analytical translation destroys the beauty of a poem. In fact, Humpty Dumpty commits the “heresy of paraphrase,” for he fails to understand that meaning cannot be separated from the form or structure of the literary work.

Of the 71 words found in “Jabberwocky,” 43 have no known meaning. They are simply nonsense. Yet through this nonsensical language, the poem manages not only to tell a story but also gives the reader a sense of setting and characterization. One feels, rather than concretely knows, that the setting is dark, wooded, and frightening. The characters, such as the Jubjub bird, the Bandersnatch, and the doomed Jabberwock, also appear in the reader’s head, even though they will not be found in the local zoo. Even though most of the words are not real, the reader is able to understand what goes on because he or she is given free license to imagine what the words denote and connote. Simply, the poem’s nonsense words *are* the meaning.

Therefore, when Humpty interprets “Jabberwocky” for Alice, he is not doing her any favors, for he actually misreads the poem. Although the poem in its original is constructed from nonsense words, by the time Humpty is done interpreting it, it truly does not make any sense. The first stanza of the original poem is as follows:

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;

All mimsy were the borogroves,

An the mome raths outgrabe. (Carroll 164)

If we replace, however, the nonsense words of “Jabberwocky” with Humpty’s translated words, the effect would be something like this:

’Twas four o’clock in the afternoon, and the lithe and slimy badger-lizard-corkscrew creatures

Did go round and round and make holes in the grass-plot round the sun-dial:

All flimsy and miserable were the shabby-looking birds

with mop feathers,

And the lost green pigs bellowed-sneezed-whistled.

By translating the poem in such a way, Humpty removes the charm or essence—and the beauty, grace, and rhythm—from the poem. The poetry is sacrificed for meaning. Humpty Dumpty commits the heresy of paraphrase. As Cleanth Brooks argues, “The structure of a poem resembles that of a ballet or musical composition. It is a pattern of resolutions and balances and harmonizations” (203). When the poem is left as nonsense, the reader can easily imagine what a “slithy tove” might be, but when Humpty tells us what it is, he takes that imaginative license away from the reader. The beauty (if that is the proper word) of “Jabberwocky” is in *not* knowing what the words mean, and yet understanding. By translating the poem, Humpty takes that privilege from the reader. In addition, Humpty fails to recognize that meaning cannot be separated from the structure itself: the nonsense poem reflects this literally—it means “nothing” and achieves this meaning by using “nonsense” words.

Furthermore, the nonsense words Carroll chooses to use in “Jabberwocky” have a magical effect upon the reader; the shadowy sound of the words create the atmosphere, which may be described as a trance-like mood. When Alice first reads the poem, she says it seems to fill her head “with ideas.” The strange-sounding words in the original poem *do* give one ideas. Why is this? Even though the reader has never heard these words before, he or she is instantly aware of the murky, mysterious mood they set. In other words, diction operates not on the denotative level (the dictionary meaning) but on the connotative level (the emotion(s) they evoke). Thus “Jabberwocky” creates a shadowy mood, and the nonsense words are instrumental in creating this mood. Carroll could not have simply used *any* nonsense words.

For example, let us change the “dark,” “ominous” words of the first stanza to “lighter,” more “comic” words:

’Twas mearly, and the churly pells

Did bimble and ringle in the tink;

All timpy were the brimbledimps,

And the bip plips outlink.

Shifting the sounds of the words from dark to light merely takes a shift in thought. To create a specific mood using nonsense words, one must create new words from old words that convey the desired mood. In “Jabberwocky,” Carroll mixes “slimy,” a grim idea, “lithe,” a pliable image, to get a new adjective: “slithy” (a portmanteau word). In this translation, brighter words were used to get a lighter effect. “Mearly” is a combination of “morning” and “early,” and “ringle” is a blend of “ring” and "dingle.” The point is that “Jabberwocky’s” nonsense words are created specifically to convey this shadowy or mysterious mood and are integral to the “meaning.”

Consequently, Humpty’s rendering of the poem leaves the reader with a completely different feeling than does the original poem, which provided us with a sense of ethereal mystery, of a dark and foreign land with exotic creatures and fantastic settings. The mysteriousness is destroyed by Humpty’s literal paraphrase of the creatures and the setting; by doing so, he has taken the beauty away from the poem in his attempt to understand it. He has committed the heresy of paraphrase: “If we allow ourselves to be misled by it [this heresy], we distort the relation of the poem to its ‘truth’… we split the poem between its ‘form’ and its ‘content’”

(Brooks 201). Humpty Dumpty's ultimate demise might be seen to symbolize the heretical split between form and content: as a literary creation, Humpty Dumpty is an egg, a well-wrought urn of nonsense. His fall from the wall cracks him and separates the contents from the container, and not even all the King's men can put the scrambled egg back together again!

Through the odd characters of a little girl and a foolish egg, "Jabberwocky" suggests a bit of sage advice about reading poetry, advice that the New Critics built their theories on. The importance lies not solely within strict analytical translation or interpretation, but in the overall effect of the imagery and word choice that evokes a meaning inseparable from those literary devices. As Archibald MacLeish so aptly writes: "A poem should not mean / But be." Sometimes it takes a little nonsense to show us the sense in something.

Works Cited

Brooks, Cleanth. *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. 1942. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1956. Print.

Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking-Glass. Alice in Wonderland*. 2nd ed. Ed. Donald J. Gray. New York: Norton, 1992. Print.

MacLeish, Archibald. "Ars Poetica." *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*. Ed. David Lehman. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. 385–86. Print.

Example 4: Poetry

Firstname Lastname

Instructor Heather Ringo

English 2

21 March 2019

"golden daffodils" as Economics of Personification in Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud"

A **lyric poem** about an isolated **speaker** wandering lonely among flowers starts out sad but becomes joyful by the end. The **title** of this poem by William Wordsworth immediately gave me the sense it would be a sad poem since it included the word "lonely." This word usually has negative connotations. The first two **lines** of the **stanza** confirmed my initial impressions in that it used **imagery** of a cloud floating "high" over an empty landscape (1-2). The **tone** is sad and moody. However, this loneliness is disrupted when the cloudlike **speaker** is joined by his new friends: **personified** daffodils (4). In this essay, I argue that through wealth **metaphor** and **anthropomorphism**, **the speaker** rejects the money economy to embrace an economy of plants, where daffodils are valuable friends in an otherwise lonely landscape.

Some might say describing flowers with human anatomy is creepy. The idea of flowers "tossing their heads" seems like a nightmare or bad drug trip at first (12). But on closer inspection, it's not just the daffodils. The entire landscape is alive. There is apparently a dance-off going on between the lake waves and the flowers (14). What started off as a lonely poem quickly grew into a kind of party. Through transforming what seems at first like an empty landscape into one that is populated, the narrator presents an unconventional approach to loneliness, where perhaps companionship includes nonhuman beings.

While being lonely often has negative **connotations,** there is a lot of **diction** choices that make it seem as if loneliness is valued by the speaker. The reason I say that is because the daffodils aren't just **personified,** but they are also described as "golden" (4). They could have been described as yellow, lemon-colored, any number of **adjectives**. The association with a valuable metal seems intentional, especially considering the speaker describes the "show" of the daffodil dance as "wealth" near the end of the poem (18). Most people would not immediately associate loneliness or common flowers with wealth.

Perhaps the true value of the daffodils is indicated in this final **stanza** emphasizing the value of daffodils in memory. Here the moment of observing the dancing daffodils again seems to be represented as a renewable gift that nature gave to the **speaker.** The **speaker sits** at home alone on his couch in a "pensive mood" (20). According to Webster's dictionary, "pensive" means a thoughtful state, with negative connotations of "thoughtful sadness" ("Pensive"). So the speaker is afflicted with sadness, and then the memory of the daffodils acts as a kind of cure, so the speaker's "heart with pleasure fills" (23). While traditional gifts can be exhausted or used up, this source is renewable: he can think of the daffodils again and again to refill any emptiness he may feel. His heart functions as a kind of bank or wallet. This emptiness of his thoughts filled by the golden daffodil memory mirrors the original empty, lonely landscape at the beginning of the poem which was then populated by the daffodils.

Looking back, the poem tells a story about finding value in surprising **settings.** It might even be described as having a **plot l**ike a work of short fiction, perhaps classifying it as **narrative poetry**. While the "lonely" beginning of the poem and the "pensive" mood indicate loneliness as negative, the speaker in the poem traces a journey where he finds "the bliss of solitude" (22). This phrase is somewhat of an **oxymoron**: bliss and solitude are not usually used together. Many find that walks in nature help them feel better. Perhaps the speaker of the poem is speaking to a universal truth about the value of nature? Or about how we aren't really ever alone? Or that maybe we should reconsider what we truly value, and what nature is worth? Certainly the poem makes an argument for relationship with the nonhuman world.

Through transforming daffodils into golden companions, and turning loneliness into blissful solitude, the poem exchanges one economy for another. The speaker gains a hoard of memories that they are able to look back upon and reconsider. This form of wealth is renewable. Perhaps this exploration of the botanical economy and its revaluation of loneliness can be applied to Wordsworth's other poems.

Works Cited

"Pensive." *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster Inc., https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pensive Accessed 31 December 2019.

Wordsworth, William. *"I wandered lonely as a cloud." 1807. Poetry Foundation.* https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45521/i-wandered-lonely-as-a-cloud Accessed 21 October 2019.

Attribution

- Sample Essay 1 received permission from Victoria Morillo to publish, licensed Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)
- Sample Essays 2 and 3 adapted from Cordell, Ryan and John Pennington. "2.5: Student Sample Papers" from *Creating Literary Analysis.* 2012. Licensed Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)

This page titled 8.15: Sample Student Literary Analysis Essays is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **12.14: Sample Student Literary Analysis Essays** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: Citations and Formatting Guide for Literature (MLA)

9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution
9.2: What is MLA?
9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA)
9.4: MLA Works Cited page
9.5: MLA In-Text Citations
9.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary

This page titled 9: Citations and Formatting Guide for Literature (MLA) is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

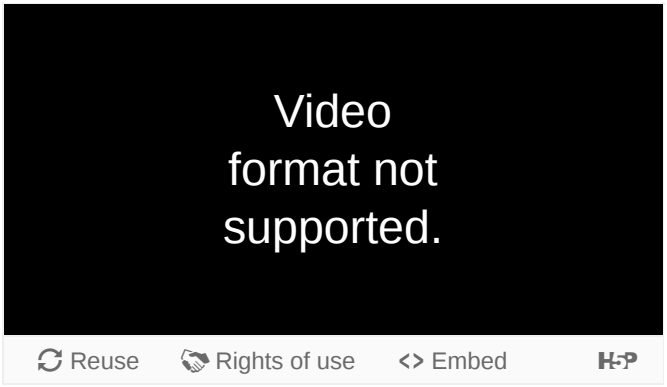
9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution

What is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism is using another thinker's words or ideas without giving them credit. In most essays, this means you use someone else's words or ideas without citing them. Other examples of plagiarism include:

- Submitting an essay written by someone else, in whole or in part
- Copying and pasting from another source without citing them
- Attempting to cite sources, but doing so incorrectly or in a way where it is unclear which ideas came from your mind and which came from other sources
- Correctly citing all sources, but most of your essay is made up of the words and ideas of others with very little of your own original ideas
- Re-using an essay you wrote in a previous class without instructor permission

Video: What is Plagiarism? by Excelsior OWL



Video Transcript

What are the Consequences of Plagiarism?

Most academics consider plagiarism a serious violation of academic honesty. Basically, by plagiarizing, you are betraying the trust of your instructor, peers, and institution. Consequences for plagiarism can include:

- Having to rewrite an assignment
- Receiving an F on the assignment
- Receiving an F in the class
- Being kicked out of the class
- Being kicked out of school
- Having a permanent mark on your transcript
- Being stripped of your degree
- Public admonishment
- Being sued for copyright infringement, which, in extreme cases, can cost millions of dollars (!!!). For example, Marvin Gaye's family was able to win over 5 million dollars when singers Pharrell Williams and Robin Thicke plagiarized one of Marvin Gaye's songs!

In most cases, copyright holders will not go after students because students tend not to have a lot of money laying around. That being said, plagiarism can still have serious consequences. Students should avoid plagiarism at all costs.

The consequences of plagiarism depend on many factors, including:

- The severity of the plagiarism
- Repeated plagiarism behavior
- Your instructor
- The course syllabus, which often describes the class policies and consequences for plagiarism
- Your college
- Your college's student handbook, which often describes the campus policies and consequences for plagiarism

Be sure to consult with your instructor and college about their policies on plagiarism.

How Can Students Avoid Plagiarism?

There are many different tactics for avoiding plagiarism.

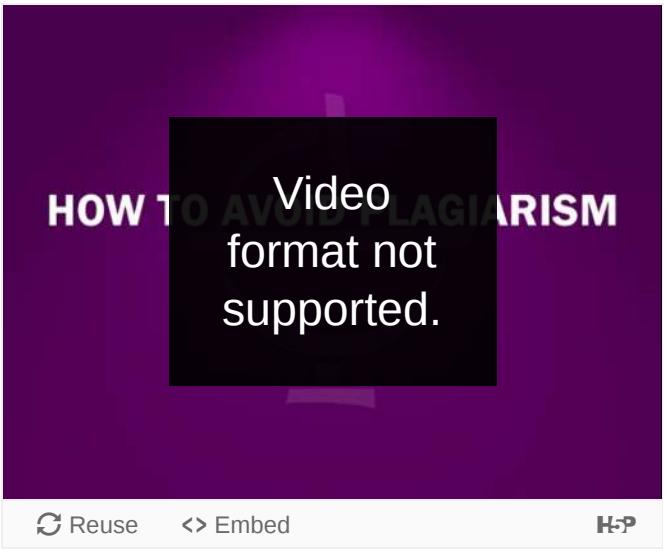
1. **Do your own work specifically for the class or context you're writing for.** Your instructor wants to read your ideas. They want to see you engaging with the course materials. The writing you produce for a given class should reflect your learning in that class.
2. **Ask for help and use your resources.** A lot of times students plagiarize because they are stressed/running short on time/have a legitimate extenuating life circumstance that got in the way of their writing process/left an assignment to the last minute due to procrastination. They might plagiarize out of desperation. In situations like these, it is better to

email your professor and explain the situation and/or ask for an extension than to plagiarize. If you're struggling on an assignment, visit your instructor's office hours or your campus writing center to get support.

3. **Use secondary sources to support your argument, not comprise it.** A lot of students new to a given writing context feel imposter syndrome. They do not feel confident in themselves or their knowledge, so they defer to experts like scholars who wrote on the topic. Unfortunately, this often means the student's smart ideas and writing voice can get smothered by secondary sources! Your instructor doesn't want to read what Famous Scholar X wrote on a topic. If they wanted to read that, they could go read that scholar's work themselves. Rather, they want to read how YOU engaged with the topic! While the expected ratio of your words to other sources will vary depending on the context of your writing situation, usually aim for 80-90% your original ideas, arguments, analysis, and explanation and 10-20% summary, quotation, and paraphrase from sources.
4. **Use Summary, Quotation, and Paraphrase with intention.** Summary generally works to show engagement with main ideas in a given discourse. Quotation is usually used to show specific wording or concepts for deeper analysis. Paraphrase works to convey basic facts or data that you put into your own words. For all three types of engagement with secondary sources, be sure to include in-text citations! It should always be clear which ideas are yours and which belong to your sources.
    1. See Summary, Quotation, and Paraphrase resource for more on this topic!
5. **Practice Ethical Attribution** by citing all sources both in-text AND on the Works Cited page
    1. **Caveat:** You don't have to cite common knowledge. Common knowledge is usually comprised of obvious or general information that your audience is likely to know already. For example, you probably wouldn't need to cite that the President of the United States is Joe Biden [or whoever the current President is as you are reading this], since most people in your audience (depending on the context) probably know this information. But you would likely have to cite statistics about his approval rating, since most of your audience probably doesn't know this information off the top of their heads. What an audience knows or doesn't know depends on the audience and context, so you'll have to think critically about your audience.

How to Avoid Plagiarism

Video by Excelsior OWL



Video Transcript

What is Ethical Attribution?

Ethical attribution is giving credit to those whose words and ideas you use in your essays. In most MLA-style essays, ethical attribution has three parts: attributive tags, in-text parenthetical citations, and a Works Cited page to give credit. (In other disciplines' citations and formatting styles, the Works Cited page might be called a References page or Bibliography).

Attributive Tags

Attributive Tags signal to the reader that material from a source is about to appear in the essay.

Example: According to literary critic Harold Bloom....

In-Text Citations

In-Text Parenthetical Citations tell the reader that the words or ideas from the source have ended. It also tells the reader where to find the original source information on the Works Cited page so they can see the original source themselves

Example: According to the literary critic Harold Bloom, "we are certain from the start that he is indeed King Hamlet's spirit," and not a demon as Horatio seems to suggest (Bloom 4).

Works Cited page

The Works Cited page gives more in-depth bibliographical information so that readers can find the original source. It appears at the end of the essay, on the last page. It should include all sources referenced in the essay.

Example:

Works Cited

Bloom, Harold. *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*. New York: Riverhead, 2003.

Why Use Ethical Attribution?

There are several reasons to use ethical attribution

- **Builds Ethos.** By citing sources, you build credibility and trust with your audience. Readers are able to find the sources you cite. You also improve your essay's scholarly tone by using the formal conventions used by literary scholars, which include in-text and Works Cited citations.
- **Helps You Refine Your Own Ideas.** By clearly defining which ideas are your original ideas and which belong to other authors, you are better able to refine your ideas.
- **Helps You Avoid Plagiarism.** By citing sources correctly, you avoid plagiarism and its consequences.

Activity: Check Your Understanding of Plagiarism

Quiz from *Excelsior OWL*

Attribution

- Videos and Quizzes from adapted "Types of Plagiarism," "How to Avoid Plagiarism" and "Check Your Understanding of Plagiarism" from Excelsior Online Writing Lab (OWL). Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-4.0 International License.

This page titled 9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **13.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

9.2: What is MLA?

Formatting and Citation Conventions for Literature Essays

Every academic discipline abides by a certain set of norms for essay format and citation. Why are there such norms for writing? It might help to think of formatting and citation guides like work uniforms. Just like a member of the United States Marine Corps, a McDonald's Employee, or a Cheerleading Team might wear a uniform to convey a belonging to a professional group, so too do formatting and citation guidelines help writers convey their belonging in a given discipline. But the purpose is not simply aesthetic: using the appropriate citation and formatting style ensures that other writers and readers in your field will better understand your message, make finding and keeping track of sources more efficient, and your essay will appear more polished and professional. Along these lines, each discipline or profession abides by its own expectations for formatting and citations.

Citation Styles and Academic Disciplines

Discipline	Formatting & Style Guide
Science	APA (American Psychological Association)
History, Law	Chicago / Turabian
Humanities	MLA (Modern Language Association)
Journalism	AP (Associated Press)
Medicine	AMA (American Medical Association)

Since Literature falls under the Humanities umbrella, when writing about literature, scholars usually abide by the MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines. The Modern Language Association was founded in 1883 "to strengthen the study and teaching of languages and literatures" ("About The MLA"). It is an international professional organization with over 25,000 members and it produces some of the most cutting-edge scholarship in the Humanities ("About the MLA"). They also publish the MLA Style Guide to help writers of all skill levels produce high-quality writing.

This page titled 9.2: What is MLA? is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **13.2: What is MLA?** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA)

Formatting Your Essay

The first step towards starting your essay, or putting on the finishing touch, is formatting. This helps give your essay a professional appearance. It also serves a practical purpose: instructors are better able to keep track of student essays with clear identifying information.

There are several ways to achieve the MLA essay format.

1. The simplest way is to use an MLA template provided by your Word processor. For example, Google docs, Pages, and Microsoft Word all have preset templates for MLA Essays. Use the search bar in the program to find "MLA" templates.
2. If your Word processor does not have an MLA template, or the MLA template is out of date, or you already wrote your essay, use the following parameters to manually format your essay.

Formatting Requirements

- 8 1/2 x 11" white paper (standard printer paper)
- 1-inch margins (most word processors do this automatically)
- 12 font Times New Roman (or any legible font -- no comic sans or symbols!)
- Left-aligned header including, on four separate lines, your
  - First name and last name
  - Professor name (i.e. Professor Juanita Robledo)
  - Class name (i.e. ENGL 1)
  - Date of writing (i.e. 22 September 2019)
  - Centered title

Formatting Your Essay Slideshow

MLA Essay Formatting Template

Studentfirstname Studentlastname

Professor Firstname Lastname

Class Title (i.e. English 110)

Day Month Year

Title of Essay

This is the body of the essay.This is the body of the essay.This is the body of the essay.

essay.This is the body of the essay.This is the body of the essay.This is the body of the

society, which is a place where hope and faith exist. Poe would probably argue that such a place is opposite to the world of Usher because a world where death is inevitable could not possibly hold such positive values. Therefore, just as Roderick mirrors his sister, the reflection in the tarn mirrors the dilapidation of the house, and the story mirrors the final actions before the death of Usher. “The Fall of the House of Usher” reflects Poe’s view that humanity is hopelessly doomed.

Work Cited

Poe, Edgar Allan. “The Fall of the House of Usher.” 1839. *Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library*. 1995. Web. 1 July 2012. <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/PoeFall.html>.

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from "Student Sample Papers..." *Creating Literary Analysis* by Ryan Cordell and John Pennington CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
- "MLA Formatting Guide" *Excelsior Online Writing Lab* CC BY 4.0

This page titled 9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA) is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **13.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA)** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

9.4: MLA Works Cited page

Works Cited for Literature Essays

Every literature essay must have a Works Cited page as the last page(s) of the essay. On this page should appear any sources used during the writing process. There are not really any meaningful differences between Works Cited pages for regular MLA-style essays and literature essays. The one aspect slightly unique in literature essays is the difference between primary and secondary sources. The primary source is going to be the work of literature itself which the essay focuses upon. A secondary source is any literary criticism written about the primary source. The citations for primary sources and secondary sources should all appear on the Works Cited page, listed alphabetically.

Basic Format for Works Cited Entries -- Shorter Works

> Author Last Name, Author First Name. "Title of Short Work Such as Poem or Short Story." *Publication (Anthology or Longer Work)*. Publisher Name, Publication Date.

Basic Format for Works Cited Entries -- Longer Works

> Author Last Name, Author First Name. *Title of Long Work (Novel, Play, Book-length manuscript)*. Publisher Name, Publication Date.

Pro-tip: if retrieving literary criticism from an online archive, look for the "Cite" button, which should automatically generate a citation which students can copy and paste into their Works Cited page. There are also online citation tools available like Easybib, Noodletools, or CiteKnight. Whatever citation tool students use, they should make sure to double-check the citations against the information above, as often times the citations generated have errors. It is the student's responsibility to ensure citations adhere to MLA requirements and specific to their reference work. Students may wish to consult the Purdue Online Writing Lab or the MLA Official Style Guide for further guidance.

How to Create a Works Cited Entry for a Text which Appears in this Anthology

For students using the online version of this textbook:

> Author Last Name, Author First Name. "Title." *Introduction to Literature and Critical Thinking*, edited by Cristina Lopez-Bowlin, 2021. *Libretexts*, URL of specific text. Accessed Date.

Example of a Works Cited Page for a Literature Essay

Works Cited

Boehrer, Bruce Thomas. *Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2010.

Cavendish, Margaret. "The Hunting of the Hare." *UC Press E-books Collection*, publishing.cdlib. org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=kt7q2nc9xn&chunk.id=ss1.55&toc.depth=100&toc.id=ch09&brand=eschol. Accessed 3 October 2013.

Damrosch, David and Kevin J. H. Dettmar. "Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle." *The Longman Anthology: British Literature*, edited by David Damrosch and Kevin J. H. Dettmar, Longman, 2010, pp. 2060-63.

Landry, Donna. "Green Languages? Women Poets as Naturalists in 1653 and 1807." *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 63, no.4, 2000, pp. 467-89. *JSTOR*. www.jstor.org/stable/3817613. Accessed 2 Oct. 2013.

Rees, Emma L.E. *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile*. Manchester UP, 2003. *EBSCOHost*, libproxy. ung.edu/login?url=search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2004581244&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 8 Nov. 2013.

Salzman, Paul. *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing*. Oxford UP, 2006.

Note: Your Works Cited page should be double-spaced and use a hanging indent.

This page titled 9.4: MLA Works Cited page is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

9.5: MLA In-Text Citations

In-Text Citations for Literature Essays

In order to effectively use in-text citations in essays, it is important to understand the purpose of in-text citations. In-text citations are a required part of ethical citation and attribution in MLA-style essays. Ideally, the in-text citation should, as briefly and unobtrusively as possible, point essay readers to the more detailed citation information listed on the Works Cited page (hence we described the Works Cited page first: it arguably easier and more efficient to create the Works Cited page first). In-text citations should appear at the end of the quoted or paraphrased material. What goes in the in-text citation? The first listed information in the Works Cited entry, which is usually the author's last name (Lastname). If there is no listed author, then an abbreviated version of the work's title goes in the parentheses in quotation marks ("Abbreviated Title"). After the author's last name should appear the paragraph, page, or line number where this material appeared in the original source (Smith 21) or ("Abbreivated Title" 21). This should enable readers to find and review the original source material. It also gives credit to the original author, which is not only ethical, but also legally required as a means to avoid copyright infringement. Basically, Works Cited and in-text citations combined function as a map to help readers

1. differentiate between the writer's words and ideas and their sources' words and ideas
2. find original source material.

Pro-tip: every in-text, parenthetical citation should point readers towards a more detailed Works Cited page entry. Inversely, every Works Cited page entry should match at least one in-text, parenthetical citation. Otherwise, if one or the other is missing, this is a form of plagiarism. Why? Because if a student is missing a Works Cited entry, there is no way for readers to find the original information. It is like a broken link on the internet. And everyone knows broken links are super sketch.

Inversely, if a student is missing an in-text citation, readers are unable to differentiate the student's words and ideas from the words and ideas of their sources.

Either way, there is ambiguity about source material. Ambiguity in essays should be avoided at all costs for the sake of academic integrity. To put it simply: readers should be able to

1. clearly recognize which words and ideas belong to the student and which words and ideas belong to other sources
2. locate those other sources

In-Text Citation Quick Reference Guide by Genre

Genre	Parenthetical	In-Text
Poem	(Line#) or (Author Last Name Line #)	In Word daffodils in spri The da anthro describ heads i (W
Short Story	(page#) or (par. #) Or (Author Last Name Page #)	Bal empl descript describ " Descri are frec in the st skin as unnan lurking “dark b
Creative Nonfiction	(page#) or (par. #)	The switche and En Cantu t *te*
Novel	(page#) or (paragraph #)	
Drama (Play)	(Act.Scene.Line#) Or (Author Last Name Act.Scene.Line#)	
Literary Criticism	(page#) Or (Author Last Name Page#)	

Genre	Parenthetical	In-Text Citation Example(s)	Title of Work (as it appears on the Works Cited page or in the body of the text itself)	Title E
Internet Source (from a web page without page numbers)	("Abbreviated Title" paragraph #) OR (Author Last Name) OR (“Abbreviated Title”)	("The History" par. 6) OR (Smith par. 6) OR ("The History")	Web page: "Title of Web Page" Web site: *Title of Website*	Webpage: “T *Har* Website: *The* *Dictiona*

Titles

In general, titles of long works are italicized while shorter works are placed in quotation marks.

Page, paragraph, or line numbers

In general, prose uses either paragraph numbers (par. 3) or page numbers (245). Drama uses act.scene.line (2.3.4). Poetry uses just line numbers (3). Try to use whatever measurement makes the most sense for the work referenced, keeping in mind the purpose is to help the reader find the information. For example, for a page on a website that does not otherwise have page numbers, including paragraph number would help readers find the information.

That being said, because of the CTRL + F feature, really the minimum requirement for internet web pages and websites is to place an in-text, parenthetical citation with either the author’s last name (if available) or an abbreviated title of the work (if no author information is available).

For example:

Author Name Available

If there is an author name available, use that.

Example: Some scholars argue Hamlet’s hamartia, or fatal flaw, is his indecisiveness (Greene).

Author Name Not Available

If there is not an author name available, use a condensed version of the text title in quotation marks.

Example: Other scholars argue Hamlet’s caution is justifiable, as a potentially demonic ghost of one’s dead father is arguably not a reliable source upon which to base the decision to murder (“Hamlet Criticism Summary”).

While both of the above examples may be acceptable for some professors, students should consult with their professors. It is almost always better to include paragraph or page numbers if possible. And, if the source is an online scholarly article, check for page numbers, as most reputable scholarly articles will have page numbers.

Length of Quotation

Students often want to cut and paste entire passages from literature. While this method, called a block quotation, can be useful in certain contexts, it is almost always better to only take the necessary quotes and phrasing necessary to support the thesis or main idea of the paragraph.

Block Quotation

Block quotations should be used sparingly: only when you plan to quote three or more lines or sentences, and only when you plan to spend an extended amount of space in your essay examining the details of a literary excerpt. There isn't necessarily a rule of thumb, but probably for an essay that is less than eight pages you wouldn't want to use more than two. To format a block quotation, you can justify the text and indent 1/2". You do not need to use quotations because it will be clear it is a block quotation in that it is set aside from the rest of the text. After the block quotation, include an in-text citation. Example below

> In my imagination, Abuelito’s version of history wrestles Didion’s. The white literary establishment handed her California but I propose we wrest it away from her. The Mexican presence haunting her work could do so if those of us living outside Didion’s prose lend a hand to the diaspora trapped inside of it. (Gurba par. 7)

In the example above, I am quoting from an online article called "It's Time to Take California Back From Joan Didion" by scholar and critic Myriam Gurba. If I were writing an essay, I would probably spend a great deal of this paragraph analyzing the language choices here; that is, performing a close reading.

Laser-Focused Quotation

In literary studies, we really want to focus upon and emphasize language choices. While sometimes this can be done with a block quotation, most of the time the quotations you choose should be laser-focused to support the claim you are making in the paragraph. For example, let's say I want to emphasize the extended metaphor of the hand in the above block quotation through the lens of post-colonial criticism. I might examine how Abuelito's version of history is personified as in opposition to Joan Didion's, which was "handed" to her by the "white literacy establishment," and how the literary landscape of California becomes a property over which to "wrestle" (Gurba par. 7).

Integrating Evidence & Avoiding Floating Quotations

Example Paragraph 1:

Students first learning how to effectively quote source material often simply plop a quotation into their body paragraphs. “I wandered lonely as a cloud” (Wordsworth 1). The previous sentence is an example of a floating quotation. A floating quotation is when a quotation is plopped into a paragraph without being smoothly integrated into the surrounding text. What effect does this have? It can be disorienting to the reader, who has no idea how to interpret the information. Compare this random plopping of a quotation above to the integrated version below.

Example of Effective Quotation Integration

Example Paragraph 2:

While most people value humans over plants and other inanimate objects in nature, in “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” Wordsworth frequently gives nature human characteristics (anthropomorphism) and gives human characteristics of the natural world (chremamorphism). When the speaker of the poem describes themselves as wandering “lonely as a cloud,” this gives the sense he is dehumanized, more cloud than person (1). Conversely, the natural environment is made more human when daffodils are personified as “[t]ossing their heads in sprightly dance,” and even the waves are also described as dancing (12-13). Even the verb choice for each indicates the speaker may be less human, in that an animal or human can wander, but, generally, plants and animals lack the consciousness or intentionality implicit in dancing. By blurring the line between human and nature, and imbuing the daffodils and waves with seemingly more agency than the human speaker, the poem implies nature is just as valuable as humans, if not more so.

What do you notice about the difference between the way quotations are integrated in the first and second paragraph examples?

In the second example, the quotations are smoothly integrated with the author’s words while maintaining the grammatical structure of each sentence. Rather than plopping an entire sentence or line, the writer chose the most important quotations which illustrate the point they are attempting to make. Finally, it is clear where the writer’s words end and Wordsworth's begin, and where Wordsworth's words begin and the writer's end.

Works Cited

Gurba, Myriam. "It's Time to Take California Back from Joan Didion." *Electric Literature*, 12 May 2020. Accessed 13 July 2022.

This page titled 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **13.5: MLA In-Text Citations** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

9.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary

Using Information From Sources

There are several ways to effectively incorporate information from sources in essays. Which type of source integration you use will depend on the purpose of the material. Every literary essay should strike a balance between quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing—and articulating your own perspective. Whether summarizing, paraphrasing, or quoting, you need to include both in-text and Works Cited citations for every source. It is also very important to not pass off quotation as paraphrase: this could be considered plagiarism.

Summary

Summarizing refers to the action of boiling down an author's ideas into a shorter version in your own words. Summary demonstrates your understanding of a text, but it also can be useful in giving background information or making a complex idea more accessible. In a literature essay, you might briefly summarize the plot of a text through the perspective of your topic before diving deeply into the analysis portion of the essay.

Paraphrase

When we paraphrase, we are processing information or ideas from another person's text and putting it in our own words. The main difference between paraphrase and summary is scope: if summarizing means rewording and condensing, then paraphrasing means rewording without drastically altering length. However, paraphrasing is also generally more faithful to the spirit of the original; whereas a summary requires you to boil down a large piece of text into a sentence or two, thereby losing some nuance, a paraphrase ought to mirror back the original idea using your own language. Paraphrasing is helpful for establishing background knowledge or general consensus, simplifying a complicated idea, or reminding your reader of a certain part of another text. It is also valuable when relaying statistics or historical information, both of which are usually more fluidly woven into your writing when spoken with your own voice.

Quotation

A direct quote uses quotation marks (" ") to indicate where you're borrowing an author's words verbatim in your own writing. Use a direct quote if someone else wrote or said something in a distinctive or particular way and you want to capture their words exactly. Direct quotes are good for establishing ethos and providing evidence. In a research essay, you will be expected to use some direct quotes; however, too many direct quotes can overwhelm your thesis and actually undermine your sense of ethos.

For literature, quotation is most effective when attempting to analyze literary devices such as tone, character, metaphor, and so forth.

Examples

Below, you can see three examples of these tools. Consider how the direct quote, the paraphrase, and the summary each could be used to achieve different purposes.

Original Passage

> *It has been suggested (again rather anecdotally) that giraffes do communicate using infrasonic vocalizations (the signals are verbally described to be similar—in structure and function—to the low-frequency, infrasonic "rumbles" of elephants). It was further speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production. Moreover, particular neck movements (e.g. the neck stretch) are suggested to be associated with the production of infrasonic vocalizations.*

Summary

Baotic et al. conducted a study on giraffe hums in response to speculation that these noises are used deliberately for communication.

Paraphrase

Giraffes emit a low-pitch noise; some scientists believe that this hum can be used for communication with other members of the social group, but others are skeptical because of the dearth of research on giraffe noises. According to Baotic et al., the anatomy of the animal suggests that they may be making deliberate and specific noises (3).

Quotation

Some zoological experts have pointed out that the evidence for giraffe hums has been "rather anecdotally" reported (Baotic et al. 3). However, some scientists have "speculated that the extensive frontal sinus of giraffes acts as a resonance chamber for infrasound production" (Ibid. 3).

Important Reminder!

Whether summary, paraphrase, or quotation, you need to use an in-text citation! For every in-text citation, ensure there is a matching entry on the Works Cited page! Also, remember to use information from sources only to support your own argument. For a research essay, a healthy ratio is generally no more than 10% to 20% material from sources to 80% your own original ideas, argument, interpretation, analysis, and explanation. This is not a rule as much as a reminder to think critically about how much your writing relies on the ideas of others: unless the assignment is a summary or literature review, the emphasis should be on your ideas!

Contributors and Attributions

- Adapted from "Research and Argumentation" *EmpoWord: A Student-Centered Anthology & Handbook for College Writers* by Shane Abrams of the Portland State University, 2018 CC BY-NC 4.0

This page titled 9.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary is shared under a CC BY-NC license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

- **13.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary** by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap is licensed CC BY-NC 4.0.

10: Literary Devices Glossary

Literary devices are the tools writers use to bring literature to life. Literature is like art with words: in the same way an artist might use paintbrushes, textures, colors, and different mediums, so might a writer use literary devices to render their real or imagined worlds and characters.

Literary Devices

The following vocabulary list represents just a few of the most common literary devices.

Allegory

usually didactic (meant to impart a lesson), an allegory is a kind of story in which abstract concepts (such as love, war, or death) became objects, characters, or places in the story. For example, consider Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," where light symbolizes knowledge and darkness symbolizes ignorance.

Alliteration

multiple words in a row which start with the same sound (vowel or consonant). Example: silly snakes slither silently.

Allusion

an indirect reference, usually to another work, outside of the text, without explicitly naming the reference point. For example, in *Hamlet*, the scene of Old Hamlet being poisoned in the castle garden by his brother -- who is referred to as a "serpent" -- would likely be a familiar allusion to the Biblical Garden of Eden for highly religious Elizabethan readers (1.5.36).

Anagnorisis

the scene of recognition in a Tragedy, as described in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In this scene, the tragic hero realizes their true identity or tragic flaw (hamartia). Example: when in *Antigone* by Sophocles Creon finally admits he made the wrong decision about sentencing Antigone to death for burying her brother in accordance with the will of the Gods.

Anaphora

a repeated grammatical structure for rhetorical effect. For example, Frederick Douglass often uses anaphora for emphasis: "O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! betwixt me and you, the turbid waters roll. Go on, go on. O that I could also go! Could I but swim! If I could fly! O, why was I born a man, of whom to make a brute! The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me!" In this instance, the repeated use of "O" adds rhythmic and dramatic emphasis to his feelings of disappointment of seeing ships move freely while he is enslaved.

Antagonist

an opposing force to the protagonist. The antagonist may be a villain, but not necessarily: it could be an animal, an abstract concept, or the environment. Example: the antagonist in *Hamlet* might be Claudius; in Antigone, Creon.

Anthropomorphism

imbuing a nonhuman entity with human behaviors or attributes. Example: the daffodils in Wordsworth's "I wandered lonely as a cloud" are described as "dancing," which is a distinctly human behavior (6). Similar to **personification**, but slightly different.

Anti-Hero

a type of protagonist who may not have the moral uprightness required of a hero. This character usually elicits the sympathy of their audience, but may be morally unscrupulous in their methods (such as an assassin who murders child abusers). A popular culture example of this would be Deadpool, because he is the main character and generally audiences cheer him on, but he speaks using inappropriate language, is sexually promiscuous and tends to be chaotic and over-the-top in his violence.

Antithesis

the opposite of a thesis. Example: if one's main argument, or thesis, is that Hamlet is crazy and the ghost is a hallucination, the antithesis would be that Hamlet is sane and the ghost is real.

Assonance

multiple vowel sounds in close proximity within a text. For example, "my mouth wound itself around the soulful sounds of the poem's words."

Autobiography

a work of creative nonfiction written about the author's life, as written by the author (as opposed to being written by someone other than the author). An example of this would be the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass. Compare to **biography**

Bildungsroman

a coming of age story, usually involving a young person becoming an adult (and changing fundamentally by surviving a challenging moment). A pop culture example would be the Harry Potter series, which chronicles Harry Potter's difficult teenage years.

Biography

a nonfiction story about a person's life, written by someone other than the person who lived the life. Compare to **autobiography**

Caesura

a pause or break within the line of a poem. Often defined in comparison to a line break or an enjambment.

Catharsis

the purgation of emotion, usually pity and fear, at the end of a play. According to Aristotle in *Poetics*, this is one of the defining characteristics of a Tragedy.

Chiasmus

leverage of reverse grammatical structure for rhetorical effect: think of it like a boomerang of words. For example, consider this excerpt from *Paradise Lost* by John Milton: “The mind is its own place, and in it self/Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (1. 254-55). In this case, heaven of hell hell of heaven reverses the words and ideas, bringing them back unto themselves with new meaning.

Chremamorphism

imbuing a human being with the qualities of a nonhuman inanimate object or machine. For example, in “I wandered lonely as a cloud” by William Wordsworth, the speaker describes themselves as a cloud.

Cliche

a phrase or trope which has been used so many times that it has, some would argue, outrun its extended warranty so that it becomes boring and uncreative. For example, Robert Burns' image of love as a "red rose" has been so used that it has become cliche.

Colloquialism

an informal word used in common, everyday speech. A word you likely would be ill advised to use in a formal job interview. For example, Californians often say “hella” (though this phrase was already dated by the time this textbook goes into publication)

Comedy

a type of play which usually deals with less serious themes, centers on entertainment, may feature more bawdy or common characters, and often ends with a literal or metaphorical wedding. Often juxtaposed with Tragedy. An example of this would be *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by William Shakespeare

Conflict

is the tension in a literary work created by opposition between one or more of the following characters: (1) protagonist vs. antagonist (2) protagonist vs. self (3) protagonist vs. environment (4) protagonist vs. society, or some other oppositional relationship. Without conflict there can be no **plot.** For example, the conflict in *Hamlet* is between Hamlet (protagonist) and Claudius(antagonist), but also could be interpreted as between Hamlet and his own self-doubt.

Consonance

two or more words in close proximity which share a consonant sound. For example, “the **s**lithering **s**na**k**e **s**ha**k**es i**ts** li**ttl**e ra**ttl**e.”

Couplet

two adjoining lines of poetry which share an end rhyme. Most of Shakespeare’s sonnets end with a couplet. For example, the final two lines of Sonnet 18:

> So long as men can breathe or eyes can **see**, (13)
>
> So long lives this, and this gives life to **thee**. (14)

Creative Nonfiction

as Lee Gutkind, editor of Creative Nonfiction magazine defines it, “true stories, well told.” That is, Creative Nonfiction boasts all of the literary adornments that ficiton does (literary devices, skilled writing) but rather than stemming from the imagination, the stories relayed in Creative Nonfiction are true.

Descriptive Imagery

is the use of sensory details to immerse a reader in the story. Descriptive imagery can include **visual** (sight), **auditory** (sound), **olfactory** (smell), **tactile** (touch), or **gustatory** (taste) imagery. For example, "My breath escaped in **ragged bursts**, my quadriceps **burning** as I crested the summit. The lake stretched before me, **aquamarine, glistening** in the **hot August afternoon sun**. Ponderosa pines lined its shores, dropping their **spicy-scented** needles into the clear water. Despite the heat, the Montana mountain air **tasted crisp**." In this excerpt, the reader is able to picture the scene almost as if they are there.

Deus Ex Machina

literally translating to “God in the machine,” in Greek drama the deus ex machina was a literal machine that dropped down an actor playing a God on the stage for dramatic effect, usually to save a hero at the last minute from a sticky situation. In literature nowadays, this literary device refers to a somewhat non-believable plot device which saves the hero from an otherwise intractable situation.

Dialogue

words spoken by characters in a literary work, often in the form of a conversation.

Diction

word choice. Paying attention to diction helps determine the tone of a literary work.

Double Entendre

a word or phrase which has multiple meanings, often to snarky, bawdy, or humorous effect. For example, when Claudius asks Hamlet why the clouds hang on him, Hamlet responses that he is "too much in the sun." The word sun means the sun, as in the big star which heats our planet, but also son, as in he is not only Old Hamlet's son, but now also the stepson of Claudius. Hamlet is expressing petulance towards his uncle for this reason.

Drama

a work of literature which is meant to be performed by actors rather than simply read.

Dynamic character

a character who changes significantly over the course of a story.

Ekphrasis

the description of a work of art within a work of literature. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde famously describes the painting of Dorian Gray.

Elegy

a poem expressing grief over the dead. For example, "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg" was written by William Wordsworth in memory of poet James Hogg.

Elision

is the dropping of a syllable in a word, usually to make the word fit in a poetic meter. For example, in William Wordsworth's poem "I wandered lonely as a cloud," one of the lines reads "that floats on high o'er vale and hill." In this line, the word "over" is shortened to "o'er" in order to reduce its syllabus from two to one, so that it fits in with the iambic tetrameter of the rest of the poem.

Enjambment

is when a sentence continues from one line of poetry to the next without punctuation or pause.

Epistolary

a type of story written in letter or journal entry form. "Bajadas" by Francisco Cantu is a journal of Cantu's experiences while working as a border patrol agent, as indicated by the dates written at the top of each vignette. This is a classic epistolary story.

Fabula

is a term coined by Russian formalists to describe the chronological order of events in a story. This is often juxtaposed with **syuzhet,** or the way in which events in the story are ordered or represented, which may or may not be chronological. See **linear** and **nonlinear** narratives.

Fiction

a story invented from the imagination of a writer. Distinct from Nonfiction and Creative Nonfiction, which is based in reality.

Flashback

a plot device where the narrative goes back in time. For example, in "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce, the present moment of the story takes place while Farquhar is on the bridge waiting to be hanged by the Union soldiers, but the plot jumps back in time to tell the story of how Farquhar arrived at this current predicament.

Flashforward

a plot device where the narrative jumps forward in time.

Foil

a character which, through juxtaposition, reveals something about another character; a kind of shadow character. For example, while Hamlet dilly dallies over whether or not to avenge his father's death, hot-spirited Laertes wastes no time in demanding vengeance for his father's death.

Foreshadowing

is when the author gives hints about the plot developments to come before they happen. For example, in *Antigone*, Tiriesias warns Creon something awful will happen to his family unless he apologizes to the Gods and frees Antigone.

Genre

the style of writing. The most common genres of literature are creative nonfiction, fiction, drama and poetry. Within these genres, there are subgenres, like short stories, flash fiction, lyric poetry, and so forth. Genre is a means of categorization for works of literature.

Hamartia

according to Aristotle, hamartia is the "fatal flaw" which brings about the downfall of the tragedy's hero. For example, in *Antigone*, Creon's fatal flaw is that he is too prideful (see: **hubris**).

Hero

a protagonist of a story who represents the moral values of the society depicted in the story and is generally meant to be looked upon favorably by readers. For example, Superman would be an archetypical hero. The **protagonist** is often the hero of the story, but not always.

Hubris

one of the most common examples of hamartia, at least in Ancient Greek tragedies, hubris is the tragic flaw of excessive pride

Hyperbole

an exaggeration for rhetorical effect; for example when Wordsworth describes the field of daffodils in “I wandered lonely as a cloud” as “ten thousand saw I at a glance,” he likely did not literally count ten thousand daffodils, but the number is meant to demonstrate the immense quantity

Iambic Pentameter

a style of poetic meter in which five sets of iambs (or ten syllables) appear per line of poem. Each iamb contains an unstressed and stressed syllable. For example, "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?" in Shakespeare's Sonnet 118 is a solid example of Iambic Pentameter.

Imagery

descriptive, immersive details meant to paint a picture in the reader’s mind: the five kinds of description follow the five senses: auditory (sound), tactile (touch), gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), and the most common, visual (sight). See: **descriptive imagery**

Irony

a meaning or outcome contrary to what is expected. The three types of irony include

- **Dramatic irony:** when the reader or audience knows something characters don’t
- **Situational irony:** when a character holds a position or has an expectation that is reversed or fulfilled in an unexpected way
- **Verbal irony:** when a speaker or narrator says one thing and means the reverse (e.g., sarcasm)

Line

an organizational tool in a poem, a line is usually a sentence or part of a sentence running horizontally across the page. Think of it as a horizontal poetic thought.

Line Break

an organizational tool in a poem, a line break is when one line ends and another begins

Linear Narrative

a story where the plot unfolds chronologically, without flashbacks or flashforwards (see **fabula**, **nonlinear narrative**)

Lyric Poem

a poem that expresses the speaker’s thoughts and feelings.

Magical Realism

a style of writing in which fantastical elements are described in realistic detail, as popularized by Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges & Isabel Allende. “A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings” is a popular example of magical realism, in that the angel in the story is described in gritty detail.

Memoir

a creative nonfiction work about a person’s life, where the author is the **protagonist.**

Metaphor

the use of figurative language to describe one object using another for rhetorical effect, without using the words "like" or "as." For example, when *Hamlet* describes Claudius as a "snake" or Polonius as a "rat" and "fishmonger."

Meter

related to the rhythm of the story, meter is determined by stressed and unstressed syllables. Different poems use different types of meter for effect. See **iambic pentameter**

Metonym

is a use of figurative language in which one thing is represented by another thing associated with it. For example, one might say “he relinquished the crown” to insinuate someone giving up their role as king, where crown stands in for the king and is simultaneously symbolic of power.

Myth

a fictional story of epic proportions, usually told to explain the world, promote a religion, or imbue a society with values. An example of a myth would be the myth of narcissus written in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which explained the origins of daffodils and echoes & also showed that Greeks saw excessive pride as an undesirable trait.

Narrative Poem

a poem that tells a story and includes elements of fiction.

Narrator

the speaker of the story, who may be a character within the story or an objective, unnamed narrator; the perspective from which the story is told.

Nonfiction

an umbrella term which encompasses creative nonfiction, nonfiction is simply the antithesis of fiction: written work depicting reality. The difference between creative nonfiction and nonfiction is that creative nonfiction strives to be literary while nonfiction is often more informational in nature (see: a science textbook, or a historical account, for example).

Nonlinear Narrative

is a story which is not relayed chronologically. It may have **flashbacks** or **flashforwards.**

Novel

a work of prose, usually fiction, usually 50,000 words or longer. For example, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison is a novel.

Objective Correlative

a phrase coined by poet T.S. Eliot, the objective correlative is the idea that a particular object, setting or symbol can evoke emotion; for example, a desert can prompt feelings of emptiness or loneliness

Ode

a poem written in praise of its subject; for example, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "To Autumn" by John Keats are both written in praise of the Grecian Urn and the season of fall, respectively.

Onomatopoeia

words that sound like the object they are intending to describe. For example, the word “shush” phonetically sounds like the action it is intended to represent. Other examples include bang, thud, hiss.

Oxymoron

a combination of contradictory or opposite ideas, qualities, or entities. For example, Mrs. Mallard experiences "monstrous joy" after hearing news of her husband's death in "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin.

Peripeteia

the reversal of fortune which occurs to a tragic hero, as defined by Aristotle in *Poetics*. An example of peripeteia is when Creon, who has all the power and control in Antigone, suddenly finds out his son and wife have died, and his entire world is flipped upside down.

Personification

giving human qualities to animals or objects for the sake of imagery. For example, “the trees’ branches reached towards the sun like arms.” Similar to **anthropomorphism**

Perspective

the lens through which the story is told. For example, the story might be told in first person (I, me), second person (you) or third person (it, they, she, he, nouns). See **Point of View**

Play

see **drama**

Plot

is the events or action of the story, and the order in which the events are told.

Poetry

is difficult to define, as it is amorphous: often, one can recognize poetry by its use of line, meter, and stanzas (i.e. it is not written in prose), but poetry can also (though less commonly) be written in prose. A poem may rhyme (or not), but usually the emphasis of poetry is to evoke a feeling in the reader in surprising ways.

Point of View

the perspective through which the story is told. For example, the story might be told in first person (I, me), second person (you) or third person (it, they, she, he, nouns). Point of View can even shift throughout the story, moving from one character’s perspective to another, or from characters to a narrator. The four main points of view include

- **First-person narration:** the narrator is telling the story from their perspective, using pronouns like I, me, and we
- **Second-person narration:** the narrator is telling the story from their perspective, directly addressing the reader using words like you, your
- **Third-person limited narration:** the narrator comes across as more impartial, using objective nouns like they, her, she. They may only be able to see from this perspective, and not into the heads of different characters
- **Third-person omniscient narration**: the narrator has a God's eye view and can get into different characters' heads and perspectives, seeing the story in a way that would not be possible in real life

Props

articles or objects on a stage during a play that are sometimes symbolic.

Prose

written work without line breaks AKA anything that is not a poem, such as fiction and creative nonfiction.

Protagonist

the main character of a story, who is often but not always the hero of the story. For example, the protagonist of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton is Satan, even though most would not consider him a hero.

Pun

a play on words, usually for comedic or rhetorical effect. Often it relies upon a word having two meanings or sounding like another word. For example, if someone says a joke/pun and I respond with “very punny!”, I am responding to a pun with a pun, since “punny” sounds like “funny” but also indicates awareness of the original statement’s status as a pun. Similar to the **double entendre**.

Quatrain

a cluster or stanza of four lines in a poem

Realism

a style of literature in which, whether fiction or nonfiction, events are described as realistically as possible; that is, true to life. For example, Ambrose Bierce,who fought for the Union during the Civil War, described war in brutal, gritty detail in his stories, whereas many previous authors described war as heroic and glorious. See **verisimilitude**.

Reference

when a literary work refers to an outside work and explicitly names that outside work. For example, when Hamlet describes his father as "Hyperion" and Claudius as a "satyr," audiences can easily find the works or ideas to which he references; Greek mythological figures (1.2.140).

Rhyme

two words paired together with similar sounds, for example "boon" and "moon"

Rhythm

the "heartbeat" of language in which words fall into patterns for euphonic or discordant effect. Often this is achieved through syllabic emphasis such as meter.

Romance

a work of literature whose principal subject is love between two characters

Romanticism

a literary and artistic movement in the 18th and 19th centuries largely viewed as a reaction against Enlightenment and Industrialization which emphasized the value of nature over industry, feelings over logic, and a sense of nostalgia for the past

Sets

the design, decoration, and scenery on a stage during a play.

Setting

the place(s) where the action of the story or poem takes place. For example, “Bajadas” by Francisco Cantú takes place on the U.S. Mexico border, and *Hamlet* takes place in Denmark.

Simile

a figurative use of language in which one thing is compared to another using the words, similar to a **metaphor** except it uses the words “like” or “as.” For example, Robert Burns’ famous poem “A Red, Red Rose” begins with the line “O my Luve is like a red, red rose” (1).

Speaker

the **narrator** of a poem; the voice or **perspective** through which a poem is told. For example, the speaker in “Richard Cory” by Edwin Arlington Robinson is presumably a townsperson who watches Richard Cory from a distance.

Stage Directions

written instructions in a script that inform how to stage, perform, or imagine a play.

Stanza

is a poem paragraph: that is, a poem may be divided into clumps of lines for rhetorical effect. If there are no spaces, the poem is described as being only one stanza. Some poems, like Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” have multiple stanzas.

Static Character

a character who does not change significantly over the course of a story.

Stream of Consciousness

is when the point of view dips in and out of third person into characters’ **points of view** seamlessly, as if the reader is dipping their toes in a stream of the thoughts and ideas of characters.

Symbolism

is the use of a physical object to represent an abstract idea. For example, while physically a piece of colored cloth, to some the United States’ flag represents freedom, to others sacrifice, and to others oppression.

Synecdoche

figurative language in which a part stands in for the whole. For example, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* describes a scene on the "Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe" where the sails represent ships. See: **metonym**

Synesthesia

the mixing of senses or descriptive imagery; using one sense to describe another. For example, the phrase “summer tastes yellow” mixes gustatory imagery (taste) with visual imagery (yellow).

Syntax

the order of words in a sentence. For example, in Hamlet, when Polonius says “To thine own self be true,” he disorders the syntax used in contemporary spoken language (be true to yourself); writers often manipulate syntax for rhetorical effect

Syuzhet

is a Russian formalist term used to describe the manner in which a story is told rather than the content of the story. See: **nonlinear narrative**. It is often paired with the term **fabula**, meaning the actual chronological story events. While fabula might describe the story events, syuzhet describes the order in which they are related in the narrative. For example, in "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce, the fabula is that a Confederate Soldier gets caught attempting to burn down a Union Bridge and is hanged by Union soldiers for his crime. The syuzhet of the story is much more fragmented and jumps around in time.

Theme

the main idea(s) of a work of literature. For example, some of the themes of Hamlet might be grief, vengeance, or political corruption.

Thesis

the main argument of an essay. A strong thesis in literary criticism is a debatable interpretation of a literary work, based on observations about that work.

Tone

can be described as the attitude or mood of the work, and the style of narration. For example, the tone of Hamlet is dark and scathing, while A Midsummer Night's Dream is dreamlike and, overall, happy

Tragedy

as defined by Aristotle in his work *Poetics*, is "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions." Classic examples of Tragedy might include the Oedipus Trilogy by Sophocles or Hamlet by William Shakespeare

Tragic Hero

as defined by Aristotle's *Poetics*, the tragic hero is the focal character of a tragedy, who is mostly good but due to some flaw (hamartia) is doomed to fall. The character must go through plot elements such as peripeteia (reversal of fortune), anagnorisis (recognition), and ultimately result in catharsis (purgation of pity and fear). Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone* is often cited as a tragic hero archetype; Hamlet might also be described as a tragic hero.

Trope

any type of figurative language, or figurative phrase, repeatedly used to describe a literal situation. For example, when poet Robert Burns refers to his love as a "red, red rose," this is a trope of the rose as a symbol of love. A trope has also come to have negative connotations as a use of figurative language which has become overused, such as the aforementioned rose as love metaphor.

Unreliable Narrator

is a first-person narrator of a work of literature who is not to be trusted. They may be morally questionable or dishonest, or have a flaw which makes them difficult to understand for the reader. One example of an unreliable narrator might be the narrator in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," because he is clearly biased towards Dupin and seems to get all of his information third-hand rather than witnessing it himself.

Verisimilitude

is how realistic a work of literature seems. It does not necessarily mean the work is true: for example, a work of fiction can have strong verisimilitude in that the reality of the text is so artfully rendered that it seems real to the reader. To put it colloquially, verisimilitude is what Stephen Colbert might call the "truthiness" of a work. For example, though fictional, "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien conveys a realistic portrayal of the Vietnam War due to the rich description, colloquial soldier language, and likely because of Tim O'Brien's real-life experiences during the Vietnam War.

Vignette

is a method of organizing a work of literature wherein rather than telling the story chronologically, the story is told through snapshots of brief scenes or moments. For example, "Bajadas" by Francisco Cantu told through a series of vignettes about the narrator's time on the border.

Zoomorphism

is the opposite of anthropomorphism; that is, it is describing human characters with animal-like qualities, or reducing humans to animals. For example, in *Hamlet*, Hamlet describes Claudius as goatlike (satyr), as a serpent, and Polonius as a rat.

Zeugma

is a grammatical construct where a single word or phrase yokes together two different ideas for rhetorical effect. For example, "the flowers withered and so did she." Here "withered" yokes together "flowers" and "she," using the verb in a traditional way as it is applied to flowers, but in a figurative way to imply sadness or defeat when applied to "she."

C-ID Alignment

This knowledge resource aligns with California Community Colleges C-ID ENGL 110

Course Content

- Literary terminology, devices, and critical approaches

Student Learning Outcomes

- 7: Use style, diction, and tone appropriate to the academic community and the purpose of the specific writing task
- 9: Define common literary terms and apply these to analysis of specific texts

This page titled 10: Literary Devices Glossary is shared under a CC BY-NC-ND license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Heather Ringo & Athena Kashyap (ASCCC Open Educational Resources Initiative) .

Index

A

academic honesty
- 9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution

annotate
- 1.4: Reading and Annotating

annotated bibliography
- 8.12: Literary Research

annotating
- 1.4: Reading and Annotating

annotation
- 1.4: Reading and Annotating

attribution
- 9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution
- 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations

avoiding plagiarism
- 9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution
- 9.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary

C

citation
- 9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution

Citation Guide
- 9: Citations and Formatting Guide for Literature (MLA)

citations
- 9: Citations and Formatting Guide for Literature (MLA)
- 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations

composition
- 8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays

connotation
- 2.11: Tone, Voice and Style

Creating Literary Analysis
- 8.1: The Writing Process for Literary Essays

D

defining literature
- 1: Introduction

denotation
- 2.11: Tone, Voice and Style

drama
- 6.1: What is Drama?
- 7.1: Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra (1914)

E

Edna St. Vincent Millay
- 5.10: Edna St. Vincent Millay's "I, being born a woman and distressed" (1923)

essay writing
- 8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays

F

fiction
- 3.10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)
- 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)
- 3.11.8: Willa Cather's "On the Gull's Road" (1908)

format
- 9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA)

formatting
- 9: Citations and Formatting Guide for Literature (MLA)
- 9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution
- 9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA)
- 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations

Formatting Guide
- 9: Citations and Formatting Guide for Literature (MLA)

G

gender studies
- 3.10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)

Gender Theory
- 3.10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)

Gerard Manley Hopkins
- 5.5: Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Pied Beauty" (1887)

glossary
- 10: Literary Devices Glossary

I

inference
- 1.6: Inferences in Literature

K

Korean
- 5.13.15: Yoon Dong-joo's "A Poem That Came Easily" (1942)

L

LGBT Literature
- 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)

literary
- 1: Introduction
- 8.12: Literary Research

literary analysis
- 1.4: Reading and Annotating

literary criticism
- 1: Introduction

literary devices
- 10: Literary Devices Glossary

literary spectrum
- 1: Introduction

literary terms
- 10: Literary Devices Glossary

literary thesis statement
- 8.3: Literary Thesis Statements

literature
- 1: Introduction
- 1.4: Reading and Annotating
- 5.13.15: Yoon Dong-joo's "A Poem That Came Easily" (1942)
- 6.1: What is Drama?
- 7.1: Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra (1914)
- 8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays
- 8.12: Literary Research
- 9.2: What is MLA?
- 9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA)
- 9.4: MLA Works Cited page
- 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations
- 10: Literary Devices Glossary

M

MLA
- 9: Citations and Formatting Guide for Literature (MLA)
- 9.2: What is MLA?
- 9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA)
- 9.4: MLA Works Cited page
- 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations

MLA formatting
- 9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA)

modern language association
- 9.2: What is MLA?
- 9.4: MLA Works Cited page
- 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations

O

organization
- 8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays

Oscar Wilde
- 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)

P

paraphrase
- 9.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary

parenthetical
- 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations

plagiarism
- 9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution

poem
- 5.13.15: Yoon Dong-joo's "A Poem That Came Easily" (1942)

Poetics
- 4: About Poetry

poetry
- 4: About Poetry
- 4.1: What is Poetry?
- 5.11: Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921) and "Let America Be America Again" (1935)
- 5.13.4: Phillis Wheatley's "An Hymn to the Morning" and "An Hymn to the Evening" (1773)
- 5.13.11: Alice Ruth Moore's "Amid the Roses" (1895)
- 5.13.15: Yoon Dong-joo's "A Poem That Came Easily" (1942)

prewriting
- 1.4: Reading and Annotating

Q

quotation
- 9.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary

R

references
- 9.4: MLA Works Cited page

research
- 8.12: Literary Research

Rhetorical Analysis
- 8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays

S

Shakespeare
- 6.1: What is Drama?

short story
- 3.10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)
- 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)
- 3.11.8: Willa Cather's "On the Gull's Road" (1908)

South Asian drama
- 7.1: Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra (1914)

stanza
- 4.13: Form in Poetry

summary
- 9.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary

syntax
- 2.11: Tone, Voice and Style

T

T.S. Eliot
- 5.2: T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915)

terms
- 10: Literary Devices Glossary

The Nightingale and the Rose
- 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)

thesis statement
- 8.3: Literary Thesis Statements

V

Victorian
- 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)

vocabulary
- 10: Literary Devices Glossary

voice
- 4.6: Speaker and Voice

W

Wilde
- 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888)

Women's Literature
- 3.11.8: Willa Cather's "On the Gull's Road" (1908)

works cited
- 9.4: MLA Works Cited page

writing process
- 1.4: Reading and Annotating

writing skills
- 1.4: Reading and Annotating

Glossary

Abstract | referring to ideas or concepts that we think with our minds

Action | the physical movements of actors

Actors | people performing a play

Allegory | a kind of story in which abstract concepts (such as love, war, or death) became objects, characters, or places in the story; usually didactic (meant to impart a lesson)

Alliteration | multiple words in a row which start with the same sound (vowel or consonant)

Allusion | an indirect reference, usually to another work, outside of the text, without explicitly naming the reference point

Anagnorisis | the scene of recognition in a Tragedy, as described in Aristotle's Poetics

Analysis | the breaking apart of anything into its composite parts for close examination

Anapest | a metrical foot with two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable

Annotated Bibliography | a tool to help you keep track of your research by creating a Works Cited page in which every source is summarized after the bibliographical entry

Antagonist | an opposing force to the protagonist

Anthropomorphism | imbuing a nonhuman entity with human behaviors or attributes

Antihero | a type of protagonist who may not have the moral uprightness required of a hero; this character usually elicits the sympathy of their audience, but may be morally unscrupulous in their methods

Archetype | an original pattern or model for a type of character, object, narrative, etc.

Audience | people viewing a play or reading a literary work

Ballad | a poem that tells a story and is written in quatrains, most commonly with an A B C B rhyme scheme; the first and third lines contain eight syllables, while the second and fourth lines contain six

Beat | a stressed syllable

Caesura | a pause or break within the line of a poem

Canonical | referring to a work that is officially decided to constitute literature, making it part of the Literary Canon (a collection of works that are considered by the powers that be to constitute literature)

Catharsis | the purgation of emotion, usually pity and fear, at the end of a play

Character | an imaginary personage who acts, appears, or is referred to in a story

Characterization | the strategies that an author uses to present and develop the characters in a narrative

Claim | an argument backed up with evidence that supports the idea

Classical Unities | in drama, the unities of action, time, and place

Climax | the turning point of a story; the incident that allows the main conflict of a story to resolve

Concrete | referring to specific, individual things we can feel with our five senses and that call an exact image into our mind's eye

Conflict | the tension in a literary work created by opposition between one or more of the following: (1) protagonist vs. antagonist (2) protagonist vs. self (3) protagonist vs. environment (4) protagonist vs. society, or some other oppositional relationship

Connotation | the non-literal meaning we associate with words

Content | the message that is written in a literary work

Couplet | two adjoining lines of poetry which share an end rhyme

Creative Nonfiction | true stories that contain all of the literary adornments that fiction does (literary devices, skilled writing, etc.)

Crossed Rhyme | the rhyming of one word in the middle of a verse line with a word in the middle of the following line

Dactyl | a metrical foot with a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables

Denotation | the dictionary definition of a word

Dialogue | a conversation between two or more people

Diction | word choice

Double Rhyme | a rhyme on two syllables, the first stressed, the second unstressed

Drama | literature in which action is performed and all words are spoken before an audience by actors impersonating the characters

Dénouement | the unraveling of a plot, a resolution to a story; in the dénouement, the central conflict is resolved

End Rhyme | rhyme occurring on stressed syllables at the ends of verse lines

End-stopped | when a line of poetry ends with a form of punctuation, or with a complete phrase

Enjambed | when a line of poetry does not end with punctuation

Evidence | in a literature essay, quotes or paraphrasing from authoritative primary or secondary sources, which supports the paragraph main idea, as well as the thesis main idea; usually, one quote or paraphrase per paragraph is an effective use of evidence

Exposition | the part of a story that introduces the setting and the main characters; the exposition also hints at the themes and conflicts that will develop later in the story

External Conflict | when two individuals or groups of individuals clash

Eye Rhyme | a visual-only rhyme; i.e. when spellings match but in pronunciation there is no rhyme

Falling Action | the events that take place after the climax of a story; these events show the results of the climax, and they act as a bridge between the climax and the dénouement

Fiction | a story invented from the imagination of a writer

Figurative Language | the use of words or expressions not meant to be taken literally

Flashback | a device used to give the reader background information that happened in the past

Focalisation | the perspective through which a narrative is presented

Foil | a character which, through juxtaposition, reveals something about another character; a kind of shadow character

Foot | each complete unit of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry

Form | how a literary work is arranged; the language used to send the message

Genre | a means of categorization for works of literature based on the style of writing; the most common genres of literature are creative nonfiction, fiction, drama and poetry

Hamartia | the "fatal flaw" which brings about the downfall of a tragedy's hero

Hyperbole | an exaggeration for rhetorical effect

Iamb | the most common metrical foot in English with an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one

Iambic Pentameter | a style of poetic meter in which five sets of iambs (or ten syllables) appear per line of poem

If-then Statement | a strategy for making inferences by establishing a cause-and-effect relationship

Imagery | descriptive, immersive details meant to paint a picture in the reader's mind; the five kinds of description follow the five senses: auditory (sound), tactile (touch), gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), and visual (sight)

Inciting Incident | the event that sets the main conflict into motion in a story

Inference | a conclusion you reach by applying logic to the evidence you are given

Internal Conflict | a struggle that takes place within an individual

Internal Rhyme | rhyme occurring within a single verse line

Internalized Setting | a setting in which an aspect of the story external to a character represents the character's internal development

Inverted Syntax | when writers disrupt the grammatical order of words in unusual ways

Irony | a meaning or outcome contrary to what is expected; the three types of irony are dramatic (when the reader or audience knows something characters don't), situational (when a character holds a position or has an expectation that is reversed or fulfilled in an unexpected way), and verbal (when a speaker or narrator says one thing and means the reverse)

Kairos | the temporal and cultural context of a piece of rhetoric

Line | in poetry, one of the units of structure in verse; lines/rows work as both a unit of sensibility and music

Literary Critic | a person who studies and analyzes literature

Literary Criticism | scholarship produced by literary critics, such as articles analyzing literature

Literary Devices | literary techniques used by authors, such as metaphor, simile, personification, and imagery

Love Interest | a character who is a (potential) partner in love for the protagonist

Meme | an image or video containing cultural values or ideas, often represented through allusion

Messenger | a character who delivers news

Metaphor | the use of figurative language to describe one object using another for rhetorical effect, without using the words "like" or "as"

Meter | the rhythmical pattern of a poem, determined by stressed and unstressed syllables

Metonymy | when one thing is represented by another thing associated with it

Minor Character | a secondary or side character in a story who sometimes supports the protagonist or antagonist in their struggles

Monologue | when one character delivers a speech to convey his or her thoughts

Mood | the general feeling conveyed by a story

Motif | a recurring element in a story

Narrative | a story, an account of a series of related events or experiences

Narrator | the speaker of the story, who may be a character within the story or an objective, unnamed narrator; the perspective from which the story is told

Objectively | in an impartial manner, free of individual biases, interpretations, feelings, and imaginings

Ode | a poem written in praise of its subject

Omniscient Narrator | a narrator who has a God's eye view and can get into different characters' heads and perspectives, seeing the story in a way that would not be possible in real life

Para-rhyme | a form of half rhyme when all the consonants of the relevant words match, not just the final consonants

Pentameter | a line of five feet in poetry

Penultimate | second to last

Peripeteia | the reversal of fortune which occurs to a tragic hero

Personification | giving human qualities to animals or objects for the sake of imagery

Play | a work of literature which is meant to be performed by actors rather than simply read

Playwright | an author who writes plays

Plot | the events or action of a story, and the order in which the events are told

Poetry | patterned arrangement of language to generate rhythm and thereby both express and evoke specific emotions in a concentrated way

Prewriting | activities used by writers to get their ideas for writing

Props | articles or objects on a stage during a play that are sometimes symbolic

Prose Poem | a literary work that isn't broken into verse but contains many of the elements of poetry: figures of speech, musical language, internal rhyme, repetition, condensed syntax, and imagery

Prosody | the musical component of language that projects the speaker's voice and breath

Protagonist | the main character of a story, who is often but not always the hero of the story

Quatrain | a stanza of four lines

Reasonable Conclusion | an inference that is the result of reasoned thinking, not emotional reactions

Repetition | a powerful rhetorical device that involves intentionally using similar events in the plot, similar descriptions, or the same word or phrase multiple times

Revision | making changes to major elements in a paper and improving the overall argument

Rhetorical Devices | words that serve a special function in the text in order to convey meaning to the reader

Rhyme Scheme | the pattern of rhymes at the end of each line of a poem

Rhythm | patterns of sound caused by the way some words or syllables are stressed more than others in speech

Rising Action | a series of events that build up to the climax of a story by introducing secondary conflicts and creating tension in the story

Roundel | an English form of poetry consisting of eleven lines in three stanzas with no set meter; the first part of line one repeats at the end of the first stanza and again as the last line of poem, with a rhyme scheme of A B A R–B A B–A B A R (in which R stands for "refrain")

Sets | the design, decoration, and scenery on a stage during a play

Setting | the place(s) where the action of the story or poem takes place

Simile | a figurative use of language in which one thing is compared to another using the words, similar to a metaphor except it uses the words "like" or "as"

Slant Rhyme | also known as a half rhyme, an incomplete form of rhyme in which final consonants match but vowel sounds do not

Soliloquy | a speech made by one character but delivered when he or she is alone on stage

Sonnet | a fourteen-line poem that contains a volta, or a turn in thought, which can sometimes be indicated with the words "but" or "yet"

Spondee | a two-syllable metrical foot that has two equally stressed beats

Stage | the physical space upon which actors move in a play

Stage Directions | written instructions in a script that inform how to stage, perform, or imagine a play

Stanza | a poem paragraph: that is, a poem may be divided into clumps of lines for rhetorical effect

Story | an account of imaginary or real people and events

Subjectively | in a biased manner based on personal perspectives, feelings, beliefs, and desires

Symbolism | the use of a physical object to represent an abstract idea

Synecdoche | figurative language in which a part stands in for the whole

Syntax | the order of words in a sentence

Tercet | a stanza of three lines

Tetrameter | a line of four feet

Theme | the main idea(s) of a work of literature

Tone | the attitude or mood of a literary work, and the style of narration

Topic Sentence | a one-sentence summary at the beginning of a body paragraph that explains the main idea and suggests generally what the paragraph will talk about to support the essay's overall thesis; often includes a transition from previous paragraphs

Tragic Hero | the focal character of a tragedy, who is mostly good but due to some flaw (hamartia) is doomed to fall; the character must go through plot elements such as peripeteia, anagnorisis, and ultimately result in catharsis

Trochee | the second most common metrical foot in English with a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one

Unreliable Narrator | a first-person narrator of a work of literature who is not to be trusted; they may be morally questionable or dishonest, or have a flaw which makes them difficult to understand for the reader

Verse | lines of poetry

Villanelle | a French form of poetry that consists of five tercets and a final quatrain; the first stanza's first and third lines repeat in an alternating pattern as the last line in the subsequent stanzas, and in the final quatrain, the two lines that have been repeating throughout the poem form the final two lines of the poem

Volta | a turn in thought, emotion, or rhetoric

Wise Elder | an old man or figure of wisdom who guides the protagonist in a play

Writing Process | the steps involved in writing an essay, which may include reading, prewriting, researching, outlining, drafting, revising, seeking feedback, re-revising, and publishing

Zeitgeist | spirit of the times

Detailed Licensing

Overview

Title: Introduction to Literature and Critical Thinking

Webpages: 145

Applicable Restrictions: Noncommercial, No Derivatives

All licenses found:

- CC BY-NC 4.0: 55.2% (80 pages)
- Undeclared: 23.4% (34 pages)
- CC BY-SA 4.0: 8.3% (12 pages)
- CC BY-NC-SA 4.0: 4.8% (7 pages)
- Public Domain: 4.8% (7 pages)
- CC BY 4.0: 2.1% (3 pages)
- CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: 1.4% (2 pages)

By Page

- Introduction to Literature and Critical Thinking - *Undeclared*
  - Front Matter - *Undeclared*
    - Title Page - *Undeclared*
    - Info Page - *Undeclared*
    - Table of Contents - *Undeclared*
    - Licensing - *Undeclared*
  - 1: Introduction - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.1: What is Literature? - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.2: Why Read and Write About Literature? - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.3: What is Literary Analysis? - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.4: Reading and Annotating - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
    - 1.5: Language, Misconceptions, and Authorial Intention in Literature - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.6: Inferences in Literature - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 1.7: Discussion Activity - What is Literature To You? - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 1.8: The Rough Guide to Literary Style, a Historical Overview - *Undeclared*
    - 1.9: The Literary Landscape- Four Major Genres - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
  - 2: About Fiction - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.1: What is Fiction? - *CC BY 4.0*
    - 2.2: Short Stories versus the Novel - *Undeclared*
    - 2.3: How to Read Fiction - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.4: How to Analyze Fiction - Elements of Literature - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
    - 2.5: Theme - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.6: Plot - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.7: Character - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.8: Narration, Point of View, Dialogue - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.9: Setting - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.10: Symbolism and Figurative Language - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.11: Tone, Voice and Style - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 2.12: A Review and Questions - *Undeclared*
    - 2.13: Match and Learn Quiz - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 3: Fiction Readings - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.1: Ray Bradbury's “The Veldt” (1950) - *Undeclared*
    - 3.2: Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl" (1978) - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
    - 3.3: James Joyce's "Araby" (1914) - *CC BY 4.0*
    - 3.4: Junot Diaz's "Wildwood" (2007) - *Undeclared*
    - 3.5: Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (1846) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.6: Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat" (1926) - *Undeclared*
    - 3.7: Anton Chekhov's "The Lady with the Dog" (1899) - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
    - 3.8: Franz Kafka's "A Hunger Artist" (1922) - *Undeclared*
    - 3.9: Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" (1894) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 3.10: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) - *Public Domain*
    - 3.11: Additional Readings - *Undeclared*
      - 3.11.1: Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
      - 3.11.2: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" (1844) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
      - 3.11.3: Herman Melville's "Bartleby, The Scrivener" (1853) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

- 3.11.4: Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron-Mills" (1861) - *Public Domain*
- 3.11.5: Oscar Wilde's "The Nightingale and the Rose" (1888) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 3.11.6: Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 3.11.7: Alice Ruth Moore's "Violets" (1895) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 3.11.8: Willa Cather's "On the Gull's Road" (1908) - *Public Domain*
- 3.11.9: Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens" (1921) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 3.11.10: More Recent Short Stories - *Undeclared*

4: About Poetry - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

- 4.1: What is Poetry? - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.2: Reading Poetry - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
- 4.3: Case Study- A Close Reading of a Poem - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.4: Why Analyze Poetry? - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.5: The Line in Poetry - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.6: Speaker and Voice - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.7: Word Choice and Word Order - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.8: Sound in Poetry- Rhyme - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.9: Sound in Poetry- Alliteration, Consonance, Assonance - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.10: Sound in Poetry- Meter - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.11: Sensory Imagery - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.12: Figurative Language - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.13: Form in Poetry - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 4.14: Music and Poetry - *CC BY-SA 4.0*

5: Poetry Readings - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

- 5.1: Aphra Behn's "On Her Loving Two Equally" (1684) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 5.2: T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
- 5.3: Theodore Roethke's “My Papa’s Waltz” (1948) - *Undeclared*
- 5.4: Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" and "Fever 103°" (1962) - *Undeclared*
- 5.5: Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Pied Beauty" (1887) - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
- 5.6: Ben Jonson's "On My First Son" (1616) - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
- 5.7: Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842) - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
- 5.8: William Shakespeare's Sonnets 73 and 116 (1609) - *Undeclared*
- 5.9: Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" (1863) - *Undeclared*
- 5.10: Edna St. Vincent Millay's "I, being born a woman and distressed" (1923) - *CC BY 4.0*
- 5.11: Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921) and "Let America Be America Again" (1935) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 5.12: Judith Ortiz Cofer's "El Olvido" (1987) - *Undeclared*
- 5.13: Additional Readings - *Undeclared*
  - 5.13.1: Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" (1599) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.2: Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" (1600) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.3: Margaret Cavendish's "The Hunting of the Hare" (1653) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.4: Phillis Wheatley's "An Hymn to the Morning" and "An Hymn to the Evening" (1773) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.5: Robert Burns' "To a Mouse" (1785) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.6: John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.7: Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832-42) - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
  - 5.13.8: Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Song to the Men of England" (1839) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.9: Walt Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums!" (1861) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.10: Stephen Crane's "In the Desert" (1895) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.11: Alice Ruth Moore's "Amid the Roses" (1895) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.12: Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Richard Cory" (1897) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.13: Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (1916) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.14: William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.15: Yoon Dong-joo's "A Poem That Came Easily" (1942) - *CC BY-NC-ND 4.0*
  - 5.13.16: Maya Angelou's “On the Pulse of Morning” (1993) - *Undeclared*
  - 5.13.17: Sean Hill's "Distance Between Desires" (2013) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.18: Hieu Minh Nguyen's "The Study" and "White Boy Time Machine- Override" (2018) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 5.13.19: Athena Kashyap's "Partition Story" (2019) - *Undeclared*

6: About Drama - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

- 6.1: What is Drama? - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.2: Reading and Responding to Drama - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 6.3: Elements of Drama - *CC BY-SA 4.0*

- 6.4: Drama Discussion Questions, Assignments, and Supplemental Resources - *CC BY-NC 4.0*

- 7: Drama Readings - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 7.1: Rabindranath Tagore's Chitra (1914) - *Public Domain*
  - 7.2: Susan Glaspell's Trifles (1916) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 7.3: Sophocles' Antigone (441 BC) - *Public Domain*
  - 7.4: Langston Hughes and Zora Hurston's The Mule-Bone (1930) - *Undeclared*
  - 7.5: Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House (1879) - *Public Domain*
  - 7.6: Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (1895) - *Undeclared*
    - 7.6.1: Critical Reviews of Film Version of The Importance of Being Earnest - *Undeclared*
  - 7.7: Featured Playwright - William Shakespeare - *CC BY-SA 4.0*
    - 7.7.1: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 1 (1623) - *Undeclared*
    - 7.7.2: William Shakespeare's MacBeth Act 2 (1623) - *Public Domain*
- 8: Writing About Literature - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.1: The Writing Process for Literary Essays - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 8.2: Outlining for Literary Essays - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.3: Literary Thesis Statements - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.4: Essay as Argument - *Undeclared*
  - 8.5: Summary vs. Analysis - *Undeclared*
  - 8.6: Comparing and Contrasting Literature - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.7: Writing About Fiction and Creative Nonfiction - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.8: Writing About Poetry - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.9: Analyzing Poetry - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
    - 8.9.1: Robert Browning's Memorablia - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.10: Compare and Contrast Poetry Assignments - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.11: Writing About Drama - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.12: Literary Research - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.13: How to Perform Literary Research (Navigating Secondary Sources and Library Databases) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 8.14: What Does My Professor Want? - *Undeclared*
  - 8.15: Sample Student Literary Analysis Essays - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 9: Citations and Formatting Guide for Literature (MLA) - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 9.1: Avoiding Plagiarism Through Ethical Attribution - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 9.2: What is MLA? - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 9.3: Formatting a Literature Essay (MLA) - *CC BY-NC-SA 4.0*
  - 9.4: MLA Works Cited page - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 9.5: MLA In-Text Citations - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
  - 9.6: Quotation, Paraphrase, and Summary - *CC BY-NC 4.0*
- 10: Literary Devices Glossary - *CC BY-NC-ND 4.0*
- Back Matter - *Undeclared*
  - Index - *Undeclared*
  - Glossary - *Undeclared*
  - Detailed Licensing - *Undeclared*