



SURFACE AND SUBTEXT

Literature, Research, Writing

Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing

Second Edition

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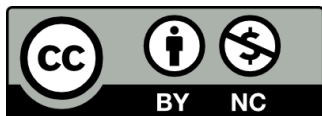
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Throughout this textbook there are simulated sample student essays included to illustrate how students can write literary analysis papers. These works are by Texas A&M authors and were written specifically for this book. They are all copyrighted and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License by their respective authors. These essays were never submitted as a part of an instructional course or for a grade.

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We acknowledge that Texas A&M University (College Station) is situated on the land of multiple Native nations, past and present. These original homelands are the territory of Indigenous peoples who were largely dispossessed and removed. We specifically acknowledge the traditional stewardship of this land by the Tonkawa, Tawakoni, Hueco, Sana, Wichita, and Coahuiltecan peoples. We pledge to support and advocate for the histories, cultures, languages, and territorial rights of historic Indigenous peoples of Texas and the Indigenous people that live here now. This statement affirms continuous Indigenous presence and rights, acknowledges the ongoing effects of settler colonization, and supports Indigenous struggles for political, legal, and cultural sovereignty.¹

¹ Texas A&M Department of Sociology, "Territorial Acknowledgment for the College Station Campus of Texas A&M University," November 24, 2020, accessed August 29, 2022, <https://liberalarts.tamu.edu/sociology/2020/11/24/territorial-acknowledgment-for-the-college-station-campus-of-texas-am-university/>.

Preface

Claire Carly-Miles and Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt

An Important Note on the Content of this Textbook

If you have taken a quick look at the pieces of literature included here, you have probably noticed that Black, Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQ+ and other marginalized populations are not represented as strongly in these pages as are white, Western European authors. In order to create a truly open educational resource (OER), the works we are able to include must be in the public domain or openly licensed. Generally speaking, this means we included works from 1925 or before, as works published then are now, in 2021, in the public domain under U.S. Copyright law. There are certain public domain exceptions for some texts published after 1925, but those are not broadly available. As you can see, this limits the texts from which we are able to draw. This does not mean, however, that BIPOCLGBTQ+ people were not writing before 1925. They certainly were creating literature (as well as all other forms of art), but as the writing of marginalized populations, their works were not allowed as frequently or as easily to enter mainstream publishing as were works by white authors. We have striven here to include as wide a variety of voices as possible, but this OER is a work in progress, and we ask that you bear this in mind. Having said this, we would also like to note that we include in some chapters recommendations for further reading; these pieces are in the public domain now and, while they do not have study questions or activities attached to them yet, they will soon, as we continue the evolution of this OER.

A Note on the Organization of this Textbook

With regard to this book's organization, in Chapters 2-8, you'll find discussions of the following:

- a specific genre (poetry, short story, novella, novel, drama, film),
- a spotlight on some particular aspect of or related to that genre,
- some tips for getting started in writing an essay about that type of literature,
- recommended readings,
- and a sample student essay with instructor annotations intended to aid you in considering the process of writing about literature and identifying where and why revisions might be useful.

While each chapter contains these elements, they may not be in the same order from chapter to chapter, depending on the internal logic of the chapter in question, the genre being discussed, and the particular focus of each spotlight section. These chapters are not meant to be prescriptive; rather, they provide diving points--places from which to begin and strike outward and onward. In all cases, your instructor will have much more to contribute to your

introduction to writing about literature, and they may even disagree with some of the points we make here. That, in itself, is one of the pleasures of discussing and writing about texts--not only do we connect with them and the scholars who write about them, but they also encourage us to connect with ourselves and one another, whether in agreement, disagreement, or an interesting (and often telling) mishmash of both.

In the end, the purpose of this textbook is manifold: to inform and educate, to stir to contemplation of multiple texts and approaches to writing about those texts, to empower people to become avid readers and writers, and, above all, to provide ways in which we can think critically about and reflect upon not only these texts but also upon ourselves and our place(s) within and in relation to the world and beyond.

And Finally, A Note on the Creation of this Textbook

The different voices, styles, and approaches that make up this book reflect an exercise in collaboration and the third in a series of OER on writing, partly adapted and largely created by academic professional track faculty and graduate students of the English Department and the librarians of the University Libraries at Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas.

Without our professional track faculty, graduate students, and librarians, this (and our other two) OER would not exist. We have found, first hand, that collaboration is key to the creation of OER, and we encourage you to remember this as you begin to read, research, and write about literature. By collaboration we don't mean plagiarism or unclear citation of sources, of course; rather, we mean partnering with other writers and researchers, and we encourage you to view your classroom as the perfect place to collaborate via lively discussions with your peers and instructor about both the texts you will be reading and those you'll be writing.

As you read this book, you'll likely notice that each chapter contains a distinct voice and writing style while still conveying kinds of information similar to the other chapters. Unlike some other academic writing, writing in literature has some leeway not just for an author's unique perspective but also for how they present themselves in the text. The voices that you'll read in these chapters are shaped by multiple factors, including their personal research interests, their identities outside of being scholars (teacher, learner, poet, novelist, editor, parent, actor, just to name a few), and how they talk about literature to their students and peers.

We wish you much enjoyment and countless rewards in thinking about these texts (either included here in their entirety or linked out to) and in reflecting on your own connections with them, with yourself, and with each other. We certainly had fun and reaped many benefits ourselves in putting this OER together for you. Thanks for reading (and researching and writing), and we wish you much good luck!

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Introduction

*I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.¹*

—Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck”

What Is Literature? The View from the Surface

Claire Carly-Miles, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and James F. Francis, Jr.

We know literature when we see it. The novels you were assigned to read in high school such as *The Grapes of Wrath* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* are literature; the poems of Langston Hughes and United States Poet Laureate Joy Harjo are literature; *Romeo and Juliet* is literature. But what happens when we encounter texts that are not somehow granted special status in our culture as “required reading”? Are movies and television shows literature? What about video games? Songs? Fan fiction? What is literature, really?

We generally understand that literature is divided into genres or types, and these divisions are based on the form authors employ in their creation of their works. Poems are poems because they are written in verse. Short stories, novellas, and novels all fall under the category of fiction because they are all written in prose, and yet they are also unique genres. They differ not only in length but in how they accomplish the creation of their characters and plot, and whether or not and how they compress meaning into a relatively small space (short stories), a slightly larger space (novellas), or an even longer space (novels). Drama is its own unique form, incorporating elements from both poetry and prose and delivering all of these in dialogues, monologues, and soliloquies—all meant to be spoken aloud. In the following chapters you will find discussions of each of these long-acknowledged genres, newer genres like film, and short forays into how you might begin writing about each.

These are the different forms literary works usually take. But what qualifies as literature and who gets to decide? Determining what does and does not “count” as literature is ultimately up to communities of readers and writers who are in conversation with each other and who share aesthetic values, tastes, and assumptions. This OER (open educational resource) gives you the close reading, analytical, and research techniques you will need to join

¹ Adrienne Rich, “Diving into the Wreck,” in *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971–1972* (New York: Norton, 1973), Poets.Org, <https://poets.org/poem/diving-wreck>.

the ongoing literary conversations between writers, critics, theorists, activists, historians, directors, professors, librarians, and scholars of all sorts.

“Artistic Merit” and “Quality”

If you look up a definition of “literature,” you may notice that several definitions include an evaluative component: in order to be literature, a text must not only include words as a major way of delivering content and meaning, but the text must also adhere to some sort of standard. What are these so-called standards, and who gets to determine them?

Historically, texts that are re-printed and regularly studied at schools and universities represent part of what literary scholars call the **canon**. This term refers to all the works of literature that you likely have heard of, even if you’ve never read them or even plan to read them. (“Canon” can also refer to the “authoritative list of books forming the Judeo-Christian Bible” and “a list of works by a single author,” but the more debatable meaning is of most interest here.²) Canonical works in English include the plays of William Shakespeare, the novels of Melville and Dickens, the short stories of Poe and Hawthorne, and the poetry of Milton and Tennyson. In short, the canon has, for many years, comprised mostly white men who lived in England and America from the 1600s to the 1900s. However, many communities of readers work to resuscitate lost and forgotten authors, thereby redefining the canon and undermining the bias the traditional canon shows towards a particular demographic.

Who was it that decided which authors and works could be canonical and which could not? As with any institutional structure, the texts that got chosen were of most interest to communities of readers who had both the leisure to read and the resources to distribute their thoughts about what they had read. The ability to create and publish a work of literature correlates with an author’s access to education, financial and temporal resources, and/or connections to the publishing industry. All of these factors have historically favored men’s voices over women’s voices, white people’s voices over the voices of people of color, heteronormative voices over queer voices, upper-class voices over working-class voices, and voices that adhere to what have been considered learned conventions over those that do not.

Different communities of readers will determine their own criteria for what counts as appropriate quality for a work of literature. For some, “quality” refers to the depth of content; for others, the priority is a text’s power to effect change, whether in society or in a particular art form; for still others, it’s the aesthetic pleasure of the sound or image of the text. Of course, many will also judge the merits of a written text by its presentation, which includes both the author’s attention to things like grammar and mechanics as well as the platform that the work is published on. For much of the country’s history, the U.S. literary canon exclusively

² “Canon.” *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 166.

reflected the stylistic and grammatical norms of formal English, which in turn derive from wealthy, white, New England dialects. Written work published through traditional print structures such as a major press is frequently considered more “literary” (or at least of higher quality) than work that is available only online or self-published by an author.

Yet “popular” should not be antithetical to “literary.” Several now-canonical texts originated as popular fare aimed at non-elite audiences. Shakespeare’s plays are but one example—in modern terms, he’s more of a Steven Spielberg as opposed to a Spike Lee or Hayao Miyazaki, meaning that he wrote popular blockbusters as opposed to being an auteur. Novels too were frequently considered “fluff” by their contemporaries. In an article in *The Atlantic*, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes that “it’s an old story stretching back to the days when the novel was seen as a low form, fit to be practiced by women. The thinking man wrote poetry and philosophical treatises.” Coates also observes,

And then as the novel moved into respectability the contribution of women to the genre was often met with derision. Nathaniel Hawthorne sums up a feeling which, regrettably, remains with us today: ‘America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed.’³

You will find this discussed in more depth in our chapters on the novella and the novel. Kate Chopin’s novella *The Awakening* (1899) was not considered literature at the time it was published, but almost a century later, with ideas about literature undergoing significant change, it became part of the canon. While we might view a novel like *Jane Eyre* (1847) as literature, it came to be considered so in part because Charlotte Brontë published it under the pseudonym “Currer Bell.” This name signaled to readers that the author was not one of the “damned mob of scribbling women” and therefore should be taken seriously. Like novels, genres like science fiction and fantasy were once considered too “lowbrow” and popular, but they now enjoy a great deal of commercial and critical success, thanks to writers such as Ray Bradbury and Samuel Delany who blur the line between the popular and the literary.

As with art in general, literature becomes literature when someone with power treats it as literary. This “someone” in question does not have to be the original author; indeed, much of what gets to be considered literary is determined by various gatekeepers, including publishers, teachers, government officials, and other creators who have been deemed literary enough to participate. Hence, a string of code or several text messages could become a piece of literature, even if their original creators never intended for them to be read as such.

³ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Damned Mob of Scribbling Women,” *The Atlantic*, June 3, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/06/the-damned-mob-of-scribbling-women/239882/>.

Words, Words, Words

At its surface, literature is words, but is any word-focused text literature? Well, no. While **avant-garde**, experimental art might render newspapers, lab reports, or phone notifications into literature, we generally agree that such forms of writing are not literary. While experimental art shows how loose the category “literature” can be, literariness is most often judged according to traditional, established communities with shared values, tastes, and expectations regarding form, conventions, subjects, and themes. While what counts as literary might not always be clear, it is clear that what separates the literary arts from other kinds of arts, such as performing and visual arts, is the conveyance of meaning through words. In a literary text, the author delivers information to readers or listeners by way of human language as opposed to instrumental music or various performance arts.

Authors use words to do any or all of the following things (to list just a few). Words may

- appeal to some or all of our five senses (visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, tactile) in order to create a physical experience of the work,
- create **tone**, from somber to humorous to anything in between,
- be arranged in ways so that the **structure** or placement of the words contributes to the meaning(s) of the work as a whole,
- describe characters through their looks, their actions, and the consequences of their actions,
- construct **images** or **symbols** in order to convey meaning(s),
- entertain, delight, and distract.

What are some of the other purposes for words that you can think of? If you take some time to reflect, you may come up with a wide variety of uses, ranging from worshiping a deity, teaching a lesson, or comforting someone in distress to insulting someone (even if only in your head), making puns, or chatting about the weather. Words can be powerful, banal, useful, decorative, helpful, or hurtful, and sometimes all at once. Because they are such a powerful and versatile medium, they are particularly useful when creating meaning and delivering information.

In thinking about the distinction between narratives that use words as opposed to narratives that use visual language, it may help to compare multiple adaptations of the same story. Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1602–1603) tells the tragic story of the titular Othello, a Moorish general who is convinced by his trusted subordinate Iago that his wife Desdemona is cheating on him with his second-in-command, Cassio. Toward the end of the third act of this five-act play, Iago puts into action his plan to convince Othello of Desdemona’s alleged infidelity. In this scene (excerpted below), Iago makes Othello believe that because he is happy, he must therefore not be aware of the terrible things that are (supposedly) happening right under his nose.

Othello Excerpt⁴

IAGO

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
But O, what damnèd minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strongly loves!

OTHELLO

O misery!

IAGO

Poor and content is rich, and rich enough;
But riches fineless is as poor as winter
To him that ever fears he shall be poor.
Good God, the souls of all my tribe defend
From jealousy!

OTHELLO

Why, why is this?
Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions? No. To be once in doubt
Is once to be resolved. Exchange me for a goat
When I shall turn the business of my soul
To such exsufflicate and blown surmises,
Matching thy inference. 'Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well.
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago,
I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;
And on the proof, there is no more but this:
Away at once with love or jealousy.

IAGO

I am glad of this, for now I shall have reason
To show the love and duty that I bear you

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Othello*. Eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine. (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), 3.3.195–228, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/othello/act-3-scene-3/>.

With franker spirit. Therefore, as I am bound,
Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof.
Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;
Wear your eyes thus, not jealous nor secure.
I would not have your free and noble nature,
Out of self-bounty, be abused. Look to 't.

In the excerpt above, we encounter all of the narrative through words. (In the context of an actual stage performance, meaning could also be supplemented through gestures and other dramatic elements such as music, props, or costuming.) In his initial bid to convince Othello, Iago relies on rhetorical techniques as opposed to visual evidence. First, Iago appeals to Othello's noble nature and pride, begging him not to be swayed by strong emotions such as "the green-eyed monster" (3.3.196) jealousy. Othello, in response, insists that his nature is steadfast and he will not be easily swayed by emotions or doubts as opposed to concrete evidence. Iago, "glad of this" (3.3.221), then emphasizes his role as Othello's trusted friend and subordinate, implying that he does not want to see Othello hurt by Desdemona's and Cassio's actions.

This word-centric approach stands in contrast to other artistic renderings of this same scene. In the image below from a Victorian edition of Shakespeare's works (Figure 1.1), illustrator H.C. Selous offers his interpretation of the scene. This illustration was transformed into a wood engraving by Frederick Wentworth so that it could be easily replicated in multiple copies, hence the lack of color and the abundance of lines representing color and shadow.



Figure 1.1Engraving of *Othello* 3.3. Licensed under CC 3.0 license.⁵

The above image conveys meaning that is not immediately available in the written text. Though someone has included Iago's line, "Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio," the interaction between the figures representing Othello and Cassio conveys a very different meaning than the written script offers. In this engraving, Othello holds his right hand over his eyes and forehead while a sinister-looking Iago, with a furrowed brow and diabolical mustache, hunches behind him. If this were the Iago that Othello regularly encountered, we might reasonably wonder why Othello would ever trust him. The image shows Iago in a more sinister light by giving him features and body movements that evoke fictional villains; the

⁵ H.C. Selous and Frederick Wentworth, "Iago and Othello" in *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, eds. Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke (London, Paris and Melbourne: Cassell & Company, Limited, [1864–68?]), 117. Available at Michael John Goodman, *Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare Archive*, <https://shakespeareillustration.org/2016/08/10/iago-and-othello-2/>.

visual depiction represents an exaggeration of the skillful wordplay from the original text to convey Iago as distrustful without using words. Othello, too, merits comment. Famously, Othello is a Black man (though his specific African heritage has been up for debate); in this image, Othello's skin is darker than the white Iago's, but his visible features are more Anglo than African. His appearance also is similar to certain depictions of Jesus Christ, suggesting that Othello's suffering may be akin to Christ's, especially when placed against the more devilish-looking Iago. Othello's hand over his eyes may also be read as a common depiction of distress or his concern over being cuckolded. In medieval and early modern times, the symbol of a **cuckold** (or a person whose spouse was cheating on them) were horns sprouting from the wronged party's head. Othello himself makes a reference to this later in the same scene when he complains of a headache.

Hybrid Forms: Word + Image + Sound + Movement

Other forms that combine words with other media are also considered "literature," though in order to really understand them, you will need to employ multiple ways of reading. These combined forms are often called **hybrid forms** as they combine a written or spoken word with at least one other major medium. Popular combinations that you are likely familiar with include movies and television shows, both of which use scripts and actors delivering dialogue alongside important visual and aural elements such as camera angles, sound effects, costumes, sets, music, and film editing to tell a story, convey a mood, teach a lesson, or entertain. Plays and other performances including musicals and operas also use both words and other forms (music and movement being the most noticeable) and operate similarly in requiring their viewer to be attuned not only to literary conventions but also to dramatic, filmic, and musical conventions to be able to comprehend several layers of meaning.

Let's take a look at an extended example in film, which frequently features both spoken language and what's known as film language. One of the common features of film language is distinct shots or camera angles. Take for example a conversation between two characters in a movie or television show. For a neutral conversation wherein the two characters are in equal power, the camera will keep the size of their heads (relative to the entire frame) the same. This visually signals to the viewer that the conversation is between relative equals. If a cinematographer or director wished to play with power distinctions or to privilege one person's stance over the other, they could vary the shots to have one character appear higher in the frame over the other. In these instances, while the dialogue is still conveying its own meaning, the visual language of film also conveys substantial meaning.

Other hybrid forms, or forms that combine multiple mediums, include the large and popular categories of graphic novels, music with lyrics, and several kinds of avant-garde or experimental poetry. A **graphic narrative** combines words and pictures in order to convey its message, usually providing more page space to the images that are separated in a (usually) linear fashion. Popular graphic narrative genres include **graphic novels** (long-form fiction or

non-fiction that uses both images and word), **comics** (shorter, illustrated stories that also use words for dialogue, sound effects, or establishment of a scene), **manga** (an extremely popular form of Japanese graphic narrative that is read from right to left), and **adaptations** of previously text-only works (see, for example, the recent releases of Ann M. Martin’s *The Babysitters’ Club* series that present the original stories entirely in graphic novel form). Combining the visual and verbal so explicitly strikes a chord with several audiences. Unlike other, word-heavy forms like novels, these graphic forms are often faster to read since they can quickly convey information using visual language and the relationship between different panels, particulars that would take much longer to describe with words alone.

Creators often like to “push the envelope” and experiment with multiple forms. Whether as a form of protest against limited and proscriptive modes of expression, a form of conscious experiment on the limits of meaning or feeling, or even a form of play, these hybrids typically do not appear in conventional locations such as printed books or in literary journals, even by presses that report to be more radical. Indeed, many hybrid forms of the twenty-first century are thoroughly digital, using the logic of code as opposed to linear pages to organize a text and either direct or challenge a reader or viewer’s engagement. A fascinating example of a hybrid piece of literature is *The Last Performance*,⁶ created and maintained by hybrid language artist Judd Morrissey. Described as “a constraint-based collaborative writing, archiving and text-visualization project responding to the theme of *lastness* in relation to architectural forms, acts of building, a final performance, and the interruption (that becomes the promise) of community,” this project combines several forms, including written and visual submissions from individual contributors, inspiration and active responding to performance group’s Goat Island, and architecture in the design of a virtual dome.⁷ Viewing the project from a browser challenges the reader, forcing them to break from their usual linear reading habits and to think through language, performance, and space, both real and virtual.

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⁶ Judd Morrissey, Goat Island, et al, *The Last Performance*, 2007–2009, <http://thelastperformance.org/title.php>.

⁷ Judd Morrissey, Goat Island, et al, “The Last Performance [dot org],” *The Last Performance*, 2007–2009, http://thelastperformance.org/project_info_public.php.

Why [Study] Literature? Preparing for the Plunge

Claire Carly-Miles and Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt

Ultimately, the purpose of all literature is to make us think, feel, and think about what we feel. Particularly effective literature may also move us to action, whether that be to revolt against injustice or to take steps to become the best (or, depending on the literature, the worst) versions of ourselves. For instance, you may find yourself identifying with particular characters in a novel or becoming exasperated with others. You may sympathize with their struggles or feel aggravated when they keep undermining themselves with their own actions. You might put yourself in the **protagonist**'s shoes while reading or try on the shoes of the **antagonist** to find that you identify more with that character than with the character readers are stereotypically supposed to prefer. These reactions are worth thinking about further. What does it mean, about the story and perhaps about yourself, that you identify with one character over another? How has the author created that character to appeal (or not) to the reader?

The question of how authors choose words to create their works leads us to think about a primary reason why we read and study literature: connection. Literature offers us connections to our own humanity and beyond; it exposes us to the experiences (both real and imagined) of others, across considerations of time, race, gender, culture, nationhood, space, and worlds. If we read Philip K. Dick's novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep" or view *Bladerunner*, the film based on the story, we are transported to a different place, foreign to our own world, and yet still familiar in its portrayal of people's struggles with organized religion, relationships, and deciding which actions are "right," which actions are "wrong," and whether there are definitive rights and wrongs. In reading or viewing and thinking about these works, we identify and therefore connect with them.

Think about any poem, short story, novella, novel, play, TV series, or film you've ever had a strong reaction to; why did you love or hate it? More than likely, your answer will be that you felt a connection to it, whether that connection was pleasant or not. Whether you felt that it spoke to you about your own experience, introduced you to a new way of thinking about someone else's experience, made you angry or happy or sad, some connection was established between the work and you, the audience. Even if you absolutely *hated* the piece, it's still important to think about how the author evoked that feeling and why.

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Reading and Annotating Literature: Beginning the Dive

Claire Carly-Miles

Examining *how* and *why* the creator of a work forges connections and what they may mean constitutes a huge part of what literary scholarship involves. In order to begin to consider how the writer establishes connections, we want not only to read the text but to engage with it, and we do this through a **close reading** and **annotation** of the text. When you annotate a text, you are, essentially, beginning to identify and/or make connections with the words on the page. Think of your annotations as a way to begin a conversation with the work you're reading. In order to illustrate the beginnings of such a conversation, we've included a page from Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and our annotations of it below:

| <i>The Awakening</i> Text ⁸ | Reader Annotations |
|--|---|
| <p>Madame Ratignolle was very fond of Mrs. Pontellier, and often she took her sewing and went over to sit with her in the afternoons. She was sitting there the afternoon of the day the box arrived from New Orleans. She had possession of the rocker, and she was busily engaged in sewing upon a diminutive pair of night-drawers.</p> <p>[. . .]</p> | <p>A box of sweets and other goodies sent by Mr. Pontellier to Mrs. Pontellier (EP) a few days after he criticizes her.</p> |
| <p>Robert was there, seated as he had been the Sunday before, and Mrs. Pontellier also occupied her former position on the upper step, leaning listlessly against the post. Beside her was a box of bonbons, which she held out at intervals to Madame Ratignolle.</p> | <p>EP seems bored here, watching Madame Ratignolle (MR) sews baby clothes.</p> |
| <p>That lady seemed at a loss to make a selection, but finally settled upon a stick of nougat, wondering if it were not too rich; whether it could possibly hurt her. Madame Ratignolle had been</p> | <p>So MR has spent half of her marriage pregnant.</p> |

⁸ Kate Chopin, "The Awakening," in *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories*, by Kate Chopin (1994), Project Gutenberg, produced by Judith Boss and David Widger, www.gutenberg.org/files/160/160-h/160-h.htm.

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| <p>married seven years. About every two years she had a baby. At that time she had three babies, and was beginning to think of a fourth one. She was always talking about her “condition.” Her “condition” was in no way apparent, and no one would have known a thing about it but for her persistence in making it the subject of conversation</p> | <p>“Condition” = a euphemism for pregnancy.</p> <p>In other words, even though MR uses a euphemism to refer to it, she talks about it persistently and frequently.</p> |
| <p>Robert started to reassure her, asserting that he had known a lady who had subsisted upon nougat during the entire—but seeing the color mount into Mrs. Pontellier’s face he checked himself and changed the subject</p> | <p>Interesting! MR and Robert are both completely comfortable talking about pregnancy, but EP blushes at the conversation, and Robert cuts his comment short because of this. Also notice that EP is always “Mrs.” whereas Adele Ratignolle is “Madame”—this indicates that they are different in terms of being “American” or “Creole.”</p> |
| <p>Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them. There were only Creoles that summer at Lebrun’s. They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations. A characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their entire absence of prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable.</p> | <p>“Absence of prudery” = comfortable talking about pregnancy and, probably, what causes pregnancy.</p> <p>Again, an interesting detail: EP recognizes that while they may talk very frankly, they are also very chaste, so it’s really just all talk.</p> |
| <p>Never would Edna Pontellier forget the shock with which she heard Madame Ratignolle relating to old Monsieur Farival the harrowing story of one of her accouchements, withholding no intimate detail. She was growing accustomed to like shocks, but she could not keep the mounting color back from her cheeks. Oftener than once her coming had interrupted the droll story with which Robert was entertaining some amused group of married women.</p> | <p>This is the first time the narrator refers to EP by her first name in the text and this is Chapter IV! So formal! And also, without her first name used until now, when she’s been named, her relationship as a wife to a husband is always prioritized.</p> <p><i>Accouchements</i> is French for</p> |

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|---|---|
| | <p>“childbirth.”</p> <p>“Droll story”: Probably a story about sex or some rake’s escapades.</p> |
| <p>A book had gone the rounds of the <i>pension</i>. When it came her turn to read it, she did so with profound astonishment. She felt moved to read the book in secret and solitude, though none of the others had done so,—to hide it from view at the sound of approaching footsteps. It was openly criticised and freely discussed at table. Mrs. Pontellier gave over being astonished, and concluded that wonders would never cease.</p> | <p>Chopin repeats the word “solitude” several times throughout the book; why?</p> <p>EP is embarrassed to be seen reading this book, and she is also fascinated by it.</p> <p>No one else is embarrassed about having read it; discussing it at table would mean the book’s contents are being openly talked about in front of everybody.</p> |

Annotating the text helps you think more deeply about the work, and your notes can be extremely useful, providing placeholders, reminders, or signposts for you to return to as you read, when you discuss, and when you begin to engage in the initial stages of discovering and exploring what others have said about the work. Any valid argument (whether spoken aloud as part of a class discussion or written as an essay) about a work of literature should be grounded in its text. You will need to support your points with specific quotations (or summary or paraphrase), and those points will need to be valid not only with the use of specific textual material but also with the entire story taken into consideration. In other words, the better you remember specific places in the text that strike you, the better you’ll be able to think about how they work within the text as a whole.

In one of the annotations above, for example, we notice the “droll story” Robert mentions. Having noted this here in Chapter IV, when we get to Chapter VIII and an actual name (Alcée Arobin) is mentioned and then when Alcée himself makes an actual appearance in Chapter XXIII, we can begin to characterize him. Noting that he’s referred to in the earlier chapters (and in a particular way) might help you to think about what kind of character Alcée is and to remember how Robert feels about him when he finally makes his entrance. If you want to write an essay comparing and contrasting Robert and Alcée, you are then able to look back at your annotations to see that there is plenty of evidence throughout the text to support a claim that Robert and Alcée have very different roles to play in Edna’s life.

To begin a close reading and annotations of any piece of literature, consider the following questions (please note: many of the terms included below are discussed within the chapters dedicated to each genre):

- What genre is this piece of literature classified as, and are there specific elements unique to that genre to consider as you read and annotate?
- What structural elements do you observe as you read?
- Are characters present? If so, who are the main and who are the supporting characters, and how are they developed? Are they flat and/or static, or are they round and/or dynamic? Do certain characters serve as foils for the main character, and if they do, what is revealed by comparing and contrasting these characters?
- Where is the action set, and why might this be important?
- Who (or what) is the speaker or narrator? Is the narrator reliable or unreliable?
- What is the plot? What is the main conflict?
- Are there images or symbols that seem significant because of where they appear and/or how frequently the author incorporates them? Are they “universal” symbols or ones that have meaning only within the bounds of this piece of literature?

Making these observations will help you to begin the dive that may eventually lead to your constructing a particular argument about the text.

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Writing about Literature: Diving Deep

Claire Carly-Miles

After reading, you’ll be able to summarize what you’ve read (the surface), and as you begin to write about it, you’ll begin to dive deep, thinking about what lies beneath that surface summary and beyond your annotations. At every stage, from your initial reading onwards, you are beginning to consider the subtexts of the work—those aspects that may not be readily apparent at first. During the process of writing about literature, you are working to bring those subtexts to light. As you formulate your thesis argument/claim, you’ll also begin to research what others have written about the work. While you will not repeat what they’ve said as your own argument, you will begin to connect with those scholars by annotating their

texts and considering how you might use pieces of their work to support your argument and how you'll respond to their connections by adding those of your own, whether you agree or disagree with them.

Earlier, we mentioned that literature's purpose is to encourage readers to connect—both with the ideas in the text and with what they, themselves, bring to the text. These connections that authors forge when they write and to which you contribute when you read are deepened when you begin the process of writing about literature. As you write and converse with the text and with others who are thinking and writing about it too, you will develop deeper levels of understanding and an even greater connection with the text. As you dive into literature—as you consider its surface, plumb its depths, and resurface to write a unique argument that will shed new light on text and subtext—you connect not only with the work and yourself but with a community of other readers, writers, and scholars. You are becoming part of the many conversations about literature.

These ideas of discovery, conversation, and community within and around texts arise in Adrienne Rich's poem, "Diving into the Wreck" (1973). Rich writes the following lines, which we included as an epigraph at the beginning of this chapter:

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.⁹

One of the beauties of this poem, and of all literature, is that there are many possible and valid readings and analyses. Here, Rich uses the metaphor of diving in order to examine the process of rediscovering something. Critics have posited that the speaker of this poem is diving into herself, her sexuality, her own creative process, her positionality as a lesbian writer, and/or her attempt to rediscover texts by marginalized authors who went, for the most part, unrecognized and unremembered.

The works in this OER feature some of those authors and writings that, until recently, went unrecognized and unremembered, along with authors who may be better known. But Rich's metaphor—"The words are purposes./The words are maps"—applies to all of these authors. When we read and think and write about their words, we, like Rich's speaker, are diving in, looking for the purposes and contexts which perhaps motivated or shaped these works, reading the maps these authors created in order to guide us in our understanding of them. Whenever we read literature, we begin by diving in and exploring alone; when we discuss and write about literature, we then join many communities of divers who are doing the same thing.

⁹ Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck," in *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971–1972* (New York: Norton, 1973) W.W. Norton & Company, 1973, Poets.Org, <https://poets.org/poem/diving-wreck>.

In the following pages, we invite you to leap in with us, and if we dive deep enough, we just may resurface with some of “the treasures that prevail.”

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Poetry

*A poem should not mean / But be.*¹

—Archibald MacLeish, “Ars Poetica”

Introduction

R. Paul Cooper

Most readers, upon encountering a poem for the first time, usually want to know one thing: what does it mean? Poems are made up of words after all, specially crafted arrangements of words, and words convey meanings. Therefore, readers conclude, this special arrangement of words must convey a special meaning. Yet meaning is not waiting to be unearthed from the poem, as if the poem were an archaeological dig. No, the meaning of a poem rests in the experience of it, not in meaning dug from it but in the very act of digging itself.

How, then, does a poem *be*? That is precisely the question this introduction answers and where any analysis of a poem ought to begin.

It is often said that poetry is a special way of using language, a heightened attention to the materiality of the words, the marks on the page, and vibrations in the air that create and convey all meaning. However, if we reflect upon all the special uses of language that different societies throughout history have considered to be poetry, there seems to be little consensus. Some literary cultures have valued highly organized and predetermined ways of using language, such as the sonnet in European culture, while others, such as the beatniks in America, have rejected such strict organization. Where one literary culture might value the higher-order, often religious meaning produced by such special arrangements of words, others find delight in the play of the immediate and palpable. Some literary cultures value the sonorous elements, rhyme and rhythm, creating poems meant to be heard, while others value the visual, creating poems meant to be seen.

As you can see, the special arrangements of words that qualify as poetry are subject to quite a bit of historical variability. Value judgments change. Yet despite this variability in tastes and judgments, certain technical features—**craft elements**—can be identified in common across all types of poetry. This introduction will, accordingly, highlight the craft elements used by poets, because whatever tastes and values inform the reader’s or writer’s perspectives, these craft elements define the very being of poetry itself. Most of the terminology related to craft

¹Archibald MacLeish, “Ars Poetica,” in *Collected Poems 1917–1952* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1952), Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/17168/ars-poetica>.

elements will be explored in this chapter, but the sheer number of terms means you should consult the glossary as well.

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Key Components of Poetry

R. Paul Cooper

Well before the written word existed, there was poetry; this much we know. For example, the **ballad** is an ancient form that tells a narrative in short stanzas, and it is the form that reveals song and poetry to be old friends. One of the perhaps oldest and lasting definitions of poetry considers it to be a special form of *rhythmic* speech. We begin to feel poetry before we begin to make meaning from it, just as we feel our mother's heartbeat before we ever see her face.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous type of poetry, one that has been with us since antiquity, is **lyric poetry**, usually short poems expressing the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker. You might assume that the strong 'I' found in a lyric poem, for example, signifies that it is the author speaking, but that is not a good assumption to make. Authors often write to express their own feelings on a subject, yes, but they also take on **personas**, a concept which comes from the Latin word for "mask." The author is not always the **speaker**, or the voice that speaks the poem. Authors become other characters, other people. Consider Natasha Trethewey's use of first person in her lyric poem "White Lies," a poem included in this OER. Even though the poem speaks to her own experience growing up biracial in the South, she is NOT the speaker of the poem. Don't confuse the speaker with the poet!

Poetic Forms

Besides the lyric poem, there are other, general types of poems. There are **epic poems** that depict a mythic time of origins and beginnings, **narrative poems** that tell a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end, and there are **odes**, poems that valorize a person, object, idea, or place. There are **dramatic monologues**, speeches given by a single speaker at an important moment, and there are even **didactic poems**, poems meant to teach. Any of these general categories could take on a **closed form** (such as a sonnet, discussed below), but they can also take on other forms such as **blank verse** and **open verse**. Blank verse is a type of poem made

of unrhymed iambic pentameter, making it an effective way of imitating natural speech for, say, a dramatic monologue, while open verse poems—poems not confined to any pre-set rules or strictures—are only limited by the imaginations and materials of the poet.

Modern poets sometimes even write what are called **prose poems**! That might seem a contradiction, and for many readers, a prose poem might seem too “prosaic” to be considered poetry, but modern poets have used this form to create prosodic and experimental prose that would not work well for a story or novel. Experimental poetry is also known as **avant-garde** poetry. There are many schools of avant-garde poetry, such as **surrealism**, where artists work to redefine the nature of literary forms. The avant-garde has given rise to new poetic forms, such as **conceptual poetry**, a type of **found poetry**, and has popularized **automatic techniques** such as **blackout**, **lipogram**, and **cut-up**.

Certain **closed or fixed forms** are handed down throughout history, though many poets have made it their work to invent new closed forms or re-invent old ones. Some closed, fixed forms include, but are not limited to: the **villanelle**, **sestina**, **terza rima**, **ghazal**, **rhyming quatrains**, **heroic couplets**, **haiku**, **N+7**, and the **sonnet**. All of these forms operate according to set rules, so even if you did not recognize a particular form, you could still analyze it using the tools given you in this chapter and derive the rules that govern it.

That said, let’s take a closer look at the sonnet, of which there are two common types, **the Petrarchan (Italian)** and **the Shakespearean (English)**. The Petrarchan sonnet will be discussed below. As to the English sonnet, it consists of fourteen lines written in iambic pentameter, which is just a fancy way to describe the rhythm of the syllables, a matter which will be addressed below in the section on rhythm and sound. These fourteen lines written in iambic pentameter will be organized into four rhyming four-line **stanzas** called **quatrains**, and the poem will take a **turn (volta)** in tone, either after the first octet or before the final two-line stanza called a **couplet**. A stanza is, in essence, a paragraph of poetry, and there are different names for stanzas of different lengths (**couplet**, **triplet/tercet**, **quatrain**, **quintain/quintet**, **septet**, **sestet/sexain**, & **octet**). The most common **theme** of the sonnet is, of course, love, whether that be romantic love, love of nation, or agape.

Word Choice and Punctuation

Where does the poet begin? Well, with the word, of course.

Stories and novels are made of words, too, yes, but poems are often short enough that poets labor over every single word. Unlike stories, which are strings of sentences, a poem can contain no sentences at all, just fragments of speech and solitary words. Choosing the right word can be difficult. Words have **denotations**, or literal meanings, but words also carry **connotations**, unspoken meanings that are often cultural and contextual. Take the phrase,

“They are yellow.” If they are literally yellow, we might be worried they are jaundiced, but within U.S. colloquial English, to be “yellow-bellied” is to be a coward.

Colloquial English designates a type of **diction**. There is **formal English**, which is the sort of diction usually reserved for speeches and academic essays; there is **standard English**, which is the everyday English spoken in schools, churches, courthouses, and public parks; there is **colloquial English**, which is often confined to a group with shared interests or geography; there is **slang**, words that carry connotations far removed from their denotative meanings; and there is **jargon**, specialized vocabulary specific to a field of study, such as engineering, medicine, or law. An exceedingly clever poet might engage in wordplay such as **puns**, plays on words that sound alike but have different meanings (sun/son).

To make things more complex, every single word has its own rhythm, a rhythm that might throw off the entire rhythm of the line. To string words together in rhythmic fashion requires an understanding of punctuation and how it affects those rhythms. Any line of poetry that ends on a punctuation mark is called an **end-stopped line**. Lines that do not end on punctuation are said to be **run-on lines**, or to show **enjambment**. Punctuation breaks in the middle of a line of poetry are called **caesura**—literally, cuts. It is even helpful to translate common punctuation marks into plain language: a period states: “this idea ends, and a new begins”; a semi-colon states: “this idea ends, but the next is closely related”; and a colon states: “what follows clarifies what came before.”

Poets also use **white space** to convey meaning; you must study absence, too. We are accustomed to seeing white space as occupying the margins, but many poets incorporate white space in ways that demand our attention. How do we occupy the white spaces? How do we wait? Do we hold our breath? Or do we breathe deep? Most importantly, how do we begin to view absence not as nothing but something? Or put another way, nothing is something, too.

Rhythm and Sound

As a poet strings words together, they may also prioritize sound over sense. This is especially true of performative subgenres such as **spoken word**. Rather than constructing a line of poetry to convey a meaning in the clearest possible fashion, a poet might construct a line of poetry according to rules of **euphony** (pleasant sounds) or **cacophony** (unpleasant sounds). Repetition plays a key role in creating euphony or cacophony. To repeat a clause at the beginning of a sentence, to repeat the clause at the beginning of a sentence, that is **anaphora**; **epistrophe** happens when you repeat a clause at the end of the sentence, at the end of the sentence.

Individual sounds are also repeated. While the alliterative repetition of an 's' sound might have a pleasing effect, euphony, the repetition of 'b' and 't' sounds might produce a cacophony. While **alliteration** refers to the repetition of consonant sounds, usually at the

beginning of words, **assonance** refers to the repetition of vowel sounds, such as found in the sentence: “He fell asleep at the wheel.” Of course, this line also alliterates. Similar to alliteration, **consonance** employs repetition of consonant clusters within words; consider: streak/struck, mammal/clammy, pitter/patter, and so forth. Consonance often creates a **near rhyme or slant rhyme**, that is, a rhyme that is not quite exact. Rhyme is, of course, one of the major driving sonorous features of poetry, and rhyme can be divided into **single rhyme** (rhyme on a final, stressed syllable; ex: confer/defer) and **double rhyme** (a rhyming stressed then unstressed syllable; ex: bower/power). To complicate matters further, there are also **eye rhymes**, that is, words that look like they ought to rhyme but do not (tough/though, for example). And of course there is **onomatopoeia**, a word imitating a sound, which will allow us to end this paragraph with a BANG.

Table 2.1 Sound and rhyme

| Term | Definition | Examples |
|--------------|--|--|
| Alliteration | Same consonant sound at the beginning of two or more words | “tortured Tantalus” (Cullen) “bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings” (Hopkins) |
| Assonance | Same vowel sound (or sounds) within two or more words | “winner, winner, chicken dinner” “son of a gun” |
| Consonance | Same consonant sound (or sounds) within two or more words | “God is good” (Cullen) |
| Slant Rhyme | Refers to both assonance and consonance; example uses both | “Ready for action, nip it in the bud / We never relaxing, OutKast is everlasting / Not clashing, not at all” (Outkast) |

To **scan** a poem is to analyze the rhythms, or **meter**. Traditionally, English language poetry offers six rhythms: the **iamb**, the **trochee**, the **anapest**, the **dactyl**, the **spondee**, and the **pyrrhic**. For a definition of each, see the table below, but let us take the iamb as an illustrative example. An iamb consists of two syllables, the first unstressed and the second stressed. So words like define, attain, describe, destroy, these words all exhibit one metric foot of iambs, or iambic monometer (see the glossary to learn the terms **monometer**, **dimeter**, **trimeter**, **tetrameter**, **pentameter**, etc..).

If you recall from above, a sonnet is written in iambic pentameter—five feet of iambs. If an iamb consists of an unstressed and stressed syllable, a line of iambic pentameter will be ten syllables long with the following stress pattern: “ba-DUM ba-DUM ba-DUM ba-DUM ba-DUM.” Read aloud this first line from a sonnet by Edna St. Vincent Millay, making sure to over-accentuate the stressed syllables: “What LIPS my LIPS have KISSED and WHERE and WHY.” Now you should have a feel for the most common meter in all of English poetry. But let's take it further. We've analyzed the 'being' of that first line, but look closer at the stressed words: “LIPS LIPS KISSED WHERE WHY.” Even by analyzing the meter of a single line, we can see the poem begin to take shape. This speaker has kissed quite a few lips, so many she no longer recalls them all, and perhaps even regrets a few.

Table 2.2 Traditional meters.

| Meter Name | Stress Pattern | Example |
|------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Iamb | Unstressed stressed | “What LIPS / my LIPS / have KISSED , / and WHERE , / and WHY” ² |
| Trochee | Stressed unstressed | “ DOU ble / DOU ble / TOIL and / TROU ble, / FI re / BURN and / CAUL dron / BUB ble.” ³ |
| Anapest | Unstressed unstressed stressed | “It was MAN /y and MAN /y a YEAR / ago, in a KING /dom by the SEA” ⁴ |
| Dactyl | Stressed unstressed unstressed | “ CAN non to / RIGHT of them, / CAN non to / LEFT of them....” ⁵ |
| Spondee | Stressed stressed | “To a / GREEN THOUGHT , / in a / GREEN SHADE .” ⁶ |

² Edna St. Vincent Millay, “What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,” in *Vanity Fair*, November 1920, Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46557/what-lips-my-lips-have-kissed-and-where-and-why>.

³ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), 4.1.10–11, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/macbeth/act-4-scene-1/>.

⁴ Edgar Allan Poe, “Annabel Lee,” Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44885/annabel-lee>.

⁵ Alfred Tennyson, “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45319/the-charge-of-the-light-brigade>.

⁶ Andrew Marvell, “The Garden,” Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44682/the-garden-56d223dec2ced>.

| | | |
|---------|-----------------------|---|
| Pyrrhic | Unstressed unstressed | “TO A / green thought, / IN A / green shade.” |
|---------|-----------------------|---|

Imagery

Poets also think hard about **imagery**. To qualify as an image, one must be able to imagine the poet’s descriptions in a way that engages one of the five senses; while most images are **visual**, there are **auditory** images, **tactile** images, **olfactory** images, and **gustatory** images. If a word engages the five senses in the imagination, that word belongs to the class of words called **concrete diction**. A collection of concrete words comprises an image (there is even a genre of poetry called **concrete poetry**, where the words take on the shape of the subject of the poem). In contrast, words that cannot be filtered through one of the five senses are considered **abstract diction**. Abstractions not only include ideas, like freedom, but also feelings, like love. While some poets value the concrete over the abstract, and vice versa, poetry covers all aspects of the human experience, from what we can sense to what we cannot, from the palpable to the ineffable.

Irony and Figures of Speech

Of course, poets rarely say exactly what they mean, often arriving at truth through the artistic application of lies, half-truths, and contradictions. An **oxymoron**, for example, provides two contradictory terms that might cancel each other out, such as “working vacation,” while a **paradox** provides a seemingly contradictory set of propositions that upon further reflection reveal a deeper truth. If a poet says one thing but does not mean it, then that poet has employed **verbal irony**, of which **sarcasm** is one variety. But there are other types of irony. **Dramatic irony** occurs when you, the reader, know something the characters do not, while **cosmic irony** occurs when a character tries to escape their *explicit* fate but only ends up fulfilling their fate in the process.

The biggest lies told by poets are **figures of speech**. In order to be a figure of speech, the words in question must denote something that is *literally* impossible. Consider an exaggeration such as **hyperbole**. To say, “I’m so hungry I could eat a large pizza” would not constitute hyperbole, because a person can, in fact, eat an entire large pizza. But to say, “I’m so hungry I could eat a horse,” well, no single person could eat an entire horse on their own. **Understatement** also exists, but is often more subtle, because it downplays the severity or gravity of an event.

Figures of speech offer the poet some of their most powerful tools: **metaphor**, **simile**, **metonymy**, and **synecdoche**. You have probably heard that a simile is a comparison using like or as, but any comparison word will suffice. “My love resembles a red rose” is as much a simile

as “my love is like a red rose.” A metaphor removes the comparison word and replaces it with the verb “to be,” creating an equivalency between two unlike things: “My love IS a red rose.” Of course, metaphors that are not explicit in their comparisons are **implied metaphors**, such as “My love has petals and thorns,” and a metaphor can be an **extended metaphor**, which merely denotes a metaphor that goes on for four or more lines. Metonymy and synecdoche are closely related figures of speech, each relying on replacements or stand-ins. Metonymy uses a closely related idea or object to stand-in for something, while synecdoche uses a part of something to stand in for the whole. So, to say “The White House issued a press release” is not to say that the physical White House accomplished this task in anthropomorphic fashion, but to metonymically state that the president, whom the “White House” replaces, issued a press release. A common synecdoche might be, “Let's grab your wheels and get out of here.” Wheels are part of a car, so here, synecdochally, wheels stand in for the car.

What is important to remember for all figures of speech is that they must be impossible! If it can be interpreted literally and still make sense, it is likely not a figure of speech. So even if you have trouble differentiating metonymy from synecdoche, you can still identify a figure of speech using this rule of thumb.

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Writing About Poetry

R. Paul Cooper

Now that you know all of these terms, what do you write about?

The temptation might be to jump straight to interpretation, to start arguing about meaning, and to start engaging in research. But to engage in research too early can actually be counterproductive. Too often, readers fixate on a theme or idea that means a lot to them, so they see that theme or idea replicated everywhere. Soon, they begin trying to fit poems into predetermined readings or patterns of meaning. However, if we follow closely the poem, consider carefully the words on the page, and allow the form and content to dictate the shape of our research questions, then we are more likely to have an honest engagement with the source poem and the research.

So, with poems, we start by writing an explication. To explicate a poem is to highlight, annotate, and examine its various parts in close detail while refusing to rest on any one particular interpretation. An **explication** does not focus on specific interpretations but rather allows itself to freely pursue all of the possible interpretations; it explores and explains. After the explication is complete, analytical close reading can begin, an example of which can be found at the end of this chapter. So, in short, an explication breaks a poem down into its constituent parts, and a close reading analyzes the parts through an argument about the whole (the poem) in the form of a thesis statement. Remember, none of the explications below can be said to be exhaustive: what's missing? What remains left out?

To be as systematic as possible, each explication below will start broadly before moving into particulars. Each will begin with a broad overview of the form of the poem before moving into a paraphrase that illuminates the who, what, when, and where of the poem. Then the explications will move on to how those elements are executed, to analyzing what choices the author made regarding words, punctuation, sounds, images, and figures. While analyzing the choices made by the poem, effort will be made to speculate on *why* the author might have made the choices they did.

Elsa Gidlow (1898-1986)

"I, Lover" (1923)

I shall never have any fear of love,
Not of its depth nor its uttermost height,
Its exquisite pain and its terrible delight.
I shall never have any fear of love.

I shall never hesitate to go down
Into the fastness of its abyss
Nor shrink from the cruelty of its awful kiss.
I shall never have any fear of love.

Never shall I dread love's strength
Nor any pain it might give.
Through all the years I may live
I shall never have any fear of love.

I shall never draw back from love
Through fear of its vast pain
But build joy of it and count it again.

⁷ Elsa Gidlow, "I, Lover," in *On a Grey Thread* (Chicago: Will Ransom, 1923), 61, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/ongreythread00gidl/page/60/mode/2up?q=I%2C+Lover>.

I shall never have any fear of love.

I shall never tremble nor flinch
From love's moulding touch:
I have loved too terribly and too much
Ever to have any fear of love.

Before even reading the poem, let us examine the page for any patterns that are immediately apparent. Take a moment to see the poem not as a grouping of words with meaning, but as a collection of marks consciously organized into a pattern on the page. What patterns emerge?

This poem is written in quatrains, or four-line stanzas. A quick glance reveals these quatrains to be rhyming quatrains. The rhymes have a distinct pattern. The first stanza repeats the word "love" at the end of the first and fourth lines, and the second and third lines of each stanza rhyme, establishing a rhyme pattern of ABBA, also called an **envelope stanza**. However, the stanzas do not all rhyme exactly according to this pattern. When the word "love" is not repeated at the end of the first line of a stanza, that stanza breaks the rhyming pattern, and each stanza actually repeats the exact same fourth line, until the deviation of the ultimate line. Love is a prominent enough concept in this poem that the word is repeated at the end of seven lines; it is also a powerful enough concept to disrupt the patterns of the poem and cause cacophony within the rhyme scheme.

If we start to count syllables, we see that most lines contain ten syllables, though some contain more or less. A base of ten syllables suggests a predominance of iambic pentameter, the most common meter in English poetry, and the lines that break that pattern call attention to themselves by deviating from the pattern. A quick glance at the punctuation of this poem reveals there are no caesuras, and that when punctuation does occur, it is end-stopped. All of the above can be discerned without much attention to the meaning of the words within the poem, and such treatment will soon reveal whether you have a closed or fixed form before you. Here we have rhyming quatrains that purposefully employ deviation from the rules of that form. Whatever the case, this process reveals a pattern; whether we have traditional patterns such as sonnet, villanelle, or haiku, or modern patterns that break the rules, pattern recognition is a fundamental skill.

Next, paraphrase the poem, taking care not to add any external information. A paraphrase will cover the subject of the poem or what it is about, it will address who is speaking during the poem, and when and where the poem takes place. How and why a poem is written is, of course, an important question. We will return to that, but let's address the what, when, who, and where first.

The speaker of this poem is unclear, though it must be the speaker of the title, "I, Lover." The poem nowhere indicates anything specific about the speaker, not even gender. The clear first-person voice marks this poem as lyric, as expressing the thoughts and emotions of a single-

speaker, but the poem appears to be an ode and a lament at the same time. The subject here, love, is portrayed as both terrible and delightful, something one should rush toward but also be wary of. Place and time are not relevant to the poem. Nothing about the poem places it in the world of objects, of the particular; no, love here is abstract and universal.

Next, we consider *how* the subject of the poem is portrayed. If we observe the word choice and syntax of this poem, we can see that the poem is built upon oxymorons, paradoxes, parallelisms and puns. Word pairings such as “exquisite pain” and “horrible delight” are examples of oxymorons (ln. 3). “Exquisite” carries positive connotations—things we enjoy are exquisite; yet most people do not enjoy pain, a word that carries obviously negative meanings. The same applies to “horrible” and “delight”; these words differ in their connotations and denotations. Paradoxes function similarly to oxymorons, but they usually extend to phrases, and paradoxical phrases often exhibit parallelism, which is a way of linking ideas using matching syntax and structures. Consider line 2 from the poem: “nor of its depth nor its uttermost height.” Here there are two clauses, each beginning with the conjunction “nor”; after the “nor” comes the possessive “its,” and both clauses end on features or qualities that love possesses. But how can something possess depths and heights? Aren't those opposites? This paradox and the parallel structure emphasize the positive and negative attributes of love at the same time, but in this line the heights are emphasized by the modifier “uttermost,” which may imply that the heights make up for the lows somehow. Finally, consider the pun of “moulding touch” in line 18. This is the UK spelling of *mold*, but *to mould* is to give shape or form to something, while *a mould* is a fungus that in some cases causes health issues. Love is everywhere defined in this poem by this dual quality, something foundational and formational, yet devastating and sadistic.

This poem deals primarily in abstractions and emotions, so it offers little in the form of concrete language associated with imagery. Even figurative speech is minimal, although personification plays a central role and there is at least one implied metaphor. In line 7, we learn about love’s “awful kiss”; and in line 18, there is love's “moulding touch.” Love is more than an abstraction here, and it takes on human characteristics—love caresses, love shapes, love kisses. Continuing with the use of oxymoron, those kisses are awful, the touch mouldy, but it is clear that, literally, love cannot possibly perform these actions. Furthermore, line 6 contains an implied metaphor with “into the fastness of its abyss.” What contains abysses? An abyss is usually a chasm, a geographical feature, though it can be used to describe non-geographical differences. Taken geographically, love is implied to be a land mass; seas contain abysses, so do mountains. Therefore, love is implied to be either a high place with abysses, a mountain, or a low place with further depths, a sea. This dual implication continues the patterns of dual meanings that permeate this poem.

Why, then? Why has the author created this special arrangement of words in such a way that love is permeated by highs and lows? On one hand, this might seem obvious to anyone who has ever loved. Love takes us through highs and lows. But on the other hand, what would

research reveal about the theme of this poem? Could we have missed some figure of speech, pun, or other word play that might be revealed by an exploration of the life of the author and her historical milieu? Surely not everyone can experience love as both utmost delight and terrible pain, right? If you knew the author was a lesbian in a time when homosexuality could be punished by law, how would it change your interpretation of this poem? What new puns or other hidden meanings might then emerge? These questions are exactly the sorts of questions one might strive to answer with the thesis statement of the close reading assignment with which this chapter ends.

Yone Noguchi (1875-1947)

“Hokku” (1919)⁸

I

Bits of song—what else?
I, a rider of the stream,
Lone between the clouds.

II

Full of faults, you say.
What beauty in repentance!
Tears, songs—thus life flows.

III

But the march to life—
Break song to sing the new
song!
Clouds leap, flowers bloom.

IV

Song of sea in rain,
Voice of the sky, earth and men!
List, song of my heart.

This poem appears as a series of four stanzas. Each stanza is a tercet. Punctuation is a pronounced feature. There are three exclamation points and one question. There are also several em dashes, some that end-stop lines, but others that are caesuras. A few of the lines even present multiple caesuras, a technique sure to create a lilting, stilted rhythm.

⁸ Yone Noguchi, “Hokku,” *Poetry* 15, no. 2 (1919), 67, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20572342>.

Counting the syllables here begins to reveal the form at work. Five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second, five in the third—these are the features of a haiku. In fact, the title of this piece, “Hokku,” calls attention to the origins of the haiku. A *hokku* was, traditionally, a sequence of poems that began a longer work called a *renga*. The *hokku* became a valued form on its own, over time evolving into, simply, haiku. Haiku exhibit other features beyond the syllable count. They usually contain strong nature imagery, with words that tune the reader to the passing of the seasons. Traditional Japanese-language haiku also employ *cutting words*, words that signal changes in mood, tone, or subject. Because English does not ordinarily employ specific words to signal tone shifts, this poem uses punctuation in a manner that serves to approximate such specialized Japanese words.

The speaker of the poem identifies themselves through the use of the first-person singular in stanza one and the first person possessive in line 4. In stanza one, the speaker claims to be “a rider of the stream, / lone between the clouds” (2–3). As a metaphor, these lines may tell us many things about the speaker’s mindset, but they do little to concretely identify the speaker. There is also a “you” to which the speaker speaks, and this person is given a snippet of dialogue, “Full of faults” (4). But this is not a conversation; no, the framing of the events seems to indicate strong memories recollected later. But this speaker does not recollect in tranquility and silence. They recollect while in the rain. This seems to be the poem in its entirety: memories, including regrets, in tandem with nature. Though it would rightly be impossible to say with certainty the time of year, certain keywords indicate that this poem takes place in spring, when most notably, “flowers bloom” (9).

The diction of this poem is simple, and most readers could read it without a dictionary. “Repentance” (5) stands out as a keyword, not simply because it is one of the longest words used in a poetic form that limits syllables, but also because it offers some hint of the relationship between the speaker and the “you” they address in the poem. We cannot say for certain what the speaker has done wrong, but they have done something to warrant “tears” (6). “List” (12) also deserves attention, because it is an irregular usage denoting the motion of swaying side-to-side; like ships on the ocean, the song in the narrator’s heart lists. The word “song” also stands out, notably because it is repeated six times. This poem is itself a song, a song of lament and sorrows, but also a song of beginnings and renewals— “break song to sing the new song!” (8).

The imagery of this poem is its most important feature, those images often working in conjunction with implied metaphors. Let us take each stanza one by one. Stanza 1 opens with “bits of song,” a vague aural or auditory image (1). Noguchi then offers this mixture of image and implied metaphor: “I, rider of the stream, / lone between the clouds” (2–3). The first part of this image is abstract and implies a metaphor. The speaker *is* a rider. Are they horse riders, then? Surely not, because horses are not commonly used to ride streams. However, boats ride streams. But this contradicts the next image of a person, alone, floating through the clouds. Is the speaker lying on their back, floating down a stream, staring at the clouds? Perhaps.

Whatever the case, we know how they feel, lonely among the clouds, which might even be an **allusion**—a reference to a person, place, or thing—to William Wordsworth’s famous poem, “[I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud](#)”⁹ (1807).

Stanza 2, like Stanza 1, begins with auditory imagery. We hear words from someone who is not the speaker, “Full of faults, you say” (4). Then in the final line comes an image coupled with an implied metaphor: “Tears, song—thus life flows!” (6). We can see tears, making this a visual image, and we can even infer the noise that would come with tears. However, we would not usually associate the noise of crying with song, though the two are very consciously juxtaposed in this line. “Thus life flows” (6) has a sense of finality to it, as if the speaker is adrift, alone, singing a lament, a sad song full of tears, and that’s “just the way it is.” Of course, to say life flows is to imply a metaphor. Does life flow like the rapper Biggie Smalls? Or does life flow...like a river? Option 2 seems more likely, and not just for historical reasons. This implied metaphor links back to the implied metaphor of stanza 1, because we might now argue that the stream on which our speaker is a rider is the stream of life.

Stanza 3 presents an auditory rupture: “break song to sing the new song!” (8). This rupture is reflected in the word choice and the final set of images. A word like “break” is obvious enough in its denotation to reflect rupture in this stanza, but the word “march” in line 7 might be less obvious. In this line is an implied metaphor: *life marches*. What else marches? Armies march, time marches, so do ducks. Whatever the case, to march is to progress with determination toward a specific objective, whereas to flow is to simply go with things, to ride the current, to not direct. How can life at one moment flow, the next march? With “clouds leap” (9), the final set of images reinforce this rupture by disturbing the speaker’s solitude among the clouds, and then finally, “flowers bloom” (9), indicating fecundity and renewal. Has the speaker reached some epiphany or a resolution in the clouds and flowers?

Stanza 4 returns to a similar imagery pattern as stanzas 1 and 2. It opens with a song, with an aural image: “song of sea in rain” (10). It would seem that, if our speaker is riding the stream, that they have arrived, finally, to the sea. If life is the stream, then what is the sea? Death? But the stanza before has just promised new life, new songs, and new seasons. Could it be an afterlife? And who is it that sings this song!? Not our speaker, but the voice of someone—or something—much vaster than a single person, something celestial and universal, something composed of “sky, earth, and men” (11). Finally, the song of the speaker’s heart sways side to side, as if wavering upon the cusp of something large, wavering on the cusp of some great change, a renewal brought about by repentance and reflection.

Around the time this poem was published, there began a movement in poetry called Imagism. Some of the most notable practitioners of Imagistic poetry include major poets such as Ezra

⁹ William Wordsworth, “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,” Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45521/i-wandered-lonely-as-a-cloud>.

Pound and T.S. Eliot. As per its name, this movement emphasized the image as the most effective way of transmitting direct feelings through sensory experience. What relationship, if any, exists between Noguchi's poem and the Imagist movement? Can the Imagist understanding of imagery help us better understand this poem? If images can convey certain emotions, what emotions do you feel as you go through each stanza of this poem? Is it purely coincidence that the first English haiku was written around the same time as the Imagist movement? These questions, and more, are the sorts to ask as you move from explication to analytical close reading.

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

"God's Grandeur" (1918)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and share man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things:
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

A cursory glance at this poem reveals two stanzas: the first an octet, the second a sestet. The total number of lines is 14, making this—you guessed it! A sonnet.

In the Introductory section of this chapter, we covered the Shakespearean, or English Sonnet; this sonnet is a Petrarchan, or Italian sonnet. In many ways they are very similar: written in rhyming iambic pentameter, usually about love, and presenting a turn, or shift in the tone of the poem, at a predetermined place. However, the turn comes in different places for each type, respectively, this revealing the major structural differences between the two types of sonnets. If you recall, for the Shakespearean sonnet, the turn comes after the second quatrain or before the final couplet. Here, in the Petrarchan sonnet, the turn comes after the opening

¹⁰ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," in *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Now First Published*, ed. Robert Bridges (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918), 26, Hathi Trust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/udel.31741113248746?urlappend=%3Bseq=42>.

octet, just before the final sestet. The opening octet consists of two rhyming quatrains, here with the rhyme scheme: ABBAABBA. The rhyme scheme of the final sestet varies from poem to poem, but here it is: CDCDCD. Nothing about this structure suggests, so far, that the poet is using the sonnet structure in original or inventive ways.

The speaker of the poem is never clearly identified, but the subject of the poem is humanity's effects on nature, and the ability of God, who is in this poem equated with nature, to refresh nature despite humanity's poor stewardship. We know that sonnets often present variations on the theme of love, and this poem is no exception; only, rather than focusing on romantic love, or *eros*, this poem focuses on *agape*, or the love of God for all of humanity. The opening quatrain begins with a declaration of the power of God as manifested in nature: "the world is *charged* with the grandeur of God" (1). The word *charge* has been italicized here because it is very revealing: God here is a potential source of energy contained in all things, waiting to be unleashed, such as when we touch a balloon that has gathered a static charge. After this declaration of the power of God in nature comes a description of humankind's effects on nature, a species who treads and smears and blears and toils and who, in general, is cut off from nature by his own doing. Within the octet, darkness gives way to dawn, and we are reminded that, despite all of humanity's efforts, there awaits a renewing force in the Earth, a "freshness deep down things" (10) that is being incubated by the Holy Ghost, with its "warm breasts, and ah! bright wings" (14).

The syntax and punctuation of this poem create variations in rhythm that deviate from the standard iambic pentameter, and as such, call attention to themselves *as* deviations. The first quatrain reveals the syntax and punctuation that makes the rhythms possible. Stressed syllables are in bold:

The **w**orld / is **ch**arged / with the **g**ran / deur of **G**od.

It will **f**lame / out, like **sh**in / ing from / **sh**ook **f**oil;

It **g**ath / ers to a **g**reat / ness, like the **o**oze / of **o**il

Crushed. / Why do **m**en / then **n**ow / not **r**eck / his **r**od?¹¹

This scansion, which comes from Rosebury, emphasizes the **sprung rhythms**, a type of poetic rhythm meant to approximate natural speech. With sprung rhythm, there are usually four stressed syllables per line, and an indeterminate number of unstressed syllables. The metric feet can range from one to four syllables (in traditional rhythms, the longest metric feet are dactyls and anapest, which have three syllables.) There is also a preponderance of spondees, as seen here with oil/crushed or shook/foil. From this 'spring' comes the name sprung rhythm. Accordingly, despite most sonnets being written in iambic pentameter, this poem exhibits a

¹¹ B. J. Rosebury, "Hopkins: A Note on Scansion," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1979): 230–35, esp. 233–35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42965288>.

different pattern. There are metric feet of iambs, “the **world is charged**” but in the same line they are mixed with anapests, “with the **grandeur of God.**” Line 2 contains a trochee, the double emphasized “**shook foil**” lending emphasis to the overall euphony of this line (“f” and “sh” sounds working together to imitate the image of shook foil—silver-foil, gold-foil, etc.). And there is at least one stressed foot made up of a single syllable: “crushed.” This emphasis reveals a menacing edge to God’s power and love: he could crush mankind, too, if he wished. The final question falls back into iambic pentameter, and if you do not know what “reck” means, now would be a good time to look it up.

For a fun experience, try reading this and other poems aloud while experimenting with different meters. You can do this alone, but it is better with friends, or in class. How does this poem change when read with sprung rhythm vs iambic pentameter? Which do you prefer? Why?

Unique word choices and syntactic variations emerge from the use of alliteration, assonance, consonance, and epistrophe, and the sounds of the poems begin to imitate the sense. We have already seen how the repetition of the *f* and *sh* sounds serves to imitate the sound of shook foil. In the second quatrain, we learn that “generations have trod, have trod, have trod” (5). An unnecessary repetition in prose, in verse this epistrophe places a thudding emphasis on every step any person has ever trod on earth. Because of humanity, “all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared” (6); the assonance of the *ea* combined with the consonance of the *-red* sound serves to elongate and drag out those words, like a verbal smearing that matches humanity’s smearing of the earth. Alliteration directs the verse through the sestet—“dearest freshness **deep down things**” (10)—and builds to the final couplet, which relies heavily on the alliteration of *b* and *w*, revealing an interesting pattern: “world broods with warm breasts and with ah! bright wings” (14). In the combination “world broods,” both words have the letter *o* within, but pronounced differently; the same is true for “warm breasts” and “bright wings.” The word choice is, as we have seen, often driven less by reason and more by sound.

There are many powerful images in this poem. Some of them are couched in similes. For example: “flame out, like shining from shook foil” (2). Not only can we hear the flaming in the *f* and *sh* sounds, we are also given a visual representation, the sun gleaming on a bright surface; the two senses taken together achieve **synesthesia**, the deliberate mixing or confusion of two or more senses within an image. We also get the “ooze of oil / Crushed” (3–4), geological pressure that is compared through simile to the greatness of God. We hear and smell humanity throughout this poem (Hopkins uses the gendered and archaic ‘man’ to refer to all of humankind), but perhaps the most lasting image is that humanity’s feet are shod: the very shoes on our feet become a powerful symbol of our separation from the natural world. The sestet also provides a pair of powerful images: “the last lights off the black West” (11) and morning, that “at the brown brink eastward, springs” (12). Finally, the poem ends on the image of the Holy Ghost, who broods over the world with a warm breast and bright wings. Could this be an implied metaphor? What sort of creature broods over its young, has wings, and is known

for their breasts? Chickens? Ducks? Is the author comparing the Holy Ghost to a chicken? Such **bathos**, or a lapse in mood from the sublime to the trivial, is not unheard of in poetry, but perhaps the Holy Ghost as mother hen might suggest too much of a turn from the gravity of this poem, a poem that holds itself in awe of the sublime of God’s grandeur. The implied metaphor is likely a dove, something we maybe could not divine from the poem, but might realize once we researched Hopkins’ religious beliefs.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was a Jesuit priest. He also wrote this poem in 1877, though it was not published until 1918. Why could he not find an audience for his poetry in his time? What changed about poetry and its reception that made audiences more accepting of the sort of sound-driven verse Hopkins wrote? Another way of asking that question is: what changed in the poetic tastes between the Victorian period and the Modern period, which is associated with the early 20th century? These questions, and many others, are the sort you might consider for a close reading or research essay.

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Spotlight on Non-English U.S. Poetry in Translation

R. Paul Cooper

Now that we’ve discussed the craft of poetry, let’s turn our attention toward the linguistic and cultural diversity of the southwestern and southeastern United States. Though we often think of the United States as a monolingual place, this has not always been the case. Especially during the 19th century, families and cultures used their languages of origin at home *and* in the community. It certainly was not simply a case of speaking their heritage language at home and English at work (though that often was the case). Where commerce and business were conducted in heritage languages, there formed large literary communities that published magazines, journals, and newspapers read and enjoyed by many. We highlight this non-English poetry of the United States in this section to showcase often overlooked chapters of U.S. literary history.

This focus will have a few effects. It will enrich your knowledge of U.S. poetry, develop your ability to analyze poems through historical and biographical context, and provide you with the

tools to start thinking about poetry in translation. Don't worry! You don't need to speak any other languages. If you do, that will certainly enrich your experience, but each translation below can be read as poetry, an artistic creation between translator and author. The translations attempt to maintain the meters and rhythms of the originals, even when the translations may not be exact, which is another way of saying that, when translating poetry, sometimes sound means more than sense. Except on such occasions where that proves to be the case, each translation below is as faithful as possible to the sense of the original.

By now you're surely asking, what languages? What cultures? Well, all three languages are endemic to Texas and the surrounding areas: French, Spanish, and Kouri-Vini. German is another language endemic to Texas, and you can find pockets of German speakers throughout the state, but German is beyond this translator's abilities, unfortunately. If you know German, and your teacher allows it, maybe you could translate some Texas German poetry for an assignment, or heck, maybe just for fun.

If we could emphasize one thing before we begin the poems, it's this. These are not *foreign* languages. They are *heritage* languages of the United States. Because of that, even if you do not speak the languages these poems are written in, the English translations will still speak to you.

Spanish

We could fill volumes with the Spanish poetry of the United States. Even today, U.S. poetry is being produced in Spanish from coast-to-coast. U.S. poets writing in languages other than English isn't some new fad. If anything, it's a return to tradition. There were once-thriving print traditions in all the former Mexican territories annexed by the U.S., print traditions built around communities of readers, writers, and publishers.¹² In fact, certain Spanish forms have also retained popularity in the U.S., including but not limited to traditional Mexican ballads, called *corridos*, and the *décima*, a ten-line form popular throughout Spain but maintained in the U.S. by the Canary Islanders of Southeast Louisiana. The contributions of Spanish-speakers to U.S. Arts and letters cannot be underestimated, even though we offer only a small glimpse of that linguistic and literary diversity.

Vicente J. Bernal (1888-1915)

The poems below originate from a 1916 volume titled *Las Primicias*, or *The First Fruits*. Bernal lived in New Mexico when it was still part of Mexico, but when the United States annexed the former parts of Mexico, he suddenly found himself a citizen of the United States. Written partly in English and partly in Spanish, *Las Primicias* offers a portrait of a man attempting to see

¹² See Raúl Coronado, *A World Not to Come: A History of Latino Writing and Print Culture*, Harvard University Press, 2013.

his home country anew, as if he were a new citizen of a new land.

“God Bless _____”¹³

Mountains and arroyos,
Canyons and pine groves,
The stars and heavens,
The deserts and seas,
Sunlight, blessed and golden,
All today say it with me,
God bless _____!

“Dios Bendiga a R _____” (1916)¹⁴

Las montañas y riachuelos
Los cañones y pinares
Las estrellas y los cielos,
Los desiertos y los mares,
Y áureo sol de luz bendita,
Todos hoy conmigo digan
Dios bendiga a R _____!

“God Bless _____” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. This poem is not written in a fixed form, but the content of the poem indicates a certain type of poem. What is the attitude of the speaker toward the subject matter? What sort of poem might take such a stance towards its subject?
2. What images are employed in this poem? Taken as a whole, what emotional or mental states does this imagery evoke? Why?
3. Consider the translator’s choice of the word *arroyo*, itself a Spanish word, but one assimilated into English vernacular. Why translate *riachuelo* as *arroyo*, and not simply the more literally accurate “little river”?
4. In the final line, the actual place name has been removed. Why do you think that is the case? When answering why, consider not just the poem, but the historical context of the poem—how would place names be erased by the U.S. acquisition of the formerly Mexican territory?
5. Consider the historical context. How is this poem also a **dirge** or lament? In what ways does it express, in addition to joy and admiration, grief and loss? Does the author observe a new country, or does he pine for the old?

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¹³ Vicente J. Bernal, ““God Bless _____,” translated by Cooper, R. Paul, in *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*, 2nd ed, edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023). Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

¹⁴ Vicente J. Bernal, “Dios Bendiga a R _____,” *Las Primicias*, Telegraph-Herald, 1916, 72.

Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

“America”¹⁵

O, nation, in you I see
The sole path to liberty,
And I give praise;
The pilgrims searched and found
Succor on your sacred ground,
All 'round with mountains crowned;
O, give it praise!

My father, with fealty
To the God of liberty,
Counted his luck.
My land all around
By your love is bound,
Be my protector, O, God,
Font of all luck!

“America” (1916)¹⁶

O patria, sólo en tí
La libertad yo ví
Y doy loor;
El peregrino halló
Consuelo que buscó
Montañas que preció;
¡O dad loor!

Mi padre, con lealtad
Al Dios de libertad,
Supo a abar; [sic]¹⁷
Mi tierra al derredor
Circunda con tu amor
Sé Dios mi protector
¡De todo azar!

“America” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. What words are repeated throughout this poem? What patterns of meaning do you find in the repeated words?
2. Why is Bernal’s glowing allusion to pilgrims an ironic statement?
3. The two stanzas above put the main characters of the poem in contrast with each other. Who are the main characters in stanza 1? Who are the main characters in stanza 2? Why has Bernal created this equivalence between the two sets of characters?

¹⁵ Vicente J. Bernal, “America,” translated by Cooper, R. Paul, in *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*, 2nd ed, edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023). Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

¹⁶ Vicente J. Bernal, *Las Primicias*, Telegraph-Herald, 1916, 72, Internet Archive, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/lasprimicias00unse/page/72/mode/2up>.

¹⁷ *Abar* is the typo; it should read, *azar*.

4. Consider the title of Bernal’s original Spanish-language poem in. In Spanish, America is written *América*. Why do you think Bernal maintained the English spelling?
5. With his original poem, Bernal was translating “My Country ‘Tis of Thee.” What elements from the original did he maintain? What elements from the original did he change? Why?

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French

Many of you probably associate French in America with Louisiana, but southeast Texas and Houston also exhibit a strong French heritage. Often portrayed as illiterate speakers of “redneck” French, the truth was quite the opposite. There existed robust literary societies in 19th century Louisiana, with outlets such as *L’Abeille de la Nouvelle Orléans* and *L’Athénée Louisianais*¹⁸. French Louisiana also boasts the first anthology of poetry by Black Americans and America’s first daily black newspaper, *Les Cenelles* in 1845 and *The New Orleans Tribune* in 1864 respectively. Though nearly all of the historical French publications from the 19th century disappeared as English supplanted French, there still exist outlets, such as *Résonance* at the University of Maine and *Feux Follets*¹⁹ at the University of Lafayette, that publish contemporary authors writing in French. While you may have never encountered Louisiana French speakers, the language is experiencing an ongoing renaissance.

Hippolyte Castra (Unknown)

Louisiana Creoles are a multi-ethnic and multi-racial group of people who share a common culture based on the Catholic liturgical year, who can trace their ancestry to Louisiana prior to its sale to the U.S. in 1803, and who share a linguistic connection to French and Kouri-Vini. Many Creoles were free people of color fostered on the ideas of the French Revolution, on liberty, fraternity, and equality, a quality evident throughout their poetry. Below you will find Hippolyte Castra’s “The Campaign of 1814–1815,” a quintessential example of the sort of

¹⁸ *The Beehive of New Orleans* and *The Louisiana Atheneum*, respectively.

¹⁹ *Resonance* and *Will o’ the Wisp*, respectively.

political poetry often produced by free Creoles of color. Hippolyte Castra was a **pen name**, and though the poem was published in 1911 by Rodolphe Desdunes, also a Creole of color, Desdunes claims it was written before 1840. In this poem you will find the story of a Creole of color who fought for the U.S. during the war of 1812 only to find himself hated afterward for the color of his skin.

“The Campaign of 1814~~1815~~²⁰”

I recall a day from my infancy,
some fine morning when my mother warned me
with a sigh: "Child, emblem of innocence,
you don't know what destiny awaits you.
Beneath these stars your country you perceive:
From that error, return, my tender son,
above all else, in your mother believe—
Here, you're nothing but an object of scorn."

Ten years later, across our vast borders,
we heard the thunder of English cannon.
"We're all born of blood Louisianan!"
With those sweet words, I kissed my mother,
followed the others, repeated their cries.
I never once felt, as a warrior,
as if I were an object to despise.

When we arrived on the field of battle,
I fought the foe, a brave volunteer:
Neither the cannon nor the musket-ball,
Neither could cause me to quiver with fear.
I fought, I fought, ever so valiantly,
borne by patriotic gallantry—
I couldn't have known that for recompense,
I'd become an object of contempt.

After we had taken victory
from combat full of terror and glory,
y'all raised shots to me, clapped my back loud,
told me I'd gone and made the infantry proud.
Me, no regrets, my heart full sincere,
Alas! Thinking y'all my friends, I took part ;
I never thought my joy would soon depart,
that I'd be merely the object of sneers.

These days, I look around with a sad sigh,
because I see some profound changes;
I'm no longer met by the gracious smiles
that shined, so often, from your faces,
not honeyed lips nor refined graces.
How'd I become your bitter enemy?

“La campagne de 1814~~1815~~” (191~~21~~)

Je me souviens qu'un jour, dans mon enfance,
Un beau matin, ma mère, en soupirant,
Me dit: « Enfant, emblème d'innocence,
« Tu ne sais pas l'avenir qui t'attend.
« Sous ce beau ciel tu crois voir ta patrie:
« De ton erreur, reviens, mon tendre fils,
« Et crois surtout en ta mère chérie...
« Ici, tu n'es qu'un objet de mépris. »

Dix ans après, sur nos vastes frontières,
On entendit le canon des Anglais,
« Nous sommes tous nés du sang Louisianais ».
A ces doux mots, en embrassant ma mère,
Je vous suivis en répétant vos cris,
Ne pensant pas, dans ma course guerrière,
Que je n'étais qu'un objet de mépris.

En arrivant sur le champ de bataille,
Je combattis comme un brave guerrier:
Ni les boulets non plus que la mitraille,
Jamais, jamais, ne purent m'effrayer.
Je me battis avec cette vaillance
Dans l'espoir seul de servir mon pays,
Ne pensant pas que pour ma récompense,
Je ne serais qu'un objet de mépris.

Après avoir remporté la victoire,
Dans ce terrible et glorieux combat,
Vous m'avez tous, dans vos coups, fait boire,
En m'appelant un valeureux soldat.
Moi, sans regret, avec un cœur sincère,
Hélas! j'ai bu, vous croyant mes amis;
Ne pensant pas, dans ma joie éphémère,
Que je n'étais qu'un objet de mépris.

Mais aujourd'hui tristement je soupire,
Car j'aperçois en vous un changement;
Je ne vois plus ce gracieux sourire
Qui se montrait, autrefois, si souvent,
Avec éclat sur vos mielleuses bouches.
Devenez-vous pour moi des ennemis?...

Ah! I see something in your feral eyes:
Me, the object of your enmity.

Ah! je le vois dans vos regards farouches:
Je ne suis plus qu'un objet de mépris.

"The Campaign of 1814-1815" Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Most of the stanzas in the poem have a set line number except for one. Identify that stanza; why did the author choose to include one less line in this stanza?
2. At the end of each stanza, the author repeats a refrain that portrays him as an 'object of scorn.' Given the historical context, why do you think the speaker chooses the word 'object'?
3. Where does the turn or shift in tone happen in this poem? Describe in your own words the shift in tone. Why does it happen at this particular point?
4. Consider the final stanza. How does scorn and hate affect those who give the scorn and hate? What words or phrases support your interpretation?
5. What does this poem teach the reader about the military sacrifices that people of color have made during war-time for the United States?

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Léona Queyrouze (1861-1938)

Léona Queyrouze was a French Creole woman who wrote under the pen name Constant Beauvais. In New Orleans she was known for hosting traditional 'salons' that were attended by literary luminaries of the time such as Alfred Mercier, Adrien Roquette (included here in the section on Kouri-Vini), and Lafcadio Hearne. Her poetry is different from many of her

²⁰ Roldolphe Desdunes, "The Campaign of 1814-1815," translated by Cooper, R. Paul, in *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*, 2nd ed, edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023). Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

²¹ Rodolphe Desdunes, *Nos Hommes et Notre Histoire*, Arbour & Dupont, 1911, Project Gutenberg, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/20554>.

contemporaries, a direct influence of her Latin, Catholic roots; while contemporaries like Kate Chopin (see [Chapter 3](#) and [Chapter 4](#)) brought Anglo-Protestant perspectives to the Creole world, Queyrouze worked from within it, here reflected in the symbolic romance of her poetry.

“Sonnet”²²

Beneath his first kiss, the waking spring moves
winter to make room for flowering blooms;
With his ruddy lips, Nature he revives,
breathes new life, stirs temperatures to rise.

In potpourri cups he distills a perfume
that bees transmute into divine liqueur;
fierce sap pours from ripe fruit on the trellis,
fruits that wake love and from pain dispel us.

Beneath your pristine brow pulsates eternal
youth, and all the tenderness of vernal days
yet hold you in the art of warm, gleaming rays.

The muse ever favors you, lover immortal;
you turn to face me, not with teary gaze,
but to hear this faithful lover’s praise.

“Sonnet” (1886)²³

Sous son premier baiser le printemps qui s'éveille
Fait du sien de l'hiver s'épanouir la fleur ;
Ranimant la Nature à sa lèvre vermeille,
Il lui rend de nouveau la vie et la chaleur.

Dans sa coupe embaumée il distille à l'abeille
un parfum qu'elle change en divine liqueur ;
Versant l'ardente sève aux doux fruits de la treille
Qui fait veiller l'amour et dormir la douleur.

Sous ton beau front blanchi l'éternelle jeunesse
Palpite, et le printemps et toute sa tendresse,
Et l'art te garde encore ses plus chaudes lueurs.

Toujours t'aime la muse, amoureuse immortelle ;
Quand s'incline ton front, ce n'est pas sous les pleurs,
Mais c'est pour écouter cette amante fidèle.

“Sonnet” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. What type of sonnet is this? How do you know?
2. This poem alludes to the ‘muse.’ What is a muse? Why is it important to this poem?
3. What season is personified here? If that season were a person, what sort of person would it be?

²² Léona Queyrouze, “Sonnet,” translated by Cooper, R. Paul, in *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*, 2nd ed, edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023). Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

²³ Léona Queyrouze, “Sonnet,” *Comptes-Rendus de L'athénée Louisianais*, 1886, 252. Google Books, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://www.google.com/books/edition/Comptes-rendus-de-l-Ath%C3%A9n%C3%A9e-louisianai/p1pIAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0>.

4. The imagery of this poem is meant to symbolize complex emotional states. Identify at least two images in their entirety; what emotional states are conveyed by these images and why?
5. Léona Queyrouze originally wrote this poem in response to another sonnet by Anatole Cousin. Write your own sonnet in response.

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“Allegory—Reflection of a Creole”²⁴

The branches of the dried-up old trunk are blasted.
No more fruits, flowers, or foliage, it’s had it.
Around the lifeless trunk grow vines that choke
its crown, one hundred lips that sap and suck
its life-source down. Then the ghost tree felt,
forming on its brow, like a living affront,
the hatch and blossom of a strange flower
that swayed in the wind, parasitic and fragile.

“Allégorie—Pensée d’un Créole” (1891²⁵)

Du vieux tronc desséché les rameaux sont détruits.
Ils n’avaient plus ni fleurs, ni frondaison, ni fruits.
Autour du flanc stérile une liane avide
Enroule ses anneaux, et par cent lèvres vide
La source de sa vie. Et déjà sur son front,
L’arbre spectre a senti, comme un vivant affront
Éclorre et resplendir une fleur étrangère
Qui se balance aux vents, parasite et légère.

“Allegory—Reflection of a Creole” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Identify an internal rhyme at work in this poem. How does the internal rhyme advance the themes or ideas of the line it is in?
2. Identify the alliterations and consonances at work in this poem. What sounds are emphasized and repeated? Why?
3. Consider the image of the tree. What complex emotions are invoked by this image? What words or phrases can you point to that support your interpretation?

²⁴ Léona Queyrouze, “Allégorie—Pensée d’un Créole,” translated by Cooper, R. Paul, in *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*, 2nd ed, edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023). Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

²⁵ Léona Queyrouze, “Allegory—Reflection of a Creole,” *L’Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, 1891, https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=nlKf13ul9_IC&dat=18910621&printsec=frontpage&hl=en.

4. The poem sports a turn, or a shift in tone. In what line does the turn happen? What is the tone before it? What is the tone after it? Why has this shift occurred?
5. This poem is an insider allegory for the decline of Creole culture after the Sale of Louisiana to America in 1803. Following the allegorical reading, what has happened to Creole culture? What would be the strange and parasitic flower that has formed on the tree? Why is it parasitic?

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Kouri-Vini

Though it is well documented that Kouri-Vini began in the mouths of enslaved peoples,²⁶ Kouri-Vini was spoken by Europeans, Africans, and Native Americans (and their multi-racial children). This language employs vocabulary primarily from French, but also from English, Wolof (and other African languages), Wyandot, Choctaw, and Quechua sources. Much of the **syntax** is drawn from English, yet the grammar employs constructions from Wolof and Choctaw. Today, there are communities of Kouri-Vini speakers from Houston, TX, to Mobile, AL, but there are also communities of speakers as widespread as Chicago, IL and Los Angeles, CA. With fewer than 15K native speakers, Kouri-Vini is considered an endangered language, and this spotlight section contributes to its protection and conservation.

Adrien Roquette, Chahta-Ima (1813-1887)

Adrien Roquette was a poet-priest who lived the last few decades of his life among the Choctaw, where he was known as Chahta-Ima, meaning "Like a Choctaw." Though French trappers, known as *coureurs de bois*, and French Jesuit priests often lived among Native Americans and adopted their way of life, they should not be romanticized; even though Roquette was accepted by the Choctaw, he was a missionary, an ideological colonizer. Despite this, the poem below provides a unique look at the rhythms and onomatopoeias of Kouri-Vini as spoken within Choctaw communities. Though those communities would have primarily

²⁶ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, LSU Press, 1992.

spoken Choctaw, Kouri-Vini served as a **lingua franca** across French Louisiana, a concept with which Native Americans were familiar, since the Native Tribes of the southeast U.S. spoke Mobilien as a lingua franca for matters of commerce.

“Singing Mockingbird” 27

Hidden in the Spanish moss,
Who is that who’s singing there?
I know it’s not the nightingale.
Listen to his voice: who is this?

Ah! The one who is singing,
The one who has himself that voice,
That everyone could listen to,
'Til starving to death in the woods.

This is a wizard of a bird!
Listen, listen to his music;
Listen; listen to him saying
To us: kiliklik, kiliklik!

Listen to the sweet sorcerer!
Listen closely to what he says;
He says to us: wawa, wawa;
He says to us: hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo.

Listen, during the quiet night,
Listen to those notes he sings us;
Listen as he sings: whip-pour-wil;
He’s calling out: kolin-foirou.

Listen as he changes his voice;
He’s singing the notes of a bird;
Notes of one who sings in the woods;
In the trees, the wind, the water.

He is master and enchanter:
Each and every one who hears him,
They stay right there; they forget all;
They would listen until they die.

See him waltzing across the sky;
He’s getting drunk on his own voice;
He doesn’t know what he’s doing,
Or anything at all; he’s mad!

“Moqueur Shanteur” (1878)⁸

Kashé dan la barb espagnol,
Ki sa ki a pé shanté là ?
Mo connin, sé pa rossignol.
Kouté so la voi: ki silà ?

Ah! silà a pé shanté,
Silà ki gagnin il la voi,
Ké tou mouné sré kapab kouté,
Juska yé mouri fin dan boi, —

Silà, sé zozo ki sorsié !
Kouté, kouté so la muzik ;
Kouté-li, kouté-li ; l'a pé
Di nou : kiliklik, kiliklik.

Kouté, kouté dou sorsié là ;
Kouté biyen sa la pé di nou ;
L'a pé di nou : wawa, wawa ;
L'a pé di nou : hibou, hibou.

Kouté pandan la nuite trankil,
Kouté ton sa l'a pé di nou ;
Kouté ; l'a pé di : whip-pour-wil ;
L'a pé pélé, kolin-foirou.

Kouté — li shangé so la voi ;
L'a pé shanté kom ton zozo ;
Kom ton sa ki shanté dan boi ;
Kom narb, kom divan, kom dolo.

Li, sé gran mèt ; li, sé sorsié :
Tou silà-ye ki tandé li,
Yé resté là ; yé tou blié ;
Yé sré kouté juska mouri !

Gar-li dan siel a pé valsé ;
So la voi a pé rane li sou ;
Li plu konnin sa l'a pé fé ;
Li plu konnin aryin ; li fou !

Ah! Snitch, ah! Singing mockingbird,
You've got a devil inside you!
You are too keen, mockingbird!
Yet sing: I will listen again!

Ah ! kokeur, ah ! mokeur shanteur
Ah ! Ah ! to gagnin giab dan kor !
To gagnin tro l'espri, mokeur !
Mé, shanté : m'a kouté ankor !

“Singing Mockingbird” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. The mockingbird is the state bird of Texas. What traits are mockingbirds known for? How are those traits reflected in the poem?
2. This poem uses onomatopoeia to convey sound imagery; however, it would take many different birds to create all the sounds in this poem. Why has the author placed such cacophony in the beak of this bird? What theme or idea is conveyed by this cacophony?
3. What words or phrases convey the danger of the mockingbird’s song? Why represent this song so dangerously?
4. Adrien Roquette lived among the Choctaw, hearing the ‘call’ to live like them. If we interpret the call of the mockingbird biographically as an extension of the call that brought Roquette to live among the Choctaw, what colonizer attitudes toward the Choctaw are expressed through this poem?
5. The first stanza references the nightingale, possibly an allusion to John Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale” (1819). Read that poem and compare the two. How are they similar? How are they different? How do these differences demonstrate two different cultural contexts for understanding birds and their songs?

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²⁷ Adrien Roquette, “Singing Mockingbird,” translated by N. A. Wendte, in *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*, 2nd ed, edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023). Used by permission of the author.

²⁸ Adrien Roquette, “Mokeur Shantuer,” *Le Meschacebé*, March 09, 1878, Library of Congress, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86079080/1878-03-09/ed-1/seq-3/>.

R. Paul Cooper (1981)

R. Paul Cooper was born outside of New Orleans, LA, where he grew up with both French and Kouri-Vini spoken in the home. Like many of his generation, he was surrounded by family, friends, and grandparents who spoke both as their first languages, yet the older generation did not pass on French to the younger generation because many of them were traumatized by schools that punished them for speaking French. This generational torment was so effective, that from the 1970s until now, the number of French speakers in Louisiana has dropped from one million to less than one hundred thousand; native Kouri-Vini speakers number even less than that. For non-native speakers who grew up with the languages, learning them is an act of cultural remembrance and linguistic rebellion. Part of the language revitalization efforts sweeping South Louisiana, the poem below comes from Édition Tintamarre's 2022 book of poetry in Kouri-Vini, titled *Févi*.

“Corona Décima”²⁹

Virus done closed up all the stores,
ancient live oaks burn in fires,
hurricanes drown all the shores,
and us too poor to make a fuss!

The whole year passed bad like that, yeah,
families lost fathers and mothers,
they lost everything that mattered, yeah,
I mean everybody's losing padnas!
Virus done closed up all the stores,
hurricanes drown all of the shores—
Wearing work pants and boots,
they hope to find a good job;
but they wear their soles out
just gallivanting about.

Hurricanes drown all the shores,
ancient live oaks burn in fires.

Kaintocks manage our affairs,
laugh at us real-real big,
treat us like chickens and pigs,
but it ain't us kills the oceans.
Ancient live oaks burn in fires,
and us too poor to make a fuss.
They want us to eat shit and die,
but we going to eat barbecue;
if you're not afraid to eat smoke,
you'll have what it takes to get by.

We rich enough to make a fuss,
even if the stores stay trussed.

“Désimm a Koronage” (2022)²⁹

Viris-la færm magazin-yé,
difé-yé brul vyé shènn vær,
tempèt-yé noyé tou-l-kot,
é nou tro pòv pou fé brouyé!

Ça té pasé mal tou-lannin,
famiy té pærd dê pær é mær,
yé té pærd tou ki té vo shær,
yé té pærd padna juska dærñin!
Viris-la færm magazin-yé,
tempèt-yé noyé tou-l-kot—
Boug-yé porté kilòt é bòt
é envi pou kouri travayé,
mé san djòb, yé va rodayé,
é mènè yêkin kom ti-kròt.

Tempèt-yé noyé tou-l-kot,
difé-yé brul vyé shènn vær.

Kéyntòk-yé mènè yê zafær,
é ri buku byin apré nou,
kòz yé jonglé nou byin sòt,
mé nou té pa chwé lamær!
Difé-yé brul vyé shènn vær,
é nou tro pòv pou fé brouyé.
Y'olé nou manjé lamèd, yé,
mé nou va manjé boukanin;
apré yé, nou kapab gañin,
si nou pa gin pær barbouyé.

No asé rish pou fé brouyé,
mé yé færmé stil, magazin-yé.

²⁹ R. Paul Cooper, “Corona Décima,” translated by R. Paul Cooper, in *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*, 2nd ed, edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023). Used by permission of the author.

“Corona Décima” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. There are some unusual word choices in this poem. What words do you find unusual? What do they mean?
2. The *décima* form also covers current events. What current events are portrayed here? What tone does the poem take toward those events?
3. The *décima* is also meant to be humorous. Can you identify the pun in stanza 2? What other elements do you find humorous? Why?
4. This poem employs the *décima* form, which repeats lines as a refrain. What lines are repeated? Taken as a whole, why are those lines repeated?
5. The final line exchanges the word poor for rich in the refrain. Based on the content of the poem, what kind of riches might make a difference in their lives if they are not ‘store-bought’, materialistic ones?

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Cooper, R. Paul. “‘Corona Décima’ Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2021. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Attribution: Cooper, R. Paul. “Spotlight on Non-English U.S. Poetry in Translation.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

³⁰ R. Paul Cooper, “Désimm a Koronage,” *Févi*, Éditions Tintimarrre, 2022, 99-100. Used by permission of the author.

Selected Reading and Study Questions

R. Paul Cooper

Claude McKay (1889-1948)

Claude McKay is an integral figure from the Harlem Renaissance. Born in Jamaica, his work is heavily influenced by the racism he experienced in places like Kingston and New York. This poem directly addresses the theme of racial strife and injustice in the form of a classic Petrarchan sonnet.

“If We Must Die” (1919)¹

IF we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

Oh, kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us still be brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back!

³¹ Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” *The Liberator* 2, no. 7 (July 1919): 21, <http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/djh9w2j2>.

“If We Must Die” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. What type of sonnet is this? How do you know this? If a sonnet is usually about love, what sort of love is at work in this poem?
2. Paraphrase this poem in the form of an if/then statement. Do you find the argument compelling? Why or why not?
3. How does the use of caesura change the meter and affect the meaning within this poem?
4. What auditory images can be found in this poem? How do they enhance the overall meaning?
5. Analyze the adjectives in this poem. What do the connotations and denotations of those adjectives reveal about the persons, places, or things that they modify?

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Cooper, R. Paul. “If We Must Die’ Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Archibald MacLeish (1892-1982)

Archibald MacLeish was born in Illinois in the early 20th century, served during World War I, and was the 9th Librarian of Congress. A leading figure of literary Modernism, he won three Pulitzer Prizes for his poetry. The poem “Ars Poetica” exhibits the Modernist aesthetic in content and form; in fact, the poem is a defense, or apologia, for the kind of poetry valued by the Modernists of the early 20th century.

“Ars Poetica” (1926)

Link to text: “[Ars Poetica](#)”

MacLeish, Archibald. “Ars Poetica.” In *Collected Poems 1917-1952*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1952. Poetry Foundation.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/17168/ars-poetica>.

“Ars Poetica” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Analyze the rhyme scheme of this poem. What near rhymes can you find? How does the author use consonance to create instances of near rhyme?
2. What is the traditional rhythm of the heroic couplet? Are these couplets traditional? How and why does the author use punctuation and white space to create unique rhythms?
3. Find and analyze at least three separate instances of alliteration and assonance in this poem. How do the sounds enhance the meanings?
4. How many similes can you find in this poem?
5. The author often places an abstraction on one line in a couplet, then a concrete image on the other line. Find one stanza that exhibits this parallel structure and analyze it. Why does the author pair the abstraction with that particular image?

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Cooper, R. Paul. “‘Ars Poetica’ Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)

Sylvia Plath is a New England poet famous for her **confessional poetry**, lyric and personal poetry rooted in revealing and discussing intimate details of the poet’s life. Someone who fought with depression her entire life, she died by suicide in 1963. Her poems were published posthumously, and she was the fourth person to receive a posthumous Pulitzer Prize. The poem “Daddy” exemplifies the sort of confessional poetry for which she was known, and in it she links personal trauma to generational and political trauma.

“Daddy” (1965)

Link to text: [“Daddy”](#)

Plath, Sylvia. “Daddy.” In *The Collected Poems*. HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1992. Poetry Foundation. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48999/daddy-56d22aafa45b2>.

“Daddy” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Because Plath writes confessional poetry, we might be quick to conflate speaker and poet. If you assume Plath is NOT the speaker, how does that change your interpretation of the poem?
2. How and why does the speaker connect their experiences with their father to the experiences of the Jewish people during the Holocaust?
3. How and where does this poem use epistrophe and anaphora? How do these devices affect the rhythm of the poem?
4. What is the rhyme scheme of this poem? If no specific pattern can be derived, what general patterns can you discern?
5. To what monsters or other figures does the speaker compare her father? Why?

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Cooper, R. Paul. “‘Daddy’ Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973)

Pablo Neruda is a Chilean poet who was very famous in his lifetime. He remains perhaps the most well known Spanish-language poet of the Americas. As poet-diplomat, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. Naturally, the poem you have before you is a translation from the Spanish. Do not let the impersonal title “A Dog Has Died” fool you; the speaker is eulogizing a friend.

“A Dog Has Died” (1974)

Link to text: [“A Dog Has Died”](#)

Neruda, Pablo. Translated by Alfred Yankauer. “A Dog Has Died.” *Poetry* (February 1999): 2. Poetry Foundation. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/40470/a-dog-has-died>.

“A Dog has Died” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. This poem is an elegy. How would you describe the poet’s attitude towards his dog, in your own words? Have you had a dog or another pet? How are your feelings toward your pet similar to Neruda’s feelings? How are they different?
2. What part of speech is the word “ai”? What function does that word play in the poem?
3. What is ironic about an atheist who believes in doggy heaven? Can you find any other instances of irony?
4. How and why does the speaker understate the importance of his dog?
5. Describe in your own words, using concrete imagery, the speaker’s visit to Isla Negra with his dog. What other powerful images can you find?

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Cooper, R. Paul. “A Dog has Died’ Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Ai (1947-2010)

Ai Ogawa, born Florence Anthony, is a mixed race American poet who described herself as part Japanese, part Choctaw-Chickasaw, part Black, and part Irish. She won the National Book Award for poetry in 1999, and is considered a modern master of the dramatic monologue. She did not shy away from dark or controversial topics, and her poem “Interview with a Policeman,” written in the 1980s, takes on issues of race and justice in a way that foretells contemporary racial politics surrounding policing.

“Interview with a Policeman” (1987)

Link to text: “[Interview with a Policeman](#)”

Ai. “Interview with a Policeman.” *Poetry* (October/November 1987). Poetry Foundation. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/issue/71214/october-november-1987>.

“Interview with a Policeman” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Who is the speaker of this poem, who is being interviewed? What ways of speaking are peculiar to him or people in his job? What role does the interviewer play in the poem?
2. What word choices or phrases inspire the reader to dislike or even hate the speaker? What word choice or phrases inspire the reader to sympathize with the speaker? Do you overall feel fury toward or sympathy with the interviewed speaker? What words or phrases in the poem cause you to feel this way?
3. How would you describe the rhythms of this poem? Do people usually talk this way? Where and why might someone speak in these rhythms?
4. This poem employs powerful and disturbing images. Find at least two and analyze them. Are they primarily visual? What other senses are involved? Are any images repeated, and if so, how and why?
5. This poem employs a great deal of figurative language. What non-literal uses of language can you find at work in this poem? What figures of speech are being used? How do these non-literal uses of language shape our understanding of the subjects and themes of the poem?

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Cooper, R. Paul. “‘Interview with a Policeman’ Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Adrian C. Louis (1946-2018)

Adrian C. Louis hailed from the Lovelock Paiute tribe of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. He is known for chronicling reservation life, unflinching in his realism. This realism stemmed from his training as a journalist; he was also a co-founder of the Native American Journalists Association. “I Flew Into Denver April” provides a stark and honest view of life in Denver for an out-of-town Native American in the form of a non-traditional sonnet.

“I Flew Into Denver April” (1989)

Link to text: [“I Flew Into Denver April”](#)

Louis, Adrian C. "I Flew Into Denver April." In *Fire Water World*. West End Press, 1989. Poetry Foundation. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56144/i-flew-into-denver-april>.

"I Flew Into Denver April" Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Setting is integral to this poem. What is Denver like in April? What images and word choices convey this setting?
2. The poet wrote a 14-line poem. Therefore, this poem is in conversation with the sonnet form. How is it similar to a conventional sonnet? How does it differ?
3. What unique rhymes and rhythms define this poem? How do those rhythms enhance the meaning of the poem?
4. This poem alludes to the Winnebago tribe. What can you learn about their history?

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Cooper, R. Paul. "I Flew Into Denver April' Questions and Activities for Further Analysis." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Natasha Trethewey (1966-)

Natasha Trethewey is a biracial poet from the U.S. South. She has published five books of poetry, and has been the recipient of many awards. Most notably, she served as Poet Laureate of the State of Mississippi (2012–2016) and the 19th Poet Laureate of the United States (2012–2014). "White Lies" is a poem set in the South, where color defines the landscape. Of course, the lies that our biracial speaker can tell, well, they are more than just little white lies.

"White Lies" (2000)

Link to text: "[White Lies](#)"

Trethewey, Natasha. "White Lies." In *Indivisible: Poems for Social Justice*. Norwood House Press, 2013. Poetry Foundation. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/58265/white-lies>.

“White Lies” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. When and where is this poem set? For aid, analyze the allusion to “Maison Blanche.”
2. Other than the speaker, what other voices do we hear in this poem? Compare and contrast those two voices.
3. Color imagery is an integral element of this poem. Analyze the colors, and be sure to look up any color terms you may not know, such as “light-bright” or “high-yellow.”
4. What is the racial phenomenon known as *passing*? How is passing thematized in this poem?
5. Describe the attitude of the speaker toward her “white lies” as her mama washes her mouth out with soap in the final stanza of the poem. What nuance and subtlety complicates her feelings?

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Cooper, R. Paul. “White Lies’ Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Yusef Komunyakaa (1947)

Yusef Komunyakaa was born James Williams Brown in the small town of Bogalusa, LA. He changed his name to Komunyakaa because that was his grandfather’s African name before his grandfather stowed away on a ship from Trinidad to America. A Vietnam War veteran, Komunyakaa’s experiences during the war became an integral part of his poetry. The poem “Facing It” chronicles the first time he visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, where he finds himself overwhelmed by memories of his brothers-in-arms.

“Facing It” (2001)

Link to text: [“Facing It”](#)

Komunyakaa, Yusef. “Facing It.” In *Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems*. Wesleyan University Press, 2001. Poetry Foundation.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47867/facing-it>.

“Facing It” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. The speaker of this poem tells a story, or narrative, with a beginning, middle, and end. What line would you argue is the climax of this story? Why?
2. What is unique about the punctuation of this poem? How does the punctuation affect the rhythm and flow of the speaker’s voice? What might the author be trying to imitate through this use of punctuation?
3. Analyze the color imagery at work in the poem. What themes become apparent through the colors of the poem?
4. Find at least one metaphor and one simile at work in the poem and analyze them. How do they enhance or complicate the overall themes of the poem?

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Cooper, R. Paul. “Facing It’ Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Harryette Mullen (1953–)

Harryette Mullen is a professor of English at UCLA. She has published many works of poetry, all of them a mix of linguistic experimentation, politics, and the blues. “We Are Not Responsible” engages in word play to call attention to racial profiling and immigration through a speaker that is both comical and chilling in their absurd commitment to dehumanizing the Other.

“We Are Not Responsible” (2002)

Link to text: “[We Are Not Responsible](#)”

Mullen, Harryette. “We Are Not Responsible.” In *Sleeping with the Dictionary*. University of California Press, 2002. Poetry Foundation.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/145281/we-are-not-responsible>.

“We Are Not Responsible” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. How would you describe the speaker of this poem? Where and under what circumstances might someone utter phrases of this variety? Who is the “we” the speaker represents?
2. Where do the word choices of the speaker seem absurd or comical? How does the absurdity of the speaker’s words amplify the political themes of the poem?
3. Analyze the passive voice and active voice in this poem. How is passive voice used by the speaker to evade responsibility?
4. What institutions does this poem critique? Following closely the text of the poem, who do those institutions serve and why?

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Cooper, R. Paul. “‘We Are Not Responsible’ Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

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Sample Analysis of a Poem

R. Paul Cooper

How to Read this Section

This section contains two parts. First, you will find the prompt. The prompt is a very important element in any writing assignment. Don’t be fooled by the fact it is short! Even though it is a short document, it highlights and makes clear every element you will need to complete the given assignment effectively. When writing an essay, the prompt is where you will both begin and end. Seriously. Before you begin, familiarize yourself with the prompt, and before you

submit your final draft, give the prompt one final read over, making sure you have not left anything out. *When* you visit the University Writing Center and Libraries, they can better help if you bring along the prompt. Both the [Writing Center](#)³² and the [Libraries](#)³³ provide indispensable tools to aid students, so take advantage of their services.

The second part of this section contains a simulated student essay—the essay is not an actual student essay, but an essay written to demonstrate a strong student essay. The essay in this section is not meant to represent a “perfect” essay; it has its faults. However, this essay is an effective response to the given prompt. The “student” essay will be represented in a wide column on the left, and the grader’s commentary will be represented in a smaller column on the right. Use the example and the comments to help you think about how you might organize your own essay, to think about whether you will make similar—or different—choices.

Sample Prompt

Assignment Description: This essay is a thesis-driven close reading that employs research to add historical, cultural, biographical, or other contextual information. A good thesis is not only original and compelling, but also specific, grounded in fact, and, above all, argumentative. The thesis should also offer the reader a sense of the organization of the essay. As a close reading, this essay will pay more attention to the text itself, effectively skirting any direct scholarship about the given poem in favor of an analysis that focuses on the *form* and *content* of a particular poem.

Content: Regarding content, the essay must not stray from the text (so no personal reflections, no political commentary, etc.) Regarding form, the essay should demonstrate a working knowledge of the craft elements of poetry—figurative language, word choice, punctuation, meter, etc. These specific terms can be found in the current version of the OER.

Research Expectations: For research, use less than 3 sources, including the primary source. Secondary sources should be scholarly. We do not expect you to enter into the scholarly conversation around the poem, a facet that will be addressed in later chapters of the OER. For now, it is enough to build up the necessary context, historical or otherwise, to understand the chosen poem. In short, I want to read YOUR well-developed, insightful, and articulate analysis, not someone else's.

Format: All research should be cited using the current MLA format. The essay as a whole should be formatted in MLA style, and

³² University Writing Center, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/>.

³³ Texas A&M University Libraries, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://library.tamu.edu/>.

Scope/Page Count: Should be in the range of 900–1200 words (3–4 pages). A Works Cited page is required.

| Student Essay | Instructor Annotations |
|---|--|
| <p>Korku Mensah</p> <p>Professor Cooper</p> <p>ENGL 203</p> <p>2 July 2021</p> <p>“One Deathblow”: Claude McKay on Resisting Oppression</p> | |
| <p>Claude McKay’s 1919 poem “If We Must Die” is a conventional Shakespearean sonnet that dwells on the themes of resistance, dignity, and violence. It is an incendiary call for the oppressed to resist oppression even if that means dying for such a cause. The poem does not speak overtly to any specific group of people but rather addresses all who are being or are susceptible to oppression of any kind. Admittedly, McKay’s personal experience with racial segregation as a black Jamaican in America in the early 1900s inspired this poem. Specifically, during the Red Summer in 1919 which saw anti-Black racist violence against black people across communities in the United States, especially in the South. McKay’s poem highlights a notable component of the Red Summer; when some black folks fought back in the spirit of resistance and honor. While the inspiration of this poem is central to the Harlem Renaissance, this essay reflects on the</p> | <p>Can you find the sentence fragment in this introduction? How would you fix it?</p> <p>This introduction begins well, starting with a general statement about the poem before moving into more specific information.</p> |

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| <p>lived experiences of Blacks in the diaspora and how the call for the spirit of resistance in McKay’s early 1900 poem resurfaced as an ostensible inspiration in the 1950s, with key figures like James Baldwin and Franz Fanon in mind as they were confronted with racist oppressions in America and France respectively. The targeting of a universal audience of this poem explains its resurgence as an applicable inspiration in the works and experiences of oppressed people across the globe, especially people of African descent.</p> | <p>Much of the content of this paragraph highlights the historical reception of the poem, rather than the features of the poem itself. Such historical context is valuable, but it should not overshadow the close reading of the poetic elements. The thesis statement on which this paragraph ends makes a clear claim about the universality of McKay’s words; however, the thesis does not indicate which poetic aspects of the text work to create this universal appeal. A slight shift away from historical reception to close reading of poetic form would improve this thesis statement.</p> |
| <p>The poem is essentially about how the oppressed should respond to oppression. McKay was a member of the oppressed group during the Red Summer and was personally affected by racial discrimination and increasing threats of lynching which led many African Americans to migrate from the South to the North of America during the Great Migration. More significantly, the poem is a call for McKay’s fellow oppressed people to courageously confront oppression rather than succumb to it. The poem registers McKay’s inclusion by the use of the pronouns “we”, “our”, and “us” in referring to the oppressed. The target audience of the poem are people who are not merely under oppression but are oppressed in ways that undermine their dignity as humans, literally pushed to the wall, being crushed,</p> | <p>The topic sentence here is very clear, but it is unclear what poetic devices will be examined in this paragraph. A paraphrase of the poem should be unnecessary after the introduction.</p> <p>Focusing on speaker and word choice is necessary to any close reading, but the lines in question could be quoted and analyzed more closely.</p> |

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| <p>apparently robbed of their freedom, and hope dwindled. In this unfortunate circumstance, McKay admonishes that in the face of probable or inevitable death it is better to go down with a fight for what it is worth—dignity. This radical resistance approach is perhaps the assertion of the oppressed that their humanity must be put above their social identity. For example, in the experiences of Baldwin in the 1950s, he learned that “to be a Negro meant, precisely, that one was never looked at but was simply at the mercy of the reflexes the color of one’s skin caused in other people” (90). This echoes McKay’s inferable central point that the humanity of the oppressed is at stake in situations of oppression as was prevalent during the era of racial segregation in America.</p> | <p>The references to Baldwin add excellent context, but they begin to move this essay away from the poem itself, its words, and its historical period.</p> |
| <p>In the first quatrain of the poem, McKay acknowledges that in such a denigrating and hopeless situation—“an inglorious sport”, their lives as the oppressed group are certainly in danger, but if they must die it must not be as though they are some hounded animals or creatures whose lives don’t matter – “like hogs” (lines 1-2). In this situation, there is something other than life that is at stake; the dignity and humanity of the oppressed. As perhaps the poem’s argument, violent resistance is the most effective way to preserve the dignity, and affirm the humanity of the oppressed even if they die doing so. Furthermore, McKay points out that it is not only the oppressed</p> | <p>Here the author begins to focus more closely on the poem, organizing the remaining paragraphs by stanza; while this works fine for an organizational logic, a conceptual organization could serve better. However, the line-by-line organization is perfectly functional. This entire</p> |

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| <p>whose humanity is at stake; equally threatened, denigrated even, is the humanity of the oppressor. In that regard, McKay metaphorically refers to the oppressors as “mad and hungry dogs” who will stop at nothing to completely crush the oppressed and reduce them to nothing as though that were their fate – their “accurséd lot” (3, 4).</p> | <p>quatrain is an extended metaphor, which the author recognizes implicitly but not explicitly. Why make the hunting of black people like hogs into an <i>extended</i> metaphor?</p> |
| <p>In the second quatrain, McKay establishes the value of the oppressed people and echoes their need to violently resist oppression in defense of their honor, dignity, and humanity. Still acknowledging the apparent inevitability of their destruction, McKay is more concerned about <i>how</i> the oppressed die. His fervent call to his fellow oppressed people to die “nobly” if they must, means not dying as petrified cowards (5); defying the objective of the oppressor to reduce them to the status of dispirited souls, thus stripping them of their humanity. The point of course is already made that in oppression both the oppressed and the oppressor are dehumanized. McKay is emphatic in his reference to the oppressors as “monsters” (7). The question here is, would the oppressed rather die like hapless “hogs” shedding “in vain” their “precious blood” or like men and women of valor who defy the fear of the imminent death that sneers at them to fight for their honor (6,7)? Covertly, McKay is asking his fellow oppressed people what they</p> | <p>This paragraph excellently analyzes the word choices of this quatrain; could a consideration of meter or rhyme enhance this discussion?</p> |

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| <p>would want to be remembered for; because their choices will go a long way to define them and those who will come after them.</p> | |
| <p>In the third quatrain, McKay stresses the universality of the poem by his choice of words like “kinsmen” in reference to his fellow oppressed people everywhere, and “common foe” in allusion to oppressors of all kinds (9). Again, McKay re-emphasizes the need to vehemently fight back at oppression – the spirit of resistance. The stark truth is, to defiantly fight back, or to succumb are the only alternatives available to the oppressed while the choice of whether the oppressed live or die is utterly up to the oppressor. However, the oppressed could decide <i>how</i> they die. It is important to understand that the concept of death varies across cultures. In the context of this poem, to die a death of valor is to die with honor and dignity; an opportunity to exhibit and entrench one’s freedom from oppression, even in death. Furthermore, McKay’s choice of words such as “far outnumbered” suggests that the oppressed group belongs to the minority in society as tends to be the case with being Black in an anti-Black racist white supremacy society (10). In a do-or-die situation as the oppressed may be in, McKay emphatically suggests that violent resistance becomes the only way for the oppressed to safeguard their humanity and dignity. For example, like Fanon, in his experiences with racist oppression in the 1950s, says “if the white man challenges my humanity, I will impose my whole</p> | <p>An absent comma has created a misplaced modifier. Can you find it?</p> <p>This paragraph does an excellent job of closely analyzing McKay’s</p> |

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| <p>weight as a man on his life and show him that I am not that ‘sho’ good eatin’ that he persists in imagining” (178). Likewise, McKay suggests that in response to the oppressor’s constant dehumanization and denigration—their “thousand blows”, all the oppressed need to do is to perform a violent resistance—“one death blow” (11). Even though this violent resistance means an automatic death row, it is worth it because, in whatever case, before the oppressed “lies the open grave”—destruction (12).</p> | <p>language. Despite being far removed from the content and context of the poem, the reference to Fanon here works because it supports and echoes the language used by McKay: “sho’ good eatin” reminds us that the oppressed are hunted “like hogs” in McKay’s poem. What other poetic features can be found in this quatrain?</p> |
| <p>In the concluding two lines of the sonnet, McKay intimates that since it appears that the humanity of the oppressed is subject to the acknowledgment of the oppressor, violent resistance is the only way the oppressed can daringly uphold their humanity; thus compelling the oppressor to acknowledge their humanity. McKay marshals the strength of the oppressed “like men” to brave out the real cowards—the oppressor, and gives the final call for the oppressed to fight valiantly. Pertinently when McKay says “if we must die,” he acknowledges the power of the oppressor—perhaps because the oppressor is the majority and has the arsenal to oppress (13). So, to resist the oppression may require the ultimate sacrifice—death.</p> | <p>A conclusion ought to begin with a re-statement of the thesis, not with the introduction of more material to be analyzed.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Works Cited</p> <p>Baldwin, James. <i>Notes of a Native Son</i>. Boston, Beacon, 2012, p. 90.</p> <p>Fanon, Frantz. <i>Black Skin, White Masks</i>. London, Pluto Press, 2008, p.</p> | <p>Overall, this is an effective close reading of McKay’s sonnet that provides a strong, emphatic claim. The author has paid careful attention to the connotations and</p> |

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| <p>178.</p> <p>McKay, Claude. "If We Must Die." <i>The Liberator</i> 2, no. 7 (July 1919):</p> <p>21. http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/djh9w2j2.</p> | <p>denotations of words, and has, for the most part, avoided extraneous materials that might detract from the content of the poem itself. The argument carries with it, like the poem itself, a weight of righteous force. However, the organization and use of poetic terms could be improved here. This essay is organized in mixed fashion: it begins conceptually before settling on a stanza-by-stanza organization. The author might consider organizing around the technical and poetic terms, or around concepts and themes.</p> |
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Short Story

Introduction

Travis Rozier

The modern short story form is a fairly recent invention, only dating back to the late eighteenth century. The development of the short story coincided with the rise of the prose novel as the dominant form in the literary market and the rise of the magazine, in which stories were often published. Like the novel, the short story uses prose writing to relate a series of events. However, unlike the novel, the short story works within a confined space, usually not exceeding thirty pages and often using fewer. Although this may seem like an arbitrary difference, the space constraint defines the form and explains what makes a short story great. Without hundreds of pages to unwind the plot of the story, develop characters, and thread in themes, the short story must hold all these elements in balance in a confined space. Truly excellent short-story writers—such as Edgar Allan Poe, Katherine Mansfield, or Sarah Orne Jewett—will arrange those elements well, emphasizing the most important parts of the particular story (and these can vary from story to story) and arranging the other elements artfully around them, striking a perfect balance and delivering a meaningful and impactful story ripe for interpretation.

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Precursors

Travis Rozier

While the short story is relatively young, people have always told each other stories. Looking at some of the precursors to the short story form can tell us a lot about how the form developed and how we should read short stories, and it can also show us some common mistakes regarding interpretation.

One of the most well-known, early short forms of fiction is the **fable**, such as those written by the Greek fabulist Aesop. These very short stories often involve anthropomorphic animals (animals that act like humans) and are meant to convey lessons about human nature and our

place in the world. For example, “The Scorpion and the Frog,” in which the scorpion stings the frog while riding on his back across the water, dooming them both, teaches the reader that some people cannot act outside their nature, even when that proves self-destructive.

Parables, like those found in the Bible, are similar to fables in their purpose, though they do not usually include talking animals. Like fables, parables are **didactic**, meaning their primary purpose is to teach us a lesson. “The Parable of the Good Samaritan,” for example, is meant to teach us the value of showing kindness to strangers.

Other forms of stories are less didactic or even completely **non-didactic**, meaning they are primarily meant for entertainment rather than to teach a lesson. The **tale**, for example, is a story meant to entertain the reader by inspiring wonder, amazement, or even fear. There are different kinds of tales with different characteristics. The **fairy tale**, like those written by Hans Christian Andersen or the Brothers Grimm, may include lessons for children, but they are mostly meant to be entertaining. What does one really learn from “Jack and the Beanstalk”? **Tall tales**, such as those about Paul Bunyon, make no pretense to being instructive, and are instead only meant to inspire wonder. A simple **ghost tale** is meant to scare you, not provide you with truth (though a well-crafted ghost tale may do just that). The **sketch**, another precursor to the short story, offers a brief description of a place, a person, or some aspect of a culture. Sketches are very brief and emphasize description over plot. Associated with travel writing, the sketch was often used to inform its audience about a place they have never been, such as a far away exotic land or even a renowned tea room.

By reviewing these precursors, we can see what the short story form has drawn from them. As we do when reading the fable or the parable, we expect to get some meaning out of a short story and perhaps learn something about people and the world. As we read tales for entertainment, we also expect to be entertained by short stories. Depending on the type of story, we may even expect to experience a reaction such as wonder or fear. We may also read because we want to learn more about a certain place or culture, much like the reader of the sketch. Short stories are certainly capable of doing all of these things.

However, following any of these models too closely will lead you to miss something about the short story. Some may approach short fiction with the attitude that stories are merely meant for entertainment and that they shouldn’t be taken too seriously. This attitude will obviously lead you to miss out on the possible meanings that can be produced through the act of interpreting the short story.

A much more common mistake is to assume that a short story should have one clear meaning or lesson and that conveying that meaning clearly is the story’s sole purpose. Students often struggle with the literary short story because they approach it the way they would a parable or a fable, looking for the moral of the story, and when they reach the end and have no clear sense of the lesson they believe they were meant to learn, they may feel they have failed to understand the story. Fables and parables are written so that the moral of the story is easily

recognizable, but meaning in the literary short story is often far more ambiguous, and finding it can be a more complex and deliberative process. It requires interpretation rather than simple recognition, and interpretation is work. Also, and perhaps most importantly, it is erroneous to talk about *the meaning* (singular) of a short story because a well-crafted story should offer multiple avenues of interpretation that can produce a multiplicity of possible meanings.

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Key Components of Short Stories

Travis Rozier

The following sections introduce the most important elements of the short story. These elements should not be viewed as completely separate but as interdependent threads woven together to create the fabric of the story.

Plot

If you were to describe a story you read to a friend, you would likely begin by recounting what happened in the story or the series of events the story relates. When we discuss the events that happen over the course of a story, we are discussing **plot**. Rather than just a list of chronological events, however, short story plots tend to follow certain patterns that lead to satisfying and engaging stories.

First, short story plots tend to center around a central **conflict**. A story without conflict would be boring and pointless. Also, while a novel may include many conflicts that are raised and resolved over the course of the plot, due to the limited space, short stories most often focus on one conflict. Conflict can take several forms, though it most often occurs between the protagonist (central character) and something else. Some plots involve a **person vs. person** conflict in which the protagonist has some strife with another character. The story may involve a man attempting to survive in the wilderness, following the **person vs. nature** model. Rather than the natural world, the forces the protagonist finds themselves up against may be societal forces. The protagonist in the **person vs. society** style conflict may struggle with

poverty, sexism, racism, or some other societal problem. However, it is also possible that the strife experienced by the protagonist is an **internal conflict**, in which they struggle to make some decision, take some action, or simply come to a clear understanding of their world and their place in it. As an example of a story exhibiting person vs. person-style conflict, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) presents Montresor as he matches wits with Fortunato, leading him to his doom. In contrast, in Kate Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" (1893), while Désirée struggles with her husband Armand, the real conflict in the story is generated by the dictates of a racist antebellum southern society, thus providing a person vs. society-style conflict.

The development of the plot of the short story tends to follow set patterns as well. Most of the story involves establishing the conflict and building tension toward its inevitable resolution. We call this phase of the plot **rising action**. This leads to the moment in the story called the **climax**, in which the tension behind the conflict reaches its highest point, often prompting some action, choice, or realization by the characters. The climax is sometimes followed by a phase of **falling action**, in which the tension settles after the climax. The short story then typically ends with some description of the **resolution**, showing the reader where things stand in the aftermath of the conflict. Lastly, a story may include a **denouement** (which is French for "unravelling"), which is an ending that winds down the story after the resolution. A denouement may wrap up loose ends left behind after the resolution or even raise questions about the future of the characters. Using Poe's story again as an example, we can see the development of Montresor's plan and the walk with Fortunato through the catacombs as the rising action of the story that leads up to the climax when Montresor executes his plan and walls up Fortunato. Montresor's hesitation to finish the wall can be seen as falling action, and the resolution occurs as he puts the last brick in place. Montresor's brief statement that Fortunato has remained undisturbed for fifty years acts as the denouement, letting the reader know that Montresor got away with his crime.

While the climax of Poe's story pays off the rising action in a logical and satisfying manner, we sometimes read stories that have **anticlimactic** resolutions. Take James Joyce's "Araby" (1914) as an example: the rising action involves the narrator's anticipation of going to the bazaar to buy something for Mangan's sister. Once he finally gets to the bazaar, however, he finds that it is not the exotic market he imagined but feels cheap and common. This realization coincides with his overhearing a young woman flirt with some customers, an event that seems to cheapen his feelings toward Mangan's sister. The climax of this story is a good example of an author using the **form** of the story, its arrangement of elements, to mirror the **content**, or the possible meanings it produces. Just as the narrator feels disappointed and disillusioned by his experience at the bazaar, the reader feels similar frustrations from the anticlimactic nature of the resolution.

Point of View

Just as important as what actually happens in a story is the **point of view** through which the reader perceives the events. Or, put another way, it is important to understand the type of **narrator**, or person telling the story, that the author uses. While a novel may switch narrative perspective from chapter to chapter, short stories most often adhere to one narrator throughout the story.

One common type of narrator is the **first-person narrator**, who recounts the events from their own point of view, using the word “I.” A first-person narrator is most often the protagonist of the story and recounts events that happened to them, making them a **participant narrator**. An obvious example of a first-person narrator is Poe’s Montresor, who recounts events from his life to an unknown audience.

Another, although seldom used, narrative technique is **second-person narration**, in which the narrator describes the actions of someone they address as “you,” pulling the reader in as a character in the story.

A story may also use third-person narration, in which a narrator tells the story from outside the events, referring to the characters by name or as “she,” “he,” or “them.” There are different types of third-person narration. Third-person narrators are usually **non-participant narrators**, meaning they do not take an active role in any of the events and never refer back to themselves as “I.” Many stories are told by a **third-person omniscient narrator**. We refer to a narrator as omniscient, or all-knowing, when they take a godlike role in telling the story. They have access to all information, including each character’s thoughts and emotions. “*Désirée’s Baby*” is a good example of third-person omniscient narration. While most of the story focuses on Désirée, once she disappears from the story, our perspective shifts to Armand, and we learn important information that Désirée will never know.

A **limited narrator**, though they tell the story from the outside third-person perspective and have access to information the protagonist may not, focuses on one character’s perspective. Katherine Mansfield’s “*Miss Brill*” (1920) is told by a limited narrator. While it is told in the third person, the reader’s perspective is limited to that of Miss Brill. The story focuses on Miss Brill’s perceptions of self and especially her opinions of the people she sees on her Sunday afternoon out. Limiting our perspective to Miss Brill heightens the effect of the climax when she overhears a young couple talking about her.

A more modern narrative technique is the use of **free indirect discourse**, which refers to the subtle shifting within a story back and forth from third person omniscient to first person narration. The technique allows the reader to get the perspective of omniscient narration while also being privy to a character’s inner thoughts and feelings. “*Miss Brill*” also offers a good example of free indirect discourse. When describing the afternoon, the narrator states,

There were a number of people out this afternoon, far more than last Sunday. And the band sounded louder and gayer. That was because the Season had begun. For although the band played all the year round on Sundays, out of season it was never the same. It was like some one playing with only the family to listen; it didn't care how it played if there weren't any strangers present. Wasn't the conductor wearing a new coat, too?¹

Although the narrator does not explicitly assign these ideas to Miss Brill, the reader understands that these are her thoughts. She is the one who places so much importance on “the Season.”

Beyond these different types of narrative perspective, there are other considerations when thinking about narration. A reader should never simply assume that a narrator's version of events is accurate or trustworthy. For example, if a story has a first-person narrator, a reader should always consider who this person is and how that should color the reader's perception of their account. You may have an **unreliable narrator**, or a narrator whose version of events can't be trusted. Poe's Montresor could be considered an unreliable narrator. While we don't get the impression that he is lying about the events, he is also clearly a sociopath. His instability raises important questions about his narrative account, such as whether Fortunato ever actually insulted him or if he feels any remorse for his actions. If a child is telling a story, you might consider them a **naïve narrator**. Children see things through their innocence and may fail to understand matters that an adult reader may comprehend.

However, this does not mean that only first-person narrators should be questioned. While many third-person narrators remain completely **objective**, merely telling the story, authors will sometimes use a narrator who **editorializes**, or comments and offers judgment on the actions of the characters. An author may invent a **narrative persona**, having a narrator with their own personality, opinions, and judgements, even though they do not take part in the story.

Character

Other major elements of the short story are character and character development. Characters are the people (usually, anyway) involved in the events of a story.

Protagonist, a term that I have used several times already in this introduction, refers to the central character of a story. Most stories focus on one character, though there may be many characters involved in the story. The **antagonist**, on the other hand, is the character we find opposed to the protagonist. The antagonist is the source of conflict and is often used as a **foil** to the protagonist, highlighting their characteristics by displaying opposite traits. We often

¹ Katherine Mansfield, “Miss Brill,” in *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (1922; Project Gutenberg, August 20, 2008), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1429/1429-h/1429-h.htm#chap09>.

refer to the protagonist as the hero of the story, though we should be careful doing that. A **hero** refers to a character who displays admirable attributes such as strength, bravery, and moral rectitude. A **villain**, on the other hand, opposes the hero and acts as his foil by displaying opposite traits. It is easy to assume that the protagonist will be a hero and the antagonist will be a villain, but that is often not the case. Poe's Montresor, while he is the protagonist of the story, is no hero. He is much closer to a villain in his character, though he does not act as a foil for a hero. Fortunato is no villain, though he does act as a foil for Montresor, accentuating his cunning through his own gullibility and ineptitude. We may consider Montresor an **antihero**, or a protagonist who lacks traditional heroic qualities and may even have serious character flaws.

Heroes and villains tend to be **flat** characters, meaning they are under-developed characters who largely represent one dominant character trait, such as a hero who represents honesty and a villain who represents deceit. Most short stories include **round** characters, or complex characters who have a variety of personality traits, some of which may even conflict. A round character, for example, may succumb to greed or envy and steal something at one point in the story only to suffer guilt about the theft later. They may take a brave action only to subsequently feel fearful. In Hurston's "Spunk" (1925), for example, Spunk is known for his bravery, but he is also superstitious, and his belief in spirits causes him great fear and eventually leads to his death. Round characters feel more realistic because, like real people, they are complicated and often experience internal conflict.

Another aspect of character development to consider is whether characters change over the course of the story. A character who experiences no essential change from the story's beginning to its end is classified as a **static** character. Many characters will remain static throughout a story, and often even the protagonist remains unchanged. Both Montresor and Fortunato, though they are round characters, inhabit the story without ever changing and, therefore, remain in a state of stasis.

A character who does change over the course of a story is called a **dynamic** character. When a character changes in some way, it often indicates an important point in the story, and we should examine that change when attempting to understand the story's possible meaning. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" (1846), the titular character, who begins as a happy man, loses faith in Puritan society over the course of the story and dies a miserable wretch. Often a character will undergo an **epiphany**, a sudden realization that leaves them changed. Miss Brill is utterly changed when she hears the young couple discussing her. Mansfield subtly demonstrates the change this epiphany evokes in Miss Brill by her deviation from the end of her usual Sunday routine.

Setting

When we discuss setting we are describing the time and place in which the story takes place. Setting may seem like just the background against which the characters exist and the plot unfolds; however, understanding setting can be integral to the story and the production of meaning. Also, determining time and place, or even what we mean by those terms, can be more complicated than it seems at first glance.

We might first consider the **historical time and place** of a story: In what year, decade, or century does the story take place; in what country, province, city; and what does this information tell us about the events of the story? Identifying a certain time and place in history can be very important to understanding the story. For example, it is crucial to know that “Desiree’s Baby” is set in the antebellum American south where the institution of slavery was in place and society had very strict racial codes governing who was granted full personhood. Without that historical knowledge, Chopin’s story would seem unintelligible.

Another way to understand setting in the short story is to think about the more immediate sense of time and place. For example, what time of day is it when the story occurs? We expect different things to happen in the morning than we do at midnight. Where, specifically, do the events unfold? Are we at the zoo, at a residence, or in the wilderness? These are all places that introduce very different circumstances. We also need to think about the **duration** of the story. In other words, how much time passes between the story’s beginning and end? Does the story consist of two incidents that happen a week apart, or does the entirety of the story take place in an afternoon?

Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado” makes an interesting case regarding the problem of time and place. The historical time is quite vague. We learn early on that the story is set in Italy in some bygone era, likely during the medieval or Renaissance periods, but can we even determine the century in which the story takes place? It seems the immediate setting is more important to understanding the story. The story takes place at night in Montresor’s catacombs, an excellent place for a murder. Next, we might consider the duration of the story, which seems to take place over a few hours. At the end of the story, however, we learn that fifty years has passed between the events and their relation, exploding our sense of duration and perhaps changing the way we see the story.

We should also note that while setting is often considered merely the backdrop of the story, there are stories in which setting, a description of the time and place of the story, is the primary element. In Sarah Orne Jewett’s “A White Heron” (1886), for example, the description of the New England wilderness, its flora and fauna, defines the story. Sylvia’s relationship to the place is her primary characteristic and shapes her relationship with the hunter/ornithologist, whom she sees as an outsider. The setting of this story is almost a character itself.

Theme

A story's **theme** could be defined as the story's main idea or even as the meaning of the story. Getting at the theme of a story can be difficult, not least because there may be multiple themes and disagreement about which theme is most important. When trying to understand the theme or themes of a story, it can be useful to try to boil it down to a short statement. This can be a frustrating activity but also a very productive one. Looking at Joyce's "Araby," you might try to sum up the theme and come up with the following: "Being young can be difficult." Not bad, but you know you can do better. You look more closely at the story to see what it says is difficult about being young, and you write, "Young love can be painful." You're getting closer. You think more about the end of the story and the connection between the bazaar and the narrator's crush on Mangan's sister, and finally you write, "Being stripped of your naïve notions about love can be a painful process." This is a completely viable statement of the story's theme.

Symbol

You're probably familiar with the idea of a **symbol**, or a thing that represents more than its literal meaning. However, there are different types of symbols that you should be familiar with. **Conventional symbols** are symbols that we all recognize. When I ask students what a bird may symbolize, they almost always answer "freedom." The association between birds and freedom has become so ingrained in our collective cultural consciousness that we all recognize the association without having to think about it. Roses stand for love, spring stands for youth or renewal, and skulls symbolize death. These are associations we all recognize instantly.

Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" makes use of some conventional symbolism. When Goodman Brown meets the man in the woods, the man's staff, shaped like a serpent, draws on biblical imagery to symbolize the evil nature of their meeting and perhaps identify the man as Satan. The story also borders on the allegorical in the naming of some of its characters. An **allegory** is a story in which the characters are very obviously meant to represent certain ideas or concepts to offer lessons to the reader. *Pilgrim's Progress*, a very famous allegory written by John Bunyan, includes characters such as Christian, Piety, and Charity. "Young Goodman Brown" does something similar in naming Goodman Brown's wife Faith.

It should also be noted that symbols are not relegated to objects. As the above example demonstrates, they can be characters. They can also be settings, such as the dense forest that represents the hidden nature of human evil in "Young Goodman Brown." Characters can also perform **symbolic acts**. When Miss Brill returns her fur to its box at the end of the story, the act carries symbolic weight beyond her just putting her things away.

Most short stories, however, are not full of obvious conventional symbolism. Very often, symbols within the literary work are only intelligible within the work itself. The white heron in Jewett's story, for example, could stand for freedom, but this seems unsatisfying given the context of the story. Rather, the bird seems to represent the New England wilderness itself, which Sylvia is trying to protect from the hunter. Even that answer, however, feels insufficient. She protects the heron by keeping its secret, the location of its nest. The hunter, after all, is an ornithologist whose goal is to gain knowledge about the animal, and Sylvia becomes the protector of that knowledge. Does the bird, then, represent some relationship with the natural world that will be lost if subjected to a modern science that seeks to extract its secrets through acts of violence? Or, to move in a different direction, does the natural world in the story merely stand between the man and the girl, symbolizing Sylvia's complex feelings about his adult male presence as she moves closer to womanhood? Does her act of protecting the heron from the hunter symbolize her desire to protect her own girlhood innocence from the world of men for a while longer?

As I hope the preceding discussion illustrates, symbols perhaps work best when, rather than clearly representing one thing, they are complex and layered with meaning, and interpreting them unfolds a multiplicity of possible meanings that allow us to understand the story in new and different ways.

Style and Tone

Just as important as the various elements that make up a short story is the language the author uses to construct those elements. When we discuss the style of a story, we refer to the characteristics of the prose itself. When analyzing the style of a story, you should consider literary concerns such as the use of symbolism but also more basic elements of the prose such as **syntax** (sentence structure) and **diction** (word choice). Style is created both by the level of the diction used, such as if the story is written entirely in everyday words or if it uses a lot of words you might find on the SAT, and by the ways those words are put together into syntax. A story written in terse, reserved prose, composed of short sentences with no extra detail, will read much differently than a story written in long, winding sentences full of **purple prose**, or prose with a lot of ornate description. For example, in the first sentence of "Miss Brill," in describing the weather, the narrator details "the blue sky powdered with gold and great spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques." The story would have a much different feel if Mansfield had merely written, "It was a nice day."

Of course, noting the style of a work only matters insofar as we can use that observation to say something about the effect it creates for the story. In the example above, the purple prose in the description of the day reflects back on Miss Brill's character. Much like the prose, Miss Brill is lavish, over-the-top, a bit pretentious, and has a flair for the dramatic, character traits that are immediately confirmed as she decides to wear her fur despite the pleasant weather.

There are also other, more obvious, ways writers can use style and diction to create certain effects in their work. For example, Zora Neale Hurston writes all of her characters' dialogue in **dialect**, or writing meant to convey the way people sound when they speak. The use of dialect gives the reader a sense not just of the characters, but also of the place and culture to which they belong. While dialect has often been used in a derogatory fashion, implying that characters who speak in dialect are inferior to those who speak "proper" English, it can also function to validate the realistic sounds of speech and the value of human beings who speak in this way. An author's intention in employing dialect makes all the difference in how we understand its purpose and whether it serves as a slur or as a way to demonstrate characters' complexity. In the latter case, dialect works to undercut the assumption that all literary works must employ **formal English**. In this way the use of dialect can be an act of resistance, refusing a privileged and myopic view of what constitutes humanity.

Analyzing the style of a story can also be important for understanding the story's **tone**, or the perception of the events that we think the writer wants us to have. For example, in "The Cask of Amontillado," Montresor, our narrator, seems to brag about the actions he takes in the story, but this does not mean that Poe expects us to view the murder as an acceptable act. In fact, Montresor's detailed recounting of the events and his seeming pride in their meticulous execution add to the horror of the story because they show us that he is not only a murderer but also remorseless. Taking another example that illustrates more clearly the relationship between tone and style, let's consider Joyce's "Araby." Although the story is narrated in the first person by our protagonist, a young boy, the quality of the prose and the level of the diction do not reflect the consciousness of the child. For example, at the end of the story, when the narrator states, "I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity," it is difficult to imagine a child having these thoughts. This may lead us to assume that the narrator is the adult version of this boy, looking back on events from his childhood with a mature understanding of their significance. This assumption changes the way we think about the overall tone of the story.

Irony

Irony, or the discrepancy between expectation and reality, is a powerful literary tool but also one of the most misunderstood and, likely, the most incorrectly used literary terms. Students often refer to any events in stories that seem significant or unexpected as ironic, but irony refers to a much narrower set of circumstances.

Verbal irony is the discrepancy between words and their meaning. Sarcasm is the most common form of verbal irony. When you spill coffee on yourself and say, "Well, that's just great!" you don't really mean that it's great; you mean the opposite. Verbal irony can be used to great effect in the short story. In "The Cask of Amontillado," when Fortunato refuses to leave the catacomb and remarks, "I shall not die of a cough," and Montresor replies, "True—true," these words are ironic because they are heavy with unintended significance. While it is

true that the cough will not kill him, Fortunato will soon die because he refuses to leave the catacombs, thus falling prey to Montresor's trap.

Fortunato's situation is also a good example of **dramatic irony**, which occurs when the reader understands the ironic meaning behind the words or actions while the character does not. Fortunato doesn't recognize his words as ironic because he is unaware of Montresor's plan, but the reader does. A similar example occurs in Chopin's story when Désirée protests to Armand, "Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand." Désirée is merely trying to convince Armand that she does not have African ancestry, but her words take on ironic significance at the end of the story when we learn that it is Armand who is of mixed race.

Writers may also create **situational irony**, or a discrepancy between actions and their intended consequences. In Mansfield's "Miss Brill," Miss Brill wears her fur to feel good about herself, but the action has the opposite effect when she overhears the young couple making fun of her for wearing it.

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Writing About Short Stories

Travis Rozier

When approaching the task of composing an essay about a short story, you may wonder what you are supposed to write about. You read the story, and you even feel like you have a good understanding of it. What now?

Generally speaking, when a college professor asks you to write an essay on a work of literature, they want you to write an argumentative essay. This means that your **thesis**, or central argument, should make some debatable claim. You should say something about the story that you can imagine some reasonable person disagreeing with. You might even think that most people would easily agree with your stance, as long as you can imagine some reasonable person who would dispute it. In other words, your argument should not be so obviously true that no one would disagree. If you were to write an essay arguing that Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" is a tale of revenge, that would not be a very interesting essay because your point is indisputable to anyone who has read the story. This does not mean,

however, that you should only bother to make outlandish, sensationalist, or controversial arguments.

A good way to get started finding your argument is to ask questions about the story, particularly those without obvious answers. Focus on those aspects of the story that remain ambiguous after your first or second reading. For example, perhaps after reading Mansfield's "A Cup of Tea" (1922) you're left wondering why Rosemary takes the beggar girl home since she doesn't seem like a particularly kind or giving character. You have a hunch that the action has more to do with how Rosemary feels about herself than with helping another person. Importantly, however, we cannot make our arguments based on mere conjecture. We must have textual evidence, or quotations from the text, to support any claims that we make. After sifting through the text, you find several passages that suggest that Rosemary's thinking about the situation is primarily focused on herself. For example, she considers the incident like "one of those things she was always reading about or seeing on the stage," thus making her the protagonist of the story that she would tell later "to the amazement of her friends." She even believes the story will show the girl that "fairy godmothers were real," putting herself in the role of the magical and benevolent savior. However, what strikes you most is that the story begins with the narrator stating, "Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful," and it ends with Rosemary sending the girl away after her husband remarks on the girl's beauty. Now you're ready to put these pieces together and make an argument. Your thesis may read as follows: "Rosemary's generosity toward the girl is a self-serving attempt to make her feel good about herself, appeasing her insecurity about her physical appearance." This is a debatable claim about the way Rosemary's character flaw drives the plot of the story that you can support with evidence from the text. From there you can make claims about the importance of your observations for the larger meaning of the story. Based on your argument, you might say that the theme of the story is that seemingly selfless actions may often derive from selfish purposes.

To offer another brief example, consider my suggestions about the use of symbols in Jewett's "A White Heron." After reading the story, you may recognize that the heron is a symbol and begin asking what it represents. If you come up with several possible answers, like I did, you would then want to determine which of the possibilities is best supported by the text. The most valid claims are those supported with the most convincing textual evidence. Once you decide what you will argue that the heron symbolizes, you would then consider what ramifications it has for how you would interpret the meaning of the story.

Jewett's story is an instructive example because each of my suggestions about possible meanings behind the symbol of the heron are valid, and they each produce very different approaches to the story as a whole. After all, this is why we continue to make arguments about literature. A good short story will not limit the reader to one correct interpretation but will instead offer multiple avenues for inquiry that open the story up to an array of possible meanings.

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Spotlight on Regionalism

Travis Rozier

In the section on setting, I mentioned that while we often think of setting as secondary to elements such as plot and character, in some stories setting is a primary concern. This is characteristic of **regionalism**, a literary genre in which the author attempts to give the reader a realistic depiction of a certain place, the people who live there, and the culture and customs by which they live. Regionalism, also known as **local color** writing, rose to immense popularity with the American reading public in the late 1800s, though its roots can be found much earlier in the century. It can be seen as a descendent of **southwestern humor**, a literary genre that had its heyday in the early-nineteenth century and in which writers would share humorous tales from the American frontier. An early example is Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* (1835), a collection of stories that recounted comical anecdotes from rural Georgia. The central idea behind southwestern humor was that writers were documenting the frontier character before it disappeared as the frontier receded, but this often amounted to writers making fun of frontier residents for the amusement of urban, eastern readers.

While the work of some regionalist writers closely resembles the southwestern humor genre (for instance, the works of Mark Twain [1835–1910], who is associated with both traditions), most regionalist work varies sharply in tone from southwestern humor, taking a more sympathetic view of their subjects. What regionalist writers do take from southwestern humor is a sketch style writing that places an emphasis on setting over other literary elements.

Regionalism also shares a sense of purpose with southwestern humor, though as seen through a much different set of contexts. While the purpose of southwestern humor was to document life on the frontier before it disappeared, regionalist writers felt the same way about the small towns and villages of America's various regions. The modernization taking place in the latter half of the nineteenth century caused anxiety in many over the fate of regional culture. Increasing industrialization led to urbanization, leading people to leave rural districts to work in factories and office buildings in the metropolitan centers. Immigration also ramped up

toward the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, leading some to react with nativist fears about how immigrants would change the culture. The growing railways made the small American regions more accessible, leading to increased traffic and outside influence. Also, the rise of mass production and mass marketing had a homogenizing effect on American culture. If people were all eating the same foods, wearing the same clothes, etc., how different could they be? Just as the writers of Southwestern humor foresaw the closing of the frontier, regionalist writers presaged the disappearance of distinctive American regional cultures.

The rise in popularity of regionalism at the end of the nineteenth century can also be seen as connected with the rise of **realism**, a literary movement grounded in the idea that writers should attempt to write literature that closely mirrors reality, and which became the dominant literary aesthetic at the same time that the regionalist tradition rose to prominence. Regionalism is often considered an offshoot or subset of realism, and those American writers, editors, and literary tastemakers, such as William Dean Howells (1837–1920), who outlined the philosophies of realism, also often championed the works of regionalist writers. Like regionalism, realism can be seen as confronting the same anxieties caused by accelerating modernization at the end of the nineteenth century. Writers felt that older literary traditions, such as romanticism, were not up to the task of dealing with the rapidly changing world. They needed to write literature that would reflect the new world, making it visible so they could understand it. Regionalism, however, had a specific role to play in confronting these anxieties. While many writers were writing in expectation of the region's disappearance, the popularity of these texts with the eastern reading market may be explained by the comfort they offered readers who, flooded with changes to their daily lives, could imagine that these small communities still existed untouched.

The short story form is particularly important to regionalism. Due to the foregrounding of setting over elements such as plot or character, regionalist texts mostly employ the short story form, adding elements to the sketch, but still focusing on glimpses of life in the region rather than on longer, complex plots. Regionalist writers often published their stories collected in a **short story cycle**, sometimes referred to as a **composite novel**, in which each of the stories can stand alone but are held together by setting, theme, or even recurring characters. While a cycle has no overarching plot, such as what you would expect to find in a novel, the stories feel more connected than in a typical short story collection. After reading the cycle, the reader has a sense of the culture of the place that gave rise to the stories.

Writers of regionalism generally write about and are associated with one region, usually a place they belong to. Jewett is known for her writing about New England village life, as is Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. Both women are from the region. Kate Chopin, though she was born in St. Louis, is known for writing about the French creole culture from the bayous of Louisiana where she lived later in life. "Désirée's Baby" was included in her short story cycle, *Bayou Folk* (1894). Hamlin Garland is known for his writing about midwestern farming communities, most notably in his cycle *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891).

Regionalism is often considered a primarily female tradition, with women writers writing about women's lives. Indeed, all three of the women writers listed above wrote about female community and the trials and tribulations of a woman's life in a small region. However, even within that group, there is much variety in style, focus, and the general content of their works. Chopin, for example, often addressed issues of race in her work, issues that rarely come up in Jewett's or Freeman's stories. After all, the Louisiana bayou is a much different place than the New England village. Also, as the existence of Garland and Twain attests, there were men who also wrote in the regionalist tradition and had their own concerns. Garland, for example, tended to focus on the economic injustices committed against midwestern farmers through unscrupulous banking practices and used his fiction as a platform to argue for reform.

It is worth noting that Chopin is also associated with **naturalism**, a subset of realism that includes a focus on pessimistic determinism, the idea that we are subject to forces—natural, social, or biological—that are beyond our control. The characters of naturalist texts are often destroyed by such forces, despite their best efforts to subvert or survive them. We can see this pessimistic determinism in “*Désirée's Baby*,” as Désirée and her child are eliminated from the text by the force of race. However, as the ironic twist at the end of the story indicates, race in this story is a socially constructed force, not a biological one. Chopin's novella *The Awakening* (1899), included and discussed in the novella chapter of this text, is a good example of a text that has both regionalist and naturalist characteristics.

Biography: Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909)

Sarah Orne Jewett was born in 1849 in the small New England village of South Berwick, Maine, where her father was a village physician. Early in life Jewett developed a fondness for the people and natural surroundings of the village, and though she traveled extensively, both domestically and abroad, and lived in Boston for a time, she maintained an attachment to South Berwick, where she died after suffering a stroke in 1909. Jewett began her writing career at the early age of 19 when she published a story in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1868. She continued to find success through the rest of the nineteenth century as her focus on village life appealed to the reading public's growing interest in regional cultures. Jewett's best-known work, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), a short story cycle, follows a writer from Boston who visits Dunnet Landing, a small village in coastal Maine, as a retreat to work on her writing. The book's loose plot, following the writer's stay in the village, is merely background for the primary focus on the people and culture of Dunnet Landing. *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is one of the most famous works of regionalism and is often used as a representative example of the genre. Jewett also published many other works, including *A Country Doctor* (1884), based on her father, and *A White Heron and Other Stories* (1886), in which the following story appeared.

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A White Heron (1886)

I

The woods were already filled with shadows one June evening, just before eight o'clock, though a bright sunset still glimmered faintly among the trunks of the trees. A little girl was driving home her cow, a plodding, dilatory, provoking creature in her behavior, but a valued companion for all that. They were going away from whatever light there was, and striking deep into the woods, but their feet were familiar with the path, and it was no matter whether their eyes could see it or not.

There was hardly a night the summer through when the old cow could be found waiting at the pasture bars; on the contrary, it was her greatest pleasure to hide herself away among the huckleberry bushes, and though she wore a loud bell she had made the discovery that if one stood perfectly still it would not ring. So Sylvia had to hunt for her until she found her, and call Co.! Co!' with never an answering Moo, until her childish patience was quite spent. If the creature had not given good milk and plenty of it, the case would have seemed very different to her owners. Besides, Sylvia had all the time there was, and very little use to make of it. Sometimes in pleasant weather it was a consolation to look upon the cow's pranks as an intelligent attempt to play hide and seek, and as the child had no playmates she lent herself to this amusement with a good deal of zest. Though this chase had been so long that the wary animal herself had given an unusual signal of her whereabouts, Sylvia had only laughed when she came upon Mistress Moolly at the swamp-side, and urged her affectionately homeward with a twig of birch leaves. The old cow was not inclined to wander farther, she even turned in the right direction for once as they left the pasture, and stepped along the road at a good pace. She was quite ready to be milked now, and seldom stopped to browse. Sylvia wondered what her grandmother would say because they were so late. It was a great while since she had left home at half-past five o'clock, but everybody knew the difficulty of making this errand a short one. Mrs. Tilley had chased the hornéd torment too many summer evenings herself to blame any one else for lingering, and was only thankful as she waited that she had Sylvia, nowadays, to give such valuable assistance. The good woman suspected that Sylvia loitered occasionally on her own account; there never was such a child for straying about out-of-doors since the world was made! Everybody said that it was a good change for a little maid who had tried to grow for

eight years in a crowded manufacturing town, but, as for Sylvia herself, it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm. She thought often with wistful compassion of a wretched geranium that belonged to a town neighbor.

“Afraid of folks,” old Mrs. Tilley said to herself, with a smile, after she had made the unlikely choice of Sylvia from her daughter's houseful of children, and was returning to the farm. “Afraid of folks, they said! I guess she won't be troubled no great with 'em up to the old place!” When they reached the door of the lonely house and stopped to unlock it, and the cat came to purr loudly, and rub against them, a deserted pussy, indeed, but fat with young robins, Sylvia whispered that this was a beautiful place to live in, and she never should wish to go home.

The companions followed the shady wood-road, the cow taking slow steps and the child very fast ones. The cow stopped long at the brook to drink, as if the pasture were not half a swamp, and Sylvia stood still and waited, letting her bare feet cool themselves in the shoal water, while the great twilight moths struck softly against her. She waded on through the brook as the cow moved away, and listened to the thrushes with a heart that beat fast with pleasure. There was a stirring in the great boughs overhead. They were full of little birds and beasts that seemed to be wide awake, and going about their world, or else saying good-night to each other in sleepy twitters. Sylvia herself felt sleepy as she walked along. However, it was not much farther to the house, and the air was soft and sweet. She was not often in the woods so late as this, and it made her feel as if she were a part of the gray shadows and the moving leaves. She was just thinking how long it seemed since she first came to the farm a year ago, and wondering if everything went on in the noisy town just the same as when she was there; the thought of the great red-faced boy who used to chase and frighten her made her hurry along the path to escape from the shadow of the trees.

Suddenly this little woods-girl is horror-stricken to hear a clear whistle not very far away. Not a bird's-whistle, which would have a sort of friendliness, but a boy's whistle, determined, and somewhat aggressive. Sylvia left the cow to whatever sad fate might await her, and stepped discreetly aside into the bushes, but she was just too late. The enemy had discovered her, and called out in a very cheerful and persuasive tone, “Halloa, little girl, how far is it to the road?” and trembling Sylvia answered almost inaudibly, “A good ways.”

She did not dare to look boldly at the tall young man, who carried a gun over his shoulder, but she came out of her bush and again followed the cow, while he walked alongside.

“I have been hunting for some birds,” the stranger said kindly, “and I have lost my way, and need a friend very much. Don't be afraid,” he added gallantly. “Speak up and tell me what your name is, and whether you think I can spend the night at your house, and go out gunning early in the morning.”

Sylvia was more alarmed than before. Would not her grandmother consider her much to blame? But who could have foreseen such an accident as this? It did not seem to be her fault, and she hung her head as if the stem of it were broken, but managed to answer "Sylvy," with much effort when her companion again asked her name.

Mrs. Tilley was standing in the doorway when the trio came into view. The cow gave a loud moo by way of explanation.

"Yes, you'd better speak up for yourself, you old trial! Where'd she tucked herself away this time, Sylvy?" But Sylvia kept an awed silence; she knew by instinct that her grandmother did not comprehend the gravity of the situation. She must be mistaking the stranger for one of the farmer-lads of the region.

The young man stood his gun beside the door, and dropped a lumpy game-bag beside it; then he bade Mrs. Tilley good-evening, and repeated his wayfarer's story, and asked if he could have a night's lodging.

"Put me anywhere you like," he said. "I must be off early in the morning, before day; but I am very hungry, indeed. You can give me some milk at any rate, that's plain."

"Dear sakes, yes," responded the hostess, whose long slumbering hospitality seemed to be easily awakened. "You might fare better if you went out to the main road a mile or so, but you're welcome to what we've got. I'll milk right off, and you make yourself at home. You can sleep on husks or feathers," she proffered graciously. "I raised them all myself. There's good pasturing for geese just below here towards the ma'sh. Now step round and set a plate for the gentleman, Sylvy!" And Sylvia promptly stepped. She was glad to have something to do, and she was hungry herself.

It was a surprise to find so clean and comfortable a little dwelling in this New England wilderness. The young man had known the horrors of its most primitive housekeeping, and the dreary squalor of that level of society which does not rebel at the companionship of hens. This was the best thrift of an old-fashioned farmstead, though on such a small scale that it seemed like a hermitage. He listened eagerly to the old woman's quaint talk, he watched Sylvia's pale face and shining gray eyes with ever growing enthusiasm, and insisted that this was the best supper he had eaten for a month, and afterward the new-made friends sat down in the doorway together while the moon came up.

Soon it would be berry-time, and Sylvia was a great help at picking. The cow was a good milker, though a plaguy thing to keep track of, the hostess gossiped frankly, adding presently that she had buried four children, so Sylvia's mother, and a son (who might be dead) in California were all the children she had left. "Dan, my boy, was a great hand to go gunning," she explained sadly. "I never wanted for pa'tridges or gray squer'ls while he was to home. He's been a great wand'rer, I expect, and he's no hand to write letters. There, I don't blame him, I'd ha' seen the world myself if it had been so I could."

“Sylvy takes after him,” the grandmother continued affectionately, after a minute’s pause. “There ain’t a foot o’ ground she don’t know her way over, and the wild creatur’s counts her one o’ themselves. Squer’ls she’ll tame to come an’ feed right out o’ her hands, and all sorts o’ birds. Last winter she got the jay-birds to bangeing here, and I believe she’d ‘a’ scanted herself of her own meals to have plenty to throw out amongst ‘em, if I had n’t kep’ watch. Anything but crows, I tell her, I’m willin’ to help support—though Dan he had a tamed one o’ them that did seem to have reason same as folks. It was round here a good spell after he went away, Dan an’ his father they did n’t hitch,—but he never held up his head ag’in after Dan had dared him an’ gone off.”

The guest did not notice this hint of family sorrows in his eager interest in something else.

“So Sylvy knows all about birds, does she?” he exclaimed, as he looked round at the little girl who sat, very demure but increasingly sleepy, in the moonlight. “I am making a collection of birds myself. I have been at it ever since I was a boy.” (Mrs. Tilley smiled.) “There are two or three very rare ones I have been hunting for these five years. I mean to get them on my own ground if they can be found.”

“Do you cage ‘em up?” asked Mrs. Tilley doubtfully, in response to this enthusiastic announcement.

“Oh no, they ‘re stuffed and preserved, dozens and dozens of them,” said the ornithologist, “and I have shot or snared every one myself. I caught a glimpse of a white heron a few miles from here on Saturday, and I have followed it in this direction. They have never been found in this district at all. The little white heron, it is,” and he turned again to look at Sylvia with the hope of discovering that the rare bird was one of her acquaintances.

But Sylvia was watching a hop-toad in the narrow footpath.

“You would know the heron if you saw it,” the stranger continued eagerly. “A queer tall white bird with soft feathers and long thin legs. And it would have a nest perhaps in the top of a high tree, made of sticks, something like a hawk’s nest.”

Sylvia's heart gave a wild beat; she knew that strange white bird, and had once stolen softly near where it stood in some bright green swamp grass, away over at the other side of the woods. There was an open place where the sunshine always seemed strangely yellow and hot, where tall, nodding rushes grew, and her grandmother had warned her that she might sink in the soft black mud underneath and never be heard of more. Not far beyond were the salt marshes just this side the sea itself, which Sylvia wondered and dreamed much about, but never had seen, whose great voice could sometimes be heard above the noise of the woods on stormy nights.

“I can’t think of anything I should like so much as to find that heron's nest,” the handsome stranger was saying. “I would give ten dollars to anybody who could show it to

me," he added desperately, "and I mean to spend my whole vacation hunting for it if need be. Perhaps it was only migrating, or had been chased out of its own region by some bird of prey."

Mrs. Tilley gave amazed attention to all this, but Sylvia still watched the toad, not divining, as she might have done at some calmer time, that the creature wished to get to its hole under the door-step, and was much hindered by the unusual spectators at that hour of the evening. No amount of thought, that night, could decide how many wished-for treasures the ten dollars, so lightly spoken of, would buy.

The next day the young sportsman hovered about the woods, and Sylvia kept him company, having lost her first fear of the friendly lad, who proved to be most kind and sympathetic. He told her many things about the birds and what they knew and where they lived and what they did with themselves. And he gave her a jack-knife, which she thought as great a treasure as if she were a desert-islander. All day long he did not once make her troubled or afraid except when he brought down some unsuspecting singing creature from its bough. Sylvia would have liked him vastly better without his gun; she could not understand why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much. But as the day waned, Sylvia still watched the young man with loving admiration. She had never seen anybody so charming and delightful; the woman's heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled by a dream of love. Some premonition of that great power stirred and swayed these young creatures who traversed the solemn woodlands with soft-footed silent care. They stopped to listen to a bird's song; they pressed forward again eagerly, parting the branches—speaking to each other rarely and in whispers; the young man going first and Sylvia following, fascinated, a few steps behind, with her gray eyes dark with excitement.

She grieved because the longed-for white heron was elusive, but she did not lead the guest, she only followed, and there was no such thing as speaking first. The sound of her own unquestioned voice would have terrified her—it was hard enough to answer yes or no when there was need of that. At last evening began to fall, and they drove the cow home together, and Sylvia smiled with pleasure when they came to the place where she heard the whistle and was afraid only the night before.

II

Half a mile from home, at the farther edge of the woods, where the land was highest, a great pine-tree stood, the last of its generation. Whether it was left for a boundary mark, or for what reason, no one could say; the wood-choppers who had felled its mates were dead and gone long ago, and a whole forest of sturdy trees, pines and oaks and maples, had grown again. But the stately head of this old pine towered above them all and made a landmark for sea and shore miles and miles away. Sylvia knew it well. She had always believed that whoever climbed to the top of it could see the ocean; and the little girl had often laid her hand on the great rough trunk and looked up wistfully at those dark boughs that the wind always stirred, no matter how hot and still the air might be below. Now she

thought of the tree with a new excitement, for why, if one climbed it at break of day could not one see all the world, and easily discover from whence the white heron flew, and mark the place, and find the hidden nest?

What a spirit of adventure, what wild ambition! What fancied triumph and delight and glory for the later morning when she could make known the secret! It was almost too real and too great for the childish heart to bear.

All night the door of the little house stood open and the whippoorwills came and sang upon the very step. The young sportsman and his old hostess were sound asleep, but Sylvia's great design kept her broad awake and watching. She forgot to think of sleep. The short summer night seemed as long as the winter darkness, and at last when the whippoorwills ceased, and she was afraid the morning would after all come too soon, she stole out of the house and followed the pasture path through the woods, hastening toward the open ground beyond, listening with a sense of comfort and companionship to the drowsy twitter of a half-awakened bird, whose perch she had jarred in passing. Alas, if the great wave of human interest which flooded for the first time this dull little life should sweep away the satisfactions of an existence heart to heart with nature and the dumb life of the forest!

There was the huge tree asleep yet in the paling moonlight, and small and silly Sylvia began with utmost bravery to mount to the top of it, with tingling, eager blood coursing the channels of her whole frame, with her bare feet and fingers, that pinched and held like bird's claws to the monstrous ladder reaching up, up, almost to the sky itself. First she must mount the white oak tree that grew alongside, where she was almost lost among the dark branches and the green leaves heavy and wet with dew; a bird fluttered off its nest, and a red squirrel ran to and fro and scolded pettishly at the harmless housebreaker. Sylvia felt her way easily. She had often climbed there, and knew that higher still one of the oak's upper branches chafed against the pine trunk, just where its lower boughs were set close together. There, when she made the dangerous pass from one tree to the other, the great enterprise would really begin.

She crept out along the swaying oak limb at last, and took the daring step across into the old pine-tree. The way was harder than she thought; she must reach far and hold fast, the sharp dry twigs caught and held her and scratched her like angry talons, the pitch made her thin little fingers clumsy and stiff as she went round and round the tree's great stem, higher and higher upward. The sparrows and robins in the woods below were beginning to wake and twitter to the dawn, yet it seemed much lighter there aloft in the pine-tree, and the child knew she must hurry if her project were to be of any use.

The tree seemed to lengthen itself out as she went up, and to reach farther and farther upward. It was like a great main-mast to the voyaging earth; it must truly have been amazed that morning through all its ponderous frame as it felt this determined spark of human spirit wending its way from higher branch to branch. Who knows how steadily the least twigs held

themselves to advantage this light, weak creature on her way! The old pine must have loved his new dependent. More than all the hawks, and bats, and moths, and even the sweet voiced thrushes, was the brave, beating heart of the solitary gray-eyed child. And the tree stood still and frowned away the winds that June morning while the dawn grew bright in the east.

Sylvia's face was like a pale star, if one had seen it from the ground, when the last thorny bough was past, and she stood trembling and tired but wholly triumphant, high in the treetop. Yes, there was the sea with the dawning sun making a golden dazzle over it, and toward that glorious east flew two hawks with slow-moving pinions. How low they looked in the air from that height when one had only seen them before far up, and dark against the blue sky. Their gray feathers were as soft as moths; they seemed only a little way from the tree, and Sylvia felt as if she too could go flying away among the clouds. Westward, the woodlands and farms reached miles and miles into the distance; here and there were church steeples, and white villages, truly it was a vast and awesome world!

The birds sang louder and louder. At last the sun came up bewilderingly bright. Sylvia could see the white sails of ships out at sea, and the clouds that were purple and rose-colored and yellow at first began to fade away. Where was the white heron's nest in the sea of green branches, and was this wonderful sight and pageant of the world the only reward for having climbed to such a giddy height? Now look down again, Sylvia, where the green marsh is set among the shining birches and dark hemlocks; there where you saw the white heron once you will see him again; look, look! a white spot of him like a single floating feather comes up from the dead hemlock and grows larger, and rises, and comes close at last, and goes by the landmark pine with steady sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck and crested head. And wait! wait! do not move a foot or a finger, little girl, do not send an arrow of light and consciousness from your two eager eyes, for the heron has perched on a pine bough not far beyond yours, and cries back to his mate on the nest and plumes his feathers for the new day!

The child gives a long sigh a minute later when a company of shouting cat-birds comes also to the tree, and vexed by their fluttering and lawlessness the solemn heron goes away. She knows his secret now, the wild, light, slender bird that floats and wavers, and goes back like an arrow presently to his home in the green world beneath. Then Sylvia, well satisfied, makes her perilous way down again, not daring to look far below the branch she stands on, ready to cry sometimes because her fingers ache and her lamed feet slip. Wondering over and over again what the stranger would say to her, and what he would think when she told him how to find his way straight to the heron's nest.

"Sylvy, Sylvy!" called the busy old grandmother again and again, but nobody answered, and the small husk bed was empty and Sylvia had disappeared.

The guest waked from a dream, and remembering his day's pleasure hurried to dress himself that might it sooner begin. He was sure from the way the shy little girl looked once

or twice yesterday that she had at least seen the white heron, and now she must really be made to tell. Here she comes now, paler than ever, and her worn old frock is torn and tattered, and smeared with pine pitch. The grandmother and the sportsman stand in the door together and question her, and the splendid moment has come to speak of the dead hemlock-tree by the green marsh.

But Sylvia does not speak after all, though the old grandmother fretfully rebukes her, and the young man's kind, appealing eyes are looking straight in her own. He can make them rich with money; he has promised it, and they are poor now. He is so well worth making happy, and he waits to hear the story she can tell.

No, she must keep silence! What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb? Has she been nine years growing and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake? (The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away.

Dear loyalty, that suffered a sharp pang as the guest went away disappointed later in the day, that could have served and followed him and loved him as a dog loves! Many a night Sylvia heard the echo of his whistle haunting the pasture path as she came home with the loitering cow. She forgot even her sorrow at the sharp report of his gun and the sight of thrushes and sparrows dropping silent to the ground, their songs hushed and their pretty feathers stained and wet with blood. Were the birds better friends than their hunter might have been,—who can tell? Whatever treasures were lost to her, woodlands and summer-time, remember! Bring your gifts and graces and tell your secrets to this lonely country child!

Jewett, Sarah Orne. "A White Heron." In *A White Heron and Other Stories*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914, 1-22. Hathi Trust.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/inu.30000114559085?urlappend=%3Bseq=21>.

"A White Heron" Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Early in the story we are introduced to Mistress Moolly, a cow with a personality. Would you consider Mistress Moolly a character? What do Mistress Moolly's habits tell us about the story? What does Sylvia's relationship to Mistress Moolly tell us about Sylvia?
2. We learn that Sylvia has moved to this farm with her grandmother after growing up in a "crowded manufacturing town." What dynamics does this set up for the story? How do we see Sylvia in relation to these very different places?

3. Consider Sylvia's name. How might Jewett's choice of name for her main character influence the way we perceive Sylvia?
4. Both Sylvia and the ornithologist seem to love animals. How are their relationships to animals different? What does this say about their characters?
5. Throughout the story, Sylvia seems timid and deferential toward the ornithologist. Is this an accurate representation of the power dynamics between these characters, or does Sylvia have more control over the situation than she lets on? Do we get any indication as to whether Sylvia likes or dislikes the ornithologist?
6. The ornithologist is the only male we meet in the story, human or animal. The only other man we hear about is Dan, the grandmother's son, who is also a hunter and a traveler. What gender dynamics are set up in the story? What roles do men and women seem to play and what are their limitations?

Attribution:

Rozier, Travis. "A *White Heron* Questions and Activities for Further Analysis." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Selected Reading and Study Questions

Travis Rozier

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

The Cask of Amontillado (1846)

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. *At length* I would be avenged; this was a point definitely settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish, but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile *now* was at the thought of his immolation.

He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity—to practise imposture upon the British and Austrian *millionaires*. In painting and gemmery, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack—but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially: I was skillful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him, that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

I said to him—“My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking to-day! But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts.”

“How?” said he. “Amontillado? A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!”

“I have my doubts,” I replied; “and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain.”

“Amontillado!”

“I have my doubts.”

“Amontillado!”

“And I must satisfy them.”

“Amontillado!”

“As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi. If any one has a critical turn, it is he. He will tell me—”

“Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry.”

“And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own.”

“Come, let us go.”

“Whither?”

“To your vaults.”

“My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi—”

“I have no engagement;—come.”

“My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre.”

“Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado.”

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk, and drawing a *roqueleaire* closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honour of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

“The pipe,” said he.

“It is farther on,” said I; “but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls.”

He turned towards me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.

“Nitre?” he asked, at length.

“Nitre,” I replied. “How long have you had that cough?”

“Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!”

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

“It is nothing,” he said, at last.

“Come,” I said, with decision, “we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed.

For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi—”

“Enough,” he said; “the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough.”

“True—true,” I replied; “and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily—but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damps.”

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

“Drink,” I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

“I drink,” he said, “to the buried that repose around us.”

“And I to your long life.”

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

“These vaults,” he said, “are extensive.”

“The Montresors,” I replied, “were a great and numerous family.”

“I forget your arms.”

“A huge human foot d’or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel.”

“And the motto?”

“*Nemo me impune lacessit.*”

“Good!” he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

“The nitre!” I said; “see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river’s bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough—”

"It is nothing," he said; "let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc."

I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grave. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upwards with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.

"You do not comprehend?" he said.

"Not I," I replied.

"Then you are not of the brotherhood."

"How?"

"You are not of the masons."

"Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."

"You? Impossible! A mason?"

"A mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said, "a sign."

"It is this," I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my *roquelaire*.

"You jest," he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. "But let us proceed to the Amontillado."

"Be it so," I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth side the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior recess, in depth about four feet in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavoured to pry into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

“Proceed,” I said; “herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchesi—”

“He is an ignoramus,” interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

“Pass your hand,” I said, “over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is *very damp*. Once more let me *implore* you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power.”

“The Amontillado!” ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

“True,” I replied; “the Amontillado.”

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was *not* the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labours and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated—I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall; I replied to the yells of him who clamoured. I re-echoed—I aided—I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamourer grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there

remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said—

“Ha! ha! ha!—he! he! he!—a very good joke indeed—an excellent jest. We shall have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo—he! he! he!—over our wine—he! he! he!”

“The Amontillado!” I said.

“He! he! he!—he! he! he!—yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone.”

“Yes,” I said, “let us be gone.”

“*For the love of God, Montresor!*”

“Yes,” I said, “for the love of God!”

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud—

“Fortunato!”

No answer. I called again—

“Fortunato—”

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in reply only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick on account of the dampness of the catacombs. I hastened to make an end of my labour. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Cask of Amontillado*. 1846; Project Gutenberg, June 6, 2010.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1063/1063-h/1063-h.htm>.

“The Cask of Amontillado” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. In the opening paragraph of the story, Montresor outlines the stipulations he needs to meet to consider his revenge successful. What are the requirements for successful revenge according to Montresor? Does he meet them by the end of the story?
2. Montresor never explicitly states what the “insult” that drives him to murder Fortunato is. Do you see any evidence in the story that could point to the nature of this insult?
3. Wine and wine connoisseurship are at the center of this story. What does a knowledge of fine wines say about a person? What does Fortunato’s professed knowledge of wines and his insistence that he knows more than Luchesi say about his character?
4. Earlier, we looked briefly at Poe’s use of irony in the story. Do you see any other points of irony here? Explain briefly.
5. When Montresor wants to ensure that his home will be empty, he demands that his servants stay home all night. Why? What does this say about his character? Where else do we see him apply similar logic?
6. The carnival seems important to the story. How does Montresor use the fact that it is carnival season to his advantage? Do some light research into European carnival traditions. What did you learn? Does anything about carnival traditions seem relevant to the story?

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Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864)

Young Goodman Brown (1846)

Young Goodman Brown came forth at sunset into the street at Salem village; but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap while she called to Goodman Brown.

“Dearest heart,” whispered she, softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, “prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed to-night. A lone

woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she's afraid of herself sometimes. Pray tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year."

"My love and my Faith," replied young Goodman Brown, "of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done 'twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married?"

"Then God bless you!" said Faith, with the pink ribbons; "and may you find all well when you come back."

"Amen!" cried Goodman Brown. "Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee."

So they parted; and the young man pursued his way until, being about to turn the corner by the meeting-house, he looked back and saw the head of Faith still peeping after him with a melancholy air, in spite of her pink ribbons.

"Poor little Faith!" thought he, for his heart smote him. "What a wretch am I to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought as she spoke there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But no, no; 't would kill her to think it. Well, she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven."

With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose. He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind. It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveller knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that with lonely footsteps he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude.

"There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree," said Goodman Brown to himself; and he glanced fearfully behind him as he added, "What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!"

His head being turned back, he passed a crook of the road, and, looking forward again, beheld the figure of a man, in grave and decent attire, seated at the foot of an old tree. He arose at Goodman Brown's approach and walked onward side by side with him.

"You are late, Goodman Brown," said he. "The clock of the Old South was striking as I came through Boston, and that is full fifteen minutes ago."

"Faith kept me back a while," replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice, caused by the sudden appearance of his companion, though not wholly unexpected.

It was now deep dusk in the forest, and deepest in that part of it where these two were journeying. As nearly as could be discerned, the second traveller was about fifty years old, apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him, though perhaps more in expression than features. Still they might have been taken for father and son. And yet, though the elder person was as simply clad as the younger, and as simple in manner too, he had an indescribable air of one who knew the world, and who would not have felt abashed at the governor's dinner table or in King William's court, were it possible that his affairs should call him thither. But the only thing about him that could be fixed upon as remarkable was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent. This, of course, must have been an ocular deception, assisted by the uncertain light.

"Come, Goodman Brown," cried his fellow-traveller, "this is a dull pace for the beginning of a journey. Take my staff, if you are so soon weary."

"Friend," said the other, exchanging his slow pace for a full stop, "having kept covenant by meeting thee here, it is my purpose now to return whence I came. I have scruples touching the matter thou wot'st of."

"Sayest thou so?" replied he of the serpent, smiling apart. "Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go; and if I convince thee not thou shalt turn back. We are but a little way in the forest yet."

"Too far! too far!" exclaimed the goodman, unconsciously resuming his walk. "My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs; and shall I be the first of the name of Brown that ever took this path and kept—"

"Such company, thou wouldst say," observed the elder person, interpreting his pause. "Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's war. They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you for their sake."

"If it be as thou sayest," replied Goodman Brown, "I marvel they never spoke of these matters; or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide no such wickedness."

"Wickedness or not," said the traveller with the twisted staff, "I have a very general acquaintance here in New England. The deacons of many a church have drunk the

communion wine with me; the selectmen of divers towns make me their chairman; and a majority of the Great and General Court are firm supporters of my interest. The governor and I, too—But these are state secrets.”

“Can this be so?” cried Goodman Brown, with a stare of amazement at his undisturbed companion. “Howbeit, I have nothing to do with the governor and council; they have their own ways, and are no rule for a simple husbandman like me. But, were I to go on with thee, how should I meet the eye of that good old man, our minister, at Salem village? Oh, his voice would make me tremble both Sabbath day and lecture day.”

Thus far the elder traveller had listened with due gravity; but now burst into a fit of irrepressible mirth, shaking himself so violently that his snake-like staff actually seemed to wriggle in sympathy.

“Ha! ha! ha!” shouted he again and again; then composing himself, “Well, go on, Goodman Brown, go on; but, prithee, don't kill me with laughing.”

“Well, then, to end the matter at once,” said Goodman Brown, considerably nettled, “there is my wife, Faith. It would break her dear little heart; and I'd rather break my own.”

“Nay, if that be the case,” answered the other, “e'en go thy ways, Goodman Brown. I would not for twenty old women like the one hobbling before us that Faith should come to any harm.”

As he spoke he pointed his staff at a female figure on the path, in whom Goodman Brown recognized a very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser, jointly with the minister and Deacon Gookin.

“A marvel, truly, that Goody Cloyse should be so far in the wilderness at nightfall,” said he. “But with your leave, friend, I shall take a cut through the woods until we have left this Christian woman behind. Being a stranger to you, she might ask whom I was consorting with and whither I was going.”

“Be it so,” said his fellow-traveller. “Betake you to the woods, and let me keep the path.”

Accordingly the young man turned aside, but took care to watch his companion, who advanced softly along the road until he had come within a staff's length of the old dame. She, meanwhile, was making the best of her way, with singular speed for so aged a woman, and mumbling some indistinct words—a prayer, doubtless—as she went. The traveller put forth his staff and touched her withered neck with what seemed the serpent's tail.

“The devil!” screamed the pious old lady.

“Then Goody Cloyse knows her old friend?” observed the traveller, confronting her and leaning on his writhing stick.

“Ah, forsooth, and is it your worship indeed?” cried the good dame. “Yea, truly is it, and in the very image of my old gossip, Goodman Brown, the grandfather of the silly fellow that now is. But—would your worship believe it?—my broomstick hath strangely disappeared, stolen, as I suspect, by that unchaged witch, Goody Cory, and that, too, when I was all anointed with the juice of smallage, and cinquefoil, and wolf’s bane.”

“Mingled with fine wheat and the fat of a new-born babe,” said the shape of old Goodman Brown.

“Ah, your worship knows the recipe,” cried the old lady, cackling aloud. “So, as I was saying, being all ready for the meeting, and no horse to ride on, I made up my mind to foot it; for they tell me there is a nice young man to be taken into communion to-night. But now your good worship will lend me your arm, and we shall be there in a twinkling.”

“That can hardly be,” answered her friend. “I may not spare you my arm, Goody Cloyse; but here is my staff, if you will.”

So saying, he threw it down at her feet, where, perhaps, it assumed life, being one of the rods which its owner had formerly lent to the Egyptian magi. Of this fact, however, Goodman Brown could not take cognizance. He had cast up his eyes in astonishment, and, looking down again, beheld neither Goody Cloyse nor the serpentine staff, but his fellow-traveller alone, who waited for him as calmly as if nothing had happened.

“That old woman taught me my catechism,” said the young man; and there was a world of meaning in this simple comment.

They continued to walk onward, while the elder traveller exhorted his companion to make good speed and persevere in the path, discoursing so aptly that his arguments seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of his auditor than to be suggested by himself. As they went, he plucked a branch of maple to serve for a walking stick, and began to strip it of the twigs and little boughs, which were wet with evening dew. The moment his fingers touched them they became strangely withered and dried up as with a week’s sunshine. Thus the pair proceeded, at a good free pace, until suddenly, in a gloomy hollow of the road, Goodman Brown sat himself down on the stump of a tree and refused to go any farther.

“Friend,” said he, stubbornly, “my mind is made up. Not another step will I budge on this errand. What if a wretched old woman do choose to go to the devil when I thought she was going to heaven: is that any reason why I should quit my dear Faith and go after her?”

“You will think better of this by and by,” said his acquaintance, composedly. “Sit here and rest yourself a while; and when you feel like moving again, there is my staff to help you along.”

Without more words, he threw his companion the maple stick, and was as speedily out of sight as if he had vanished into the deepening gloom. The young man sat a few moments by the roadside, applauding himself greatly, and thinking with how clear a conscience he should meet the minister in his morning walk, nor shrink from the eye of good old Deacon Gookin. And what calm sleep would be his that very night, which was to have been spent so wickedly, but so purely and sweetly now, in the arms of Faith! Amidst these pleasant and praiseworthy meditations, Goodman Brown heard the tramp of horses along the road, and deemed it advisable to conceal himself within the verge of the forest, conscious of the guilty purpose that had brought him thither, though now so happily turned from it.

On came the hoof tramps and the voices of the riders, two grave old voices, conversing soberly as they drew near. These mingled sounds appeared to pass along the road, within a few yards of the young man's hiding-place; but, owing doubtless to the depth of the gloom at that particular spot, neither the travellers nor their steeds were visible. Though their figures brushed the small boughs by the wayside, it could not be seen that they intercepted, even for a moment, the faint gleam from the strip of bright sky athwart which they must have passed. Goodman Brown alternately crouched and stood on tiptoe, pulling aside the branches and thrusting forth his head as far as he durst without discerning so much as a shadow. It vexed him the more, because he could have sworn, were such a thing possible, that he recognized the voices of the minister and Deacon Gookin, jogging along quietly, as they were wont to do, when bound to some ordination or ecclesiastical council. While yet within hearing, one of the riders stopped to pluck a switch.

"Of the two, reverend sir," said the voice like the deacon's, "I had rather miss an ordination dinner than to-night's meeting. They tell me that some of our community are to be here from Falmouth and beyond, and others from Connecticut and Rhode Island, besides several of the Indian powwows, who, after their fashion, know almost as much deviltry as the best of us. Moreover, there is a goodly young woman to be taken into communion."

"Mighty well, Deacon Gookin!" replied the solemn old tones of the minister. "Spur up, or we shall be late. Nothing can be done, you know, until I get on the ground."

The hoofs clattered again; and the voices, talking so strangely in the empty air, passed on through the forest, where no church had ever been gathered or solitary Christian prayed. Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying so deep into the heathen wilderness? Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree for support, being ready to sink down on the ground, faint and overburdened with the heavy sickness of his heart. He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a heaven above him. Yet there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it.

"With heaven above and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!" cried Goodman Brown.

While he still gazed upward into the deep arch of the firmament and had lifted his hands to pray, a cloud, though no wind was stirring, hurried across the zenith and hid the brightening stars. The blue sky was still visible, except directly overhead, where this black mass of cloud was sweeping swiftly northward. Aloft in the air, as if from the depths of the cloud, came a confused and doubtful sound of voices. Once the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accents of towns-people of his own, men and women, both pious and ungodly, many of whom he had met at the communion table, and had seen others rioting at the tavern. The next moment, so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest, whispering without a wind. Then came a stronger swell of those familiar tones, heard daily in the sunshine at Salem village, but never until now from a cloud of night. There was one voice of a young woman, uttering lamentations, yet with an uncertain sorrow, and entreating for some favor, which, perhaps, it would grieve her to obtain; and all the unseen multitude, both saints and sinners, seemed to encourage her onward.

“Faith!” shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation; and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying, “Faith! Faith!” as if bewildered wretches were seeking her all through the wilderness.

The cry of grief, rage, and terror was yet piercing the night, when the unhappy husband held his breath for a response. There was a scream, drowned immediately in a louder murmur of voices, fading into far-off laughter, as the dark cloud swept away, leaving the clear and silent sky above Goodman Brown. But something fluttered lightly down through the air and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a pink ribbon.

“My Faith is gone!” cried he, after one stupefied moment. “There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given.”

And, maddened with despair, so that he laughed loud and long, did Goodman Brown grasp his staff and set forth again, at such a rate that he seemed to fly along the forest path rather than to walk or run. The road grew wilder and drearier and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil. The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds—the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians; while sometimes the wind tolled like a distant church bell, and sometimes gave a broad roar around the traveller, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn. But he was himself the chief horror of the scene, and shrank not from its other horrors.

“Ha! ha! ha!” roared Goodman Brown when the wind laughed at him.

“Let us hear which will laugh loudest. Think not to frighten me with your devilry. Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powwow, come devil himself, and here comes Goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fear you.”

In truth, all through the haunted forest there could be nothing more frightful than the figure of Goodman Brown. On he flew among the black pines, brandishing his staff with frenzied gestures, now giving vent to an inspiration of horrid blasphemy, and now shouting forth such laughter as set all the echoes of the forest laughing like demons around him. The fiend in his own shape is less hideous than when he rages in the breast of man. Thus sped the demoniac on his course, until, quivering among the trees, he saw a red light before him, as when the felled trunks and branches of a clearing have been set on fire, and throw up their lurid blaze against the sky, at the hour of midnight. He paused, in a lull of the tempest that had driven him onward, and heard the swell of what seemed a hymn, rolling solemnly from a distance with the weight of many voices. He knew the tune; it was a familiar one in the choir of the village meeting-house. The verse died heavily away, and was lengthened by a chorus, not of human voices, but of all the sounds of the benighted wilderness pealing in awful harmony together. Goodman Brown cried out, and his cry was lost to his own ear by its unison with the cry of the desert.

In the interval of silence he stole forward until the light glared full upon his eyes. At one extremity of an open space, hemmed in by the dark wall of the forest, arose a rock, bearing some rude, natural resemblance either to an altar or a pulpit, and surrounded by four blazing pines, their tops aflame, their stems untouched, like candles at an evening meeting. The mass of foliage that had overgrown the summit of the rock was all on fire, blazing high into the night and fitfully illuminating the whole field. Each pendent twig and leafy festoon was in a blaze. As the red light arose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow, and again grew, as it were, out of the darkness, peopling the heart of the solitary woods at once.

“A grave and dark-clad company,” quoth Goodman Brown.

In truth they were such. Among them, quivering to and fro between gloom and splendor, appeared faces that would be seen next day at the council board of the province, and others which, Sabbath after Sabbath, looked devoutly heavenward, and benignantly over the crowded pews, from the holiest pulpits in the land. Some affirm that the lady of the governor was there. At least there were high dames well known to her, and wives of honored husbands, and widows, a great multitude, and ancient maidens, all of excellent repute, and fair young girls, who trembled lest their mothers should espy them. Either the sudden gleams of light flashing over the obscure field bedazzled Goodman Brown, or he recognized a score of the church members of Salem village famous for their especial sanctity. Good old Deacon Gookin had arrived, and waited at the skirts of that venerable saint, his revered pastor. But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable, and pious people, these elders of the church, these chaste dames and dewy virgins, there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes. It was strange to see that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints. Scattered also among their

pale-faced enemies were the Indian priests, or powwows, who had often scared their native forest with more hideous incantations than any known to English witchcraft.

“But where is Faith?” thought Goodman Brown; and, as hope came into his heart, he trembled.

Another verse of the hymn arose, a slow and mournful strain, such as the pious love, but joined to words which expressed all that our nature can conceive of sin, and darkly hinted at far more. Unfathomable to mere mortals is the lore of fiends. Verse after verse was sung; and still the chorus of the desert swelled between like the deepest tone of a mighty organ; and with the final peal of that dreadful anthem there came a sound, as if the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of the unconcerted wilderness were mingling and according with the voice of guilty man in homage to the prince of all. The four blazing pines threw up a loftier flame, and obscurely discovered shapes and visages of horror on the smoke wreaths above the impious assembly. At the same moment the fire on the rock shot redly forth and formed a glowing arch above its base, where now appeared a figure. With reverence be it spoken, the figure bore no slight similitude, both in garb and manner, to some grave divine of the New England churches.

“Bring forth the converts!” cried a voice that echoed through the field and rolled into the forest.

At the word, Goodman Brown stepped forth from the shadow of the trees and approached the congregation, with whom he felt a loathful brotherhood by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart. He could have well-nigh sworn that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance, looking downward from a smoke wreath, while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother? But he had no power to retreat one step, nor to resist, even in thought, when the minister and good old Deacon Gookin seized his arms and led him to the blazing rock. Thither came also the slender form of a veiled female, led between Goody Cloyse, that pious teacher of the catechism, and Martha Carrier, who had received the devil’s promise to be queen of hell. A rampant hag was she. And there stood the proselytes beneath the canopy of fire.

“Welcome, my children,” said the dark figure, “to the communion of your race. Ye have found thus young your nature and your destiny. My children, look behind you!”

They turned; and flashing forth, as it were, in a sheet of flame, the fiend worshippers were seen; the smile of welcome gleamed darkly on every visage.

“There,” resumed the sable form, “are all whom ye have revered from youth. Ye deemed them holier than yourselves, and shrank from your own sin, contrasting it with their lives of righteousness and prayerful aspirations heavenward. Yet here are they all in my worshipping assembly. This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds: how

hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widows' weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their fathers' wealth; and how fair damsels—blush not, sweet ones—have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest to an infant's funeral. By the sympathy of your human hearts for sin ye shall scent out all the places—whether in church, bedchamber, street, field, or forest—where crime has been committed, and shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood spot. Far more than this. It shall be yours to penetrate, in every bosom, the deep mystery of sin, the fountain of all wicked arts, and which inexhaustibly supplies more evil impulses than human power—than my power at its utmost—can make manifest in deeds. And now, my children, look upon each other.”

They did so; and, by the blaze of the hell-kindled torches, the wretched man beheld his Faith, and the wife her husband, trembling before that unhallowed altar.

“Lo, there ye stand, my children,” said the figure, in a deep and solemn tone, almost sad with its despairing awfulness, as if his once angelic nature could yet mourn for our miserable race. “Depending upon one another's hearts, ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream. Now are ye undeceived. Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome again, my children, to the communion of your race.”

“Welcome,” repeated the fiend worshippers, in one cry of despair and triumph.

And there they stood, the only pair, as it seemed, who were yet hesitating on the verge of wickedness in this dark world. A basin was hollowed, naturally, in the rock. Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or, perchance, a liquid flame? Herein did the shape of evil dip his hand and prepare to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own. The husband cast one look at his pale wife, and Faith at him. What polluted wretches would the next glance show them to each other, shuddering alike at what they disclosed and what they saw!

“Faith! Faith!” cried the husband, “look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one.”

Whether Faith obeyed he knew not. Hardly had he spoken when he found himself amid calm night and solitude, listening to a roar of the wind which died heavily away through the forest. He staggered against the rock, and felt it chill and damp; while a hanging twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew.

The next morning young Goodman Brown came slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around him like a bewildered man. The good old minister was taking a walk along the graveyard to get an appetite for breakfast and meditate his sermon, and bestowed a blessing, as he passed, on Goodman Brown. He shrank from the venerable saint as if to avoid an anathema. Old Deacon Gookin was at domestic worship, and the holy words of his

prayer were heard through the open window. "What God doth the wizard pray to?" quoth Goodman Brown. Goody Cloyse, that excellent old Christian, stood in the early sunshine at her own lattice, catechizing a little girl who had brought her a pint of morning's milk. Goodman Brown snatched away the child as from the grasp of the fiend himself. Turning the corner by the meeting-house, he spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy at sight of him that she skipped along the street and almost kissed her husband before the whole village. But Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting.

Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?

Be it so if you will; but, alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream. On the Sabbath day, when the congregation were singing a holy psalm, he could not listen because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear and drowned all the blessed strain. When the minister spoke from the pulpit with power and fervid eloquence, and, with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers. Often, waking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith; and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away. And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbors not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "Young Goodman Brown." In *Mosses from an Old Manse and Other Stories*. 1846; Project Gutenberg, September 13, 2008.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/512/512-h/512-h.htm#goodman>

"Young Goodman Brown" Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. I suggested in this chapter that the name Faith could be allegorical. The title Goodman, though common during the period, could also be allegorical. If this is an allegory, what does the situation represent, and how do each of the characters play into it? Do you see any other obvious symbols in the story?
2. Hawthorne sets his story in the Puritan village of Salem. What do you know about the Puritans? What do you know about the history of Salem? How do these contexts influence your understanding of the story?

3. Hawthorne is often considered a Romantic writer. Romantic thinkers often suggest that we can look into nature to find Truth. How is nature depicted in the story? Does looking into the natural world reveal truth to Goodman Brown?
4. The man Goodman Brown meets in the forest tells him that he is well-acquainted with all the most influential and upstanding people in New England. Do we believe him? What point is he trying to make by telling Goodman Brown about these relationships?
5. At the end of the story, the narrator suggests that Goodman Brown may have dreamed the ritual in the woods. Do you think the events were a dream, or do you think they were real? How does your interpretation of the story change based on that discrepancy?
6. After the night in the woods, Goodman Brown is miserable for the rest of his life. Why? How do you interpret the end of the story.

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E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake) (1861-1913)

A Red Girl's Reasoning (1893)

"Be pretty good to her, Charlie, my boy, or she'll balk sure as shooting."

That was what old Jimmy Robinson said to his brand new son-in-law, while they waited for the bride to reappear.

"Oh! you bet, there's no danger of much else. I'll be good to her, help me Heaven," replied Charlie McDonald, brightly.

"Yes, of course you will," answered the old man, "but don't you forget, there's a good big bit of her mother in her, and," closing his left eye significantly, "you don't understand these Indians as I do."

"But I'm just as fond of them, Mr. Robinson," Charlie said assertively, "and I get on with them too, now, don't I?"

“Yes, pretty well for a town boy; but when you have lived forty years among these people, as I have done; when you have had your wife as long as I have had mine—for there’s no getting over it, Christine’s disposition is as native as her mother’s, every bit—and perhaps when you’ve owned for eighteen years a daughter as dutiful, as loving, as fearless, and, alas! as obstinate as that little piece you are stealing away from me to-day—I tell you, youngster, you’ll know more than you know now. It is kindness for kindness, bullet for bullet, blood for blood. Remember, what you are, she will be,” and the old Hudson Bay trader scrutinized Charlie McDonald’s face like a detective.

It was a happy, fair face, good to look at, with a certain ripple of dimples somewhere about the mouth, and eyes that laughed out the very sunniness of their owner’s soul. There was not a severe nor yet a weak line anywhere. He was a well-meaning young fellow, happily disposed, and a great favorite with the tribe at Robinson’s Post, whither he had gone in the service of the Department of Agriculture, to assist the local agent through the tedium of a long census-taking.

As a boy he had had the Indian relic-hunting craze, as a youth he had studied Indian archaeology and folk-lore, as a man he consummated his predilections for Indianology, by loving, winning and marrying the quiet little daughter of the English trader, who himself had married a native woman twenty years ago. The country was all backwoods, and the Post miles and miles from even the semblance of civilization, and the lonely young Englishman’s heart had gone out to the girl who, apart from speaking a very few words of English, was utterly uncivilized and uncultured, but had withal that marvellously innate refinement so universally possessed by the higher tribes of North American Indians.

Like all her race, observant, intuitive, having a horror of ridicule, consequently quick at acquirement and teachable in mental and social habits, she had developed from absolute pagan indifference into a sweet, elderly Christian woman, whose broken English, quiet manner, and still handsome copper-colored face, were the joy of old Robinson’s declining years.

He had given their daughter Christine all the advantages of his own learning—which, if truthfully told, was not universal; but the girl had a fair common education, and the native adaptability to progress.

She belonged to neither and still to both types of the cultured Indian. The solemn, silent, almost heavy manner of the one so commingled with the gesticulating Frenchiness and vivacity of the other, that one unfamiliar with native Canadian life would find it difficult to determine her nationality.

She looked very pretty to Charles McDonald’s loving eyes, as she reappeared in the doorway, holding her mother’s hand and saying some happy words of farewell. Personally she looked much the same as her sisters, all Canada through, who are the offspring of red and white parentage—olive-complexioned, gray-eyed, black-haired, with figure slight and

delicate, and the wistful, unfathomable expression in her whole face that turns one so heart-sick as they glance at the young Indians of to-day—it is the forerunner too frequently of “the white man’s disease,” consumption—but McDonald was pathetically in love, and thought her the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life.

There had not been much of a wedding ceremony. The priest had cantered through the service in Latin, pronounced the benediction in English, and congratulated the “happy couple” in Indian, as a compliment to the assembled tribe in the little amateur structure that did service at the post as a sanctuary.

But the knot was tied as firmly and indissolubly as if all Charlie McDonald’s swell city friends had crushed themselves up against the chancel to congratulate him, and in his heart he was deeply thankful to escape the flower-pelting, white gloves, rice-throwing, and ponderous stupidity of a breakfast, and indeed all the regulation gimcracks of the usual marriage celebrations, and it was with a hand trembling with absolute happiness that he assisted his little Indian wife into the old muddy buckboard that, hitched to an underbred-looking pony, was to convey them over the first stages of their journey. Then came more adieus, some hand-clasping, old Jimmy Robinson looking very serious just at the last, Mrs. Jimmy, stout, stolid, betraying nothing of visible emotion, and then the pony, rough-shod and shaggy, trudged on, while mutual hand-waves were kept up until the old Hudson Bay Post dropped out of sight, and the buckboard with its lightsome load of hearts deliriously happy, jogged on over the uneven trail.

* * * * *

She was “all the rage” that winter at the provincial capital. The men called her a “deuced fine little woman.” The ladies said she was “just the sweetest wildflower.” Whereas she was really but an ordinary, pale, dark girl who spoke slowly and with a strong accent, who danced fairly well, sang acceptably, and never stirred outside the door without her husband.

Charlie was proud of her; he was proud that she had “taken” so well among his friends, proud that she bore herself so complacently in the drawing-rooms of the wives of pompous Government officials, but doubly proud of her almost abject devotion to him. If ever human being was worshipped that being was Charlie McDonald; it could scarcely have been otherwise, for the almost godlike strength of his passion for that little wife of his would have mastered and melted a far more invincible citadel than an already affectionate woman’s heart.

Favorites socially, McDonald and his wife went everywhere. In fashionable circles she was “new”—a potent charm to acquire popularity, and the little velvet-clad figure was always the centre of interest among all the women in the room. She always dressed in velvet. No woman in Canada, has she but the faintest dash of native blood in her veins, but loves velvets and silks. As beef to the Englishman, wine to the Frenchman, fads to the Yankee, so are velvet and silk to the Indian girl, be she wild as prairie grass, be she on the borders

of civilization, or, having stepped within its boundary, mounted the steps of culture even under its superficial heights.

“Such a dolling little appil blossom,” said the wife of a local M.P., who brushed up her etiquette and English once a year at Ottawa. “Does she always laugh so sweetly, and gobble you up with those great big gray eyes of her, when you are togetheah at home, Mr. McDonald? If so, I should think youah pooah brothah would feel himself terrible *de trop*.”

He laughed lightly. “Yes, Mrs. Stuart, there are not two of Christie; she is the same at home and abroad, and as for Joe, he doesn’t mind us a bit; he’s no end fond of her.”

“I’m very glad he is. I always fancied he did not care for her, d’you know.”

If ever a blunt woman existed it was Mrs. Stuart. She really meant nothing, but her remark bothered Charlie. He was fond of his brother, and jealous for Christie’s popularity. So that night when he and Joe were having a pipe, he said:

“I’ve never asked you yet what you thought of her, Joe.” A brief pause, then Joe spoke. “I’m glad she loves you.”

“Why?”

“Because that girl has but two possibilities regarding humanity—love or hate.”

“Humph! Does she love or hate *you*?”

“Ask her.”

“You talk bosh. If she hated you, you’d get out. If she loved you I’d *make* you get out.”

Joe McDonald whistled a little, then laughed.

“Now that we are on the subject, I might as well ask—honestly, old man, wouldn’t you and Christie prefer keeping house alone to having me always around?”

“Nonsense, sheer nonsense. Why, thunder, man, Christie’s no end fond of you, and as for me—you surely don’t want assurances from me?”

“No, but I often think a young couple—”

“Young couple be blowed! After a while when they want you and your old surveying chains, and spindle-legged tripod telescope kickshaws, farther west, I venture to say the little woman will cry her eyes out—won’t you, Christie?”” This last in a higher tone, as through clouds of tobacco smoke he caught sight of his wife passing the doorway.

She entered. “Oh, no, I would not cry; I never do cry, but I would be heart-sore to lose you Joe, and apart from that”—a little wickedly—“you may come in handy for an exchange some day, as Charlie does always say when he hoards up duplicate relics.”

“Are Charlie and I duplicates?”

“Well—not exactly”—her head a little to one side, and eyeing them both merrily, while she slipped softly on to the arm of her husband’s chair—“but, in the event of Charlie’s failing me”—everyone laughed then. The “some day” that she spoke of was nearer than they thought. It came about in this wise.

There was a dance at the Lieutenant-Governor’s, and the world and his wife were there. The nobs were in great feather that night, particularly the women, who flaunted about in new gowns and much splendor. Christie McDonald had a new gown also, but wore it with the utmost unconcern, and if she heard any of the flattering remarks made about her she at least appeared to disregard them.

“I never dreamed you could wear blue so splendidly,” said Captain Logan, as they sat out a dance together.

“Indeed she can, though,” interposed Mrs. Stuart, halting in one of her gracious sweeps down the room with her husband’s private secretary.

“Don’t shout so, captain. I can hear every sentence you utter—of course Mrs. McDonald can wear blue—she has a morning gown of cadet blue that she is a picture in.”

“You are both very kind,” said Christie. “I like blue; it is the color of all the Hudson’s Bay posts, and the factor’s residence is always decorated in blue.”

“Is it really? How interesting—do tell us some more of your old home, Mrs. McDonald; you so seldom speak of your life at the post, and we fellows so often wish to hear of it all,” said Logan eagerly.

“Why do you not ask me of it, then?”

“Well—er, I’m sure I don’t know; I’m fully interested in the Ind—in your people—your mother’s people, I mean, but it always seems so personal, I suppose; and—a—a—”

“Perhaps you are, like all other white people, afraid to mention my nationality to me.”

The captain winced and Mrs. Stuart laughed uneasily. Joe McDonald was not far off, and he was listening, and chuckling, and saying to himself, “That’s you, Christie, lay ’em out; it won’t hurt ’em to know how they appear once in a while.”

“Well, Captain Logan,” she was saying, “what is it you would like to hear—of my people, or my parents, or myself?”

“All, all, my dear,” cried Mrs. Stuart clamorously. “I’ll speak for him—tell us of yourself and your mother—your father is delightful, I am sure—but then he is only an ordinary Englishman, not half as interesting as a foreigner, or—or, perhaps I should say, a native.”

Christie laughed. "Yes," she said, "my father often teases my mother now about how *very* native she was when he married her; then, how could she have been otherwise? She did not know a word of English, and there was not another English-speaking person besides my father and his two companions within sixty miles."

"Two companions, eh? one a Catholic priest and the other a wine merchant, I suppose, and with your father in the Hudson Bay, they were good representatives of the pioneers in the New World," remarked Logan, waggishly.

"Oh, no, they were all Hudson Bay men. There were no rumsellers and no missionaries in that part of the country then."

Mrs. Stuart looked puzzled. "No *missionaries*?" she repeated with an odd intonation.

Christie's insight was quick. There was a peculiar expression of interrogation in the eyes of her listeners, and the girl's blood leapt angrily up into her temples as she said hurriedly, "I know what you mean; I know what you are thinking. You were wondering how my parents were married—"

"Well--er, my dear, it seems peculiar—if there was no priest, and no magistrate, why—a—" Mrs. Stuart paused awkwardly.

"The marriage was performed by Indian rites," said Christie.

"Oh, do tell me about it; is the ceremony very interesting and quaint—are your chieftains anything like Buddhist priests?" It was Logan who spoke.

"Why, no," said the girl in amazement at that gentleman's ignorance. "There is no ceremony at all, save a feast. The two people just agree to live only with and for each other, and the man takes his wife to his home, just as you do. There is no ritual to bind them; they need none; an Indian's word was his law in those days, you know."

Mrs. Stuart stepped backwards. "Ah!" was all she said. Logan removed his eye-glass and stared blankly at Christie. "And did McDonald marry you in this singular fashion?" He questioned.

"Oh, no, we were married by Father O'Leary. Why do you ask?"

"Because if he had, I'd have blown his brain out to-morrow."

Mrs. Stuart's partner, who had hitherto been silent, coughed and began to twirl his cuff stud nervously, but nobody took any notice of him. Christie had risen, slowly, ominously—risen, with the dignity and pride of an empress.

"Captain Logan," she said, "what do you dare to say to me? What do you dare to mean? Do you presume to think it would not have been lawful for Charlie to marry me according to

my people's rites? Do you for one instant dare to question that my parents were not as legally—"

"Don't, dear, don't," interrupted Mrs. Stuart hurriedly; "it is bad enough now, goodness knows; don't make—" Then she broke off blindly. Christie's eyes glared at the mumbling woman, at her uneasy partner, at the horrified captain. Then they rested on the McDonald brothers, who stood within earshot, Joe's face scarlet, her husband's white as ashes, with something in his eyes she had never seen before. It was Joe who saved the situation. Stepping quickly across towards his sister-in-law, he offered her his arm, saying, "The next dance is ours, I think, Christie."

Then Logan pulled himself together, and attempted to carry Mrs. Stuart off for the waltz, but for once in her life that lady had lost her head. "It is shocking!" she said, "outrageously shocking! I wonder if they told Mr. McDonald before he married her!" Then looking hurriedly round, she too saw the young husband's face—and knew that they had not.

"Humph! deuced nice kettle of fish—and poor old Charlie has always thought so much of honorable birth."

Logan thought he spoke in an undertone, but "poor old Charlie" heard him. He followed his wife and brother across the room. "Joe," he said, "will you see that a trap is called?" Then to Christie, "Joe will see that you get home all right." He wheeled on his heel then and left the ball-room.

Joe did see.

He tucked a poor, shivering, pallid little woman into a cab, and wound her bare throat up in the scarlet velvet cloak that was hanging uselessly over her arm. She crouched down beside him, saying, "I am so cold, Joe; I am so cold," but she did not seem to know enough to wrap herself up. Joe felt all through this long drive that nothing this side of Heaven would be so good as to die, and he was glad when the little voice at his elbow said, "What is he so angry at, Joe?"

"I don't know exactly, dear," he said gently, "but I think it was what you said about this Indian marriage."

"But why should I not have said it? Is there anything wrong about it?" she asked pitifully.

"Nothing, that I can see—there was no other way; but Charlie is very angry, and you must be brave and forgiving with him, Christie, dear."

"But I did never see him like that before, did you?"

"Once."

"When?"

“Oh, at college, one day, a boy tore his prayer book in half, and threw it into the grate, just to be mean, you know. Our mother had given it to him at his confirmation.”

“And did he look so?”

“About, but it all blew over in a day—Charlie's tempers are short and brisk. Just don't take any notice of him; run off to bed, and he'll have forgotten it by the morning.”

They reached home at last. Christie said goodnight quietly, going directly to her room. Joe went to his room also, filled a pipe and smoked for an hour. Across the passage he could hear her slippered feet pacing up and down, up and down the length of her apartment. There was something panther-like in those restless footfalls, a meaning velvetyness that made him shiver, and again he wished he were dead—or elsewhere.

After a time the hall door opened, and someone came upstairs, along the passage, and to the little woman's room. As he entered, she turned and faced him.

“Christie,” he said harshly, “do you know what you have done?”

“Yes,” taking a step nearer him, her whole soul springing up into her eyes, “I have angered you, Charlie, and—”

“Angered me? You have disgraced me; and, moreover, you have disgraced yourself and both your parents.”

“*Disgraced?*”

“Yes, *disgraced*; you have literally declared to the whole city that your father and mother were never married, and that you are the child of—what shall we call it—love? certainly not legality.”

Across the hallway sat Joe McDonald, his blood freezing; but it leapt into every vein like fire at the awful anguish in the little voice that cried simply, “Oh! Charlie!”

“How could you do it, how could you do it, Christie, without shame either for yourself or for me, let alone your parents?”

The voice was like an angry demon's—not a trace was there in it of the yellow-haired, blue-eyed, laughing-lipped boy who had driven away so gaily to the dance five hours before.

“Shame? Why should I be ashamed of the rites of my people any more than you should be ashamed of the customs of yours—of a marriage more sacred and holy than half of your white man's mockeries.”

It was the voice of another nature in the girl—the love and the pleading were dead in it.

“Do you mean to tell me, Charlie--you who have studied my race and their laws for years--do you mean to tell me that, because there was no priest and no magistrate, my mother was not married? Do you mean to say that all my forefathers, for hundreds of years back, have been illegally born? If so, you blacken my ancestry beyond—beyond— beyond all reason.”

“No, Christie, I would not be so brutal as that; but your father and mother live in more civilized times. Father O’Leary has been at the post for nearly twenty years. Why was not your father straight enough to have the ceremony performed when he *did* get the chance?”

The girl turned upon him with the face of a fury. “Do you suppose,” she almost hissed, “that my mother would be married according to your *white* rites after she had been five years a wife, and I had been born in the meantime? No, a thousand times I say, *no*. When the priest came with his notions of Christianizing, and talked to them of re-marriage by the Church, my mother arose and said, ‘Never—never—I have never had but this one husband; he has had none but me for wife, and to have you re-marry us would be to say as much to the whole world as that we had never been married before. [Fact.] You go away; *I* do not ask that *your* people be re-married; talk not so to me. I *am* married, and you or the Church cannot do or undo it.’”

“Your father was a fool not to insist upon the law, and so was the priest.”

“Law? *My* people have *no* priest, and my nation cringes not to law. Our priest is purity, and our law is honor. Priest? Was there a *priest* at the most holy marriage know to humanity—that stainless marriage whose offspring is the God you white men told my pagan mother of?”

“Christie—you are *worse* than blasphemous; such a profane remark shows how little you understand the sanctity of the Christian faith—”

“I know what I *do* understand; it is that you are hating me because I told some of the beautiful customs of my people to Mrs. Stuart and those men.”

“Pooh! who cares for them? It is not them; the trouble is they won’t keep their mouths shut. Logan’s a cad and will toss the whole tale about at the club to-morrow night; and as for the Stuart woman, I’d like to know how I’m going to take you to Ottawa for presentation and the opening, while she is blabbing the whole miserable scandal in every drawing-room, and I’ll be pointed out as a romantic fool, and you—as worse; I *can’t* understand why your father didn’t tell me before we were married; I at least might have warned you never to mention it.” Something of recklessness rang up through his voice, just as the panther-likeness crept up from her footsteps and couched herself in hers. She spoke in tones quiet, soft, deadly.

“Before we were married! Oh! Charlie, would it have—made—any—difference?”

“God knows,” he said, throwing himself into a chair, his blonde hair ruffled and wet. It was the only boyish thing about him now.

She walked towards him, then halted in the centre of the room. “Charlie McDonald,” she said, and it was as if a stone had spoken, “look up.” He raised his head, startled by her tone. There was a threat in her eyes that, had his rage been less courageous, his pride less bitterly wounded, would have cowed him.

“There was no such time as that before our marriage, for we *are not married now*. Stop,” she said, outstretching her palms against him as he sprang to his feet, “I tell you we are not married. Why should I recognize the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine? According to your own words, my parents should have gone through your church ceremony as well as through an Indian contract; according to *my* words, *we* should go through an Indian contract as well as through a church marriage. If their union is illegal, so is ours. If you think my father is living in dishonor with my mother, my people will think I am living in dishonor with you. How do I know when another nation will come and conquer you as you white men conquered us? And they will have another marriage rite to perform, and they will tell us another truth, that you are not my husband, that you are but disgracing and dishonoring me, that you are keeping me here, not as your wife, but as your—your—*squaw*.”

The terrible word had never passed her lips before, and the blood stained her face to her very temples. She snatched off her wedding ring and tossed it across the room, saying scornfully, “That thing is as empty to me as the Indian rites to you.”

He caught her by the wrists; his small white teeth were locked tightly, his blue eyes blazed into hers.

“Christine, do you dare doubt my honor towards you? *you*, whom I should have died for; do you *dare* to think I have kept you here, not as my wife, but—”

“Oh, God! You are hurting me; you are breaking my arm,” she gasped.

The door was flung open, and Joe McDonald’s sinewy hands clinched like vices on his brother’s shoulders.

“Charlie, you’re mad, mad as the devil. Let go of her this minute.”

The girl staggered backwards as the iron fingers loosed her wrists. “Oh! Joe,” she cried, “I am not his wife, and he says I am born—nameless.”

“Here,” said Joe, shoving his brother towards the door. “Go downstairs till you can collect your senses. If ever a being acted like an infernal fool, you’re the man.”

The young husband looked from one to the other, dazed by his wife’s insult, abandoned to a fit of ridiculously childish temper. Blind as he was with passion, he remembered long

afterwards seeing them standing there, his brother's face darkened with a scowl of anger—his wife, clad in the mockery of her ball dress, her scarlet velvet cloak half covering her bare brown neck and arms, her eyes like flames of fire, her face like a piece of sculptured graystone.

Without a word he flung himself furiously from the room, and immediately afterwards they heard the heavy hall door bang behind him.

“Can I do anything for you, Christie?” asked her brother-in-law calmly.

“No, thank you—unless—I think I would like a drink of water, please.”

He brought her up a goblet filled with wine; her hand did not even tremble as she took it. As for Joe, a demon arose in his soul as he noticed she kept her wrists covered.

“Do you think he will come back?” she said.

“Oh, yes, of course; he'll be all right in the morning. Now go to bed like a good little girl, and—and, I say, Christie, you can call me if you want anything; I'll be right here, you know.”

“Thank you, Joe; you are kind—and good.”

He returned then to his apartment. His pipe was out, but he picked up a newspaper instead, threw himself into an armchair, and in a half-hour was in the land of dreams.

When Charlie came home in the morning, after a six-mile walk into the country and back again, his foolish anger was dead and buried. Logan's “Poor old Charlie” did not ring so distinctly in his ears. Mrs. Stuart's horrified expression had faded considerably from his recollection. He thought only of that surprisingly tall, dark girl, whose eyes looked like coals, whose voice pierced him like a flint-tipped arrow. Ah, well, they would never quarrel again like that, he told himself. She loved him so, and would forgive him after he had talked quietly to her, and told her what an ass he was. She was simple-minded and awfully ignorant to pitch those old Indian laws at him in her fury, but he could not blame her; oh, no, he could not for one moment blame her. He had been terribly severe and unreasonable, and the horrid McDonald temper had got the better of him; and he loved her so. Oh! He loved her so! She would surely feel that, and forgive him, and—He went straight to his wife's room. The blue velvet evening dress lay on the chair into which he had thrown himself when he doomed his life's happiness by those two words, “God knows.” A bunch of dead daffodils and her slippers were on the floor, everything—but Christie.

He went to his brother's bedroom door.

“Joe,” he called, rapping nervously thereon; “Joe, wake up; where's Christie, d'you know?”

“Good Lord, no,” gasped that youth, springing out of his armchair and opening the door. As he did so a note fell from off the handle. Charlie’s face blanched to his very hair while Joe read aloud, his voice weakening at every word:—

“DEAR OLD JOE,—I went into your room at daylight to get that picture of the Post on your bookshelves. I hope you do not mind, but I kissed your hair while your slept; it was so curly, and yellow, and soft, just like his. Good-bye, Joe.

CHRISTIE.”

And when Joe looked into his brother’s face and saw the anguish settle in those laughing blue eyes, the despair that drove the dimples away from that almost girlish mouth; when he realized that this boy was but four-and-twenty years old, and that all his future was perhaps darkened and shadowed for ever, a great, deep sorrow arose in his heart, and he forgot all things, all but the agony that rang up through the voice of the fair, handsome lad as he staggered forward, crying, “Oh! Joe—what shall I do—what shall I do!”

* * * * *

It was months and months before he found her, but during all that time he had never known a hopeless moment; discouraged he often was, but despondent, never. The sunniness of his ever-boyish heart radiated with warmth that would have flooded a much deeper gloom than that which settled within his eager young life. Suffer? ah! Yes, he suffered, not with locked teeth and stony stoicism, not with the masterful self-command, the reserve, the conquered bitterness of the still-water sort of nature, that is supposed to run to such depths. He tried to be bright, and his sweet old boyish self. He would laugh sometimes in a pitiful, pathetic fashion. He took to petting dogs, looking into their large, solemn eyes with his wistful, questioning blue ones; he would kiss them, as women sometimes do, and call them “dear old fellow,” in tones that had tears; and once in the course of his travels while at a little way-station, he discovered a huge St. Bernard imprisoned by some mischance in an empty freight car; the animal was nearly dead from starvation, and it seemed to salve his own sick heart to rescue back the dog’s life. Nobody claimed the big starving creature, the train hands knew nothing of its owner, and gladly handed it over to its deliverer. “Hudson,” he called it, and afterwards when Joe McDonald would relate the story of his brother’s life he invariably terminated it with, “And I really believe that big lumbering brute saved him.” From what, he was never to say.

But all things end, and he heard of her at last. She had never returned to the Post, as he at first thought she would, but had gone to the little town of B——, in Ontario, where she was making her living at embroidery and plain sewing.

The September sun had set redly when at last he reached the outskirts of the town, opened up the wicket gate, and walked up the weedy, unkept path leading to the cottage where she lodged.

Even through the twilight, he could see her there, leaning on the rail of the verandah—oddly enough she had about her shoulders the scarlet velvet cloak she wore when he had flung himself so madly from the room that night.

The moment the lad saw her his heart swelled with a sudden heat, burning moisture leapt into his eyes, and clogged his long, boyish lashes. He bounded up the steps—“Christie,” he said, and the word scorched his lips like audible flame.

She turned to him, and for a second stood magnetized by his passionately wistful face; her peculiar grayish eyes seemed to drink the very life of his unquenchable love, though the tears that suddenly sprang into his seemed to absorb every pulse in his body through those hungry, pleading eyes of his that had, oh! so often been blinded by her kisses when once her whole world lay in their blue depths.

“You will come back to me, Christie, my wife? My wife, you will let me love you again?”

She gave a singular little gasp, and shook her head. “Don’t, oh! don’t,” he cried piteously. “You will come to me, dear? it is all such a bitter mistake—I did not understand. Oh! Christie, I did not understand, and you’ll forgive me, and love me again, won’t you—won’t you?”

“No,” said the girl with quick, indrawn breath.

He dashed the back of his hand across his wet eyelids. His lips were growing numb, and he bungled over the monosyllable “Why?”

“I do not like you,” she answered quietly.

“God! Oh! God, what is there left?”

She did not appear to hear the heart-break in his voice; she stood like one wrapped in sombre thought; no blaze, no tear, nothing in her eyes; no hardness, no tenderness about her mouth. The wind was blowing her cloak aside, and the only visible human life in her whole body was once when he spoke the muscles of her brown arm seemed to contract.

“But, darling, you are mine—*mine*—we are husband and wife! Oh, heaven, you *must* love me, and you *must* come to me again.”

“You cannot *make* me come,” said the icy voice, “neither church, nor law, nor even”—and the voice softened—“nor even love can make a slave of a red girl.”

“Heaven forbid it,” he faltered. “No, Christie, I will never claim you without your love. What reunion would that be? But oh, Christie, you are lying to me, you are lying to yourself, you are lying to heaven.”

She did not move. If only he could touch her he felt as sure of her yielding as he felt sure there was a hereafter. The memory of the times when he had but to lay his hand on

her hair to call a most passionate response from her filled his heart with a torture that choked all words before they reached his lips; at the thought of those days he forgot she was unapproachable, forgot how forbidding were her eyes, how stony her lips. Flinging himself forward, his knee on the chair at her side, his face pressed hardly in the folds of the cloak on her shoulder, he clasped his arms about her with a boyish petulance, saying, "Christie, Christie, my little girl wife, I love you, I love you, and you are killing me."

She quivered from head to foot as his fair, wavy hair brushed her neck, his despairing face sank lower until his cheek, hot as fire, rested on the cool, olive flesh of her arm. A warm moisture oozed up through her skin, and as he felt its glow he looked up. Her teeth, white and cold, were locked over her under lip, and her eyes were as gray stones.

Not murderers alone know the agony of a death sentence.

"Is it all useless? all useless, dear?" he said, with lips starving for hers.

"All useless," she repeated. "I have no love for you now. You forfeited me and my heart months ago, when you said those two words."

His arms fell away from her wearily, he arose mechanically, he placed his little gray checked cap on the back of his yellow curls, the old-time laughter was dead in the blue eyes that now looked scared and haunted, the boyishness and the dimples crept away for ever from the lips that quivered like a child's; he turned from her, but she had looked once into his face as the Law Giver must have looked at the land of Canaan outspread at his feet. She watched him go down the long path and through the picket gate, she watched the big yellowish dog that had waited for him lumber up on to its feet—stretch—then follow him. She was conscious of but two things, the vengeful lie in her soul, and a little space on her arm that his wet lashes had brushed.

* * * * *

It was hours afterwards when he reached his room. He had said nothing, done nothing—what use were words or deeds? Old Jimmy Robinson was right; she had "balked" sure enough.

What a bare, hotelish room it was! He tossed off his coat and sat for ten minutes looking blankly at the sputtering gas jet. Then his whole life, desolate as a desert, loomed up before him with appalling distinctness. Throwing himself on the floor beside his bed, with clasped hands and arms outstretched on the white counterpane, he sobbed. "Oh! God, dear God, I thought you loved me; I thought you'd let me have her again, but you must be tired of me, tired of loving me too. I've nothing left now, nothing! it doesn't seem that I even have you to-night."

He lifted his face then, for his dog, big and clumsy and yellow, was licking at his sleeve.

Johnson, E. Pauline, a.k.a. Tekahionwake. "A Red Girl's Reasoning." In *The Moccasin Maker*. 1913; Project Gutenberg, September 2004.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/6600/old/mcssm10.txt>.

"A Red Girl's Reasoning" Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. At the opening of this story, Charlie has a conversation with his new father-in-law in which the elder man warns him, "what you are, she will be." What do you think Robert meant by this statement? How does this warning reflect on the later events of the story?
2. At one point, the narrator states that Christie, "[l]ike all her race," has "a horror of ridicule" that leads to her being "quick at acquirement and teachable in mental and social habits." Review this passage, looking at the characteristics the narrator assigns to Native Americans. Why would Native Americans develop these specific traits? Do you think the narrator is suggesting that these are biological traits, or could they be socially constructed?
3. In the second paragraph after the first break, the narrator uses the word "proud" four times to describe Charlie's feelings toward Christie. Using the word so many times in this short paragraph likely means the narrator is trying to draw our attention to this word. According to this paragraph, why is Charlie proud of Christie? What does this say about Christie? Charlie?
4. At the party, Mrs. Stuart begins to refer to Christie's mother as a "foreigner," but then corrects herself by using the word "native." We might consider these words to be opposites. What does Mrs. Stuart's slip reveal about her views of Native Americans? Do you think Mrs. Stuart's view represents a commonly-held viewpoint? What does this say about Native Americans' position in this society?
5. Early in the story, Christie jokes that Charlie and his brother are "duplicates," and that she might exchange them if anything happened to Charlie. This conversation invites the reader to compare the brothers. Compare and contrast Charlie and Joe. How does this comparison inform the way you read the story as a whole?
6. At the end of the story, the narrator states that Christie looked on Charlie "as the Law Giver must have looked at the land of Canaan." Do some research into the biblical story of Canaan. What is the narrator saying about Christie's attitude toward Charlie at the end of the story? Given the story's emphasis on following religious doctrine and comparisons between Christian and native religious practices, does this reference take on added significance?

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Kate Chopin (1850-1904)

Désirée's Baby (1893)

As the day was pleasant, Madame Valmondé drove over to L'Abri to see Désirée and the baby.

It made her laugh to think of Désirée with a baby. Why, it seemed but yesterday that Désirée was little more than a baby herself; when Monsieur in riding through the gateway of Valmondé had found her lying asleep in the shadow of the big stone pillar.

The little one awoke in his arms and began to cry for "Dada." That was as much as she could do or say. Some people thought she might have strayed there of her own accord, for she was of the toddling age. The prevailing belief was that she had been purposely left by a party of Texans, whose canvas-covered wagon, late in the day, had crossed the ferry that Coton Maïs kept, just below the plantation. In time Madame Valmondé abandoned every speculation but the one that Désirée had been sent to her by a beneficent Providence to be the child of her affection, seeing that she was without child of the flesh. For the girl grew to be beautiful and gentle, affectionate and sincere,—the idol of Valmondé.

It was no wonder, when she stood one day against the stone pillar in whose shadow she had lain asleep, eighteen years before, that Armand Aubigny riding by and seeing her there, had fallen in love with her. That was the way all the Aubignys fell in love, as if struck by a pistol shot. The wonder was that he had not loved her before; for he had known her since his father brought him home from Paris, a boy of eight, after his mother died there. The passion that awoke in him that day, when he saw her at the gate, swept along like an avalanche, or like a prairie fire, or like anything that drives headlong over all obstacles.

Monsieur Valmondé grew practical and wanted things well considered: that is, the girl's obscure origin. Armand looked into her eyes and did not care. He was reminded that she was nameless. What did it matter about a name when he could give her one of the oldest and proudest in Louisiana? He ordered the corbeille from Paris, and contained himself with what patience he could until it arrived; then they were married.

Madame Valmondé had not seen Désirée and the baby for four weeks. When she reached L'Abri she shuddered at the first sight of it, as she always did. It was a sad looking

place, which for many years had not known the gentle presence of a mistress, old Monsieur Aubigny having married and buried his wife in France, and she having loved her own land too well ever to leave it. The roof came down steep and black like a cowl, reaching out beyond the wide galleries that encircled the yellow stuccoed house. Big, solemn oaks grew close to it, and their thick-leaved, far-reaching branches shadowed it like a pall. Young Aubigny's rule was a strict one, too, and under it his negroes had forgotten how to be gay, as they had been during the old master's easy-going and indulgent lifetime.

The young mother was recovering slowly, and lay full length, in her soft white muslins and laces, upon a couch. The baby was beside her, upon her arm, where he had fallen asleep, at her breast. The yellow nurse woman sat beside a window fanning herself.

Madame Valmondé bent her portly figure over Désirée and kissed her, holding her an instant tenderly in her arms. Then she turned to the child.

"This is not the baby!" she exclaimed, in startled tones. French was the language spoken at Valmondé in those days.

"I knew you would be astonished," laughed Désirée, "at the way he has grown. The little *cochon de lait!* Look at his legs, mamma, and his hands and finger-nails,—real finger-nails. Zandrine had to cut them this morning. Is n't it true, Zandrine?"

The woman bowed her turbaned head majestically, "Mais si, Madame."

"And the way he cries," went on Désirée, "is deafening. Armand heard him the other day as far away as La Blanche's cabin."

Madame Valmondé had never removed her eyes from the child. She lifted it and walked with it over to the window that was lightest. She scanned the baby narrowly, then looked as searchingly at Zandrine, whose face was burned to gaze across the fields.

"Yes, the child has grown, has changed;" said Madame Valmondé, slowly, as she replaced it beside its mother. "What does Armand say?"

Désirée's face became suffused with a glow that was happiness itself.

"Oh, Armand is the proudest father in the parish, I believe, chiefly because it is a boy, to bear his name; though he says not,—that he would have loved a girl as well. But I know it is n't true. I know he says that to please me. And mamma," she added, drawing Madame Valmondé's head down to her, and speaking in a whisper, "he has n't punished one of them—not one of them—since baby is born. Even Négrillon, who pretended to have burnt his leg that he might rest from work—he only, laughed, and said Négrillon was a great scamp. Oh, mamma, I'm so happy; it frightens me."

What Désirée said was true. Marriage, and later the birth of his son, had softened Armand Aubigny's imperious and exacting nature greatly. This was what made the gentle

Désirée so happy, for she loved him desperately. When he frowned she trembled, but loved him. When he smiled, she asked no greater blessing of God. But Armand's dark, handsome face had not often been disfigured by frowns since the day he fell in love with her.

When the baby was about three months old, Désirée awoke one day to the conviction that there was something in the air menacing her peace. It was at first too subtle to grasp. It had only been a disquieting suggestion; an air of mystery among the blacks; unexpected visits from far-off neighbors who could hardly account for their coming. Then a strange, an awful change in her husband's manner, which she dared not ask him to explain. When he spoke to her, it was with averted eyes, from which the old love-light seemed to have gone out. He absented himself from home; and when there, avoided her presence and that of her child, without excuse. And the very spirit of Satan seemed suddenly to take hold of him in his dealings with the slaves. Désirée was miserable enough to die.

She sat in her room, one hot afternoon, in her *peignoir*, listlessly drawing through her fingers the strands of her long, silky brown hair that hung about her shoulders. The baby, half naked, lay asleep upon her own great mahogany bed, that was like a sumptuous throne, with its satin-lined half-canopy. One of La Blanche's little quadroon boys—half naked too—stood fanning the child slowly with a fan of peacock feathers. Désirée's eyes had been fixed absently and sadly upon the baby, while she was striving to penetrate the threatening mist that she felt closing about her. She looked from her child to the boy who stood beside him, and back again; over and over. "Ah!" It was a cry that she could not help; which she was not conscious of having uttered. The blood turned like ice in her veins, and a clammy moisture gathered upon her face.

She tried to speak to the little quadroon boy; but no sound would come, at first. When he heard his name uttered, he looked up, and his mistress was pointing to the door. He laid aside the great, soft fan, and obediently stole away, over the polished floor, on his bare tiptoes.

She stayed motionless, with gaze riveted upon her child, and her face the picture of fright.

Presently her husband entered the room, and without noticing her, went to a table and began to search among some papers which covered it.

"Armand," she called to him, in a voice which must have stabbed him, if he was human. But he did not notice. "Armand," she said again. Then she rose and tottered towards him. "Armand," she panted once more, clutching his arm, "look at our child. What does it mean? tell me."

He coldly but gently loosened her fingers from about his arm and thrust the hand away from him. "Tell me what it means!" she cried despairingly.

“It means,” he answered lightly, “that the child is not white; it means that you are not white.”

A quick conception of all that this accusation meant for her nerved her with unwonted courage to deny it. “It is a lie; it is not true, I am white! Look at my hair, it is brown; and my eyes are gray, Armand, you know they are gray. And my skin is fair,” seizing his wrist. “Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand,” she laughed hysterically.

“As white as La Blanche’s,” he returned cruelly; and went away leaving her alone with their child.

When she could hold a pen in her hand, she sent a despairing letter to Madame Valmondé.

“My mother, they tell me I am not white. Armand has told me I am not white. For God’s sake tell them it is not true. You must know it is not true. I shall die. I must die. I cannot be so unhappy, and live.”

The answer that came was as brief:

“My own Désirée: Come home to Valmondé; back to your mother who loves you. Come with your child.”

When the letter reached Désirée she went with it to her husband’s study, and laid it open upon the desk before which he sat. She was like a stone image: silent, white, motionless after she placed it there.

In silence he ran his cold eyes over the written words. He said nothing. “Shall I go, Armand?” she asked in tones sharp with agonized suspense.

“Yes, go.”

“Do you want me to go?”

“Yes, I want you to go.”

He thought Almighty God had dealt cruelly and unjustly with him; and felt, somehow, that he was paying Him back in kind when he stabbed thus into his wife’s soul. Moreover he no longer loved her, because of the unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name.

She turned away like one stunned by a blow, and walked slowly towards the door, hoping he would call her back.

“Good-by, Armand,” she moaned.

He did not answer her. That was his last blow at fate.

Désirée went in search of her child. Zandrine was pacing the sombre gallery with it. She took the little one from the nurse's arms with no word of explanation, and descending the steps, walked away, under the live-oak branches.

It was an October afternoon; the sun was just sinking. Out in the still fields the negroes were picking cotton.

Désirée had not changed the thin white garment nor the slippers which she wore. Her hair was uncovered and the sun's rays brought a golden gleam from its brown meshes. She did not take the broad, beaten road which led to the far-off plantation of Valmondé. She walked across a deserted field, where the stubble bruised her tender feet, so delicately shod, and tore her thin gown to shreds.

She disappeared among the reeds and willows that grew thick along the banks of the deep, sluggish bayou; and she did not come back again.

Some weeks later there was a curious scene enacted at L'Abri. In the centre of the smoothly swept back yard was a great bonfire. Armand Aubigny sat in the wide hall-way that commanded a view of the spectacle; and it was he who dealt out to a half dozen negroes the material which kept this fire ablaze.

A graceful cradle of willow, with all its dainty furbishings, was laid upon the pyre, which had already been fed with the richness of a priceless *layette*. Then there were silk gowns, and velvet and satin ones added to these; laces, too, and embroideries; bonnets and gloves; for the *corbeille* had been of rare quality.

The last thing to go was a tiny bundle of letters; innocent little scribblings that Désirée had sent to him during the days of their espousal. There was the remnant of one back in the drawer from which he took them. But it was not Désirée's; it was part of an old letter from his mother to his father. He read it. She was thanking God for the blessing of her husband's love:—

“But, above all,” she wrote, “night and day, I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery.”

Chopin, Kate. “Désirée’s Baby.” In *Bayou Folk*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, 1894; Project Gutenberg, August 22, 2014. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/46650/46650-h/46650-h.htm#DESIREES_BABY

“Désirée’s Baby” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. When Armand decides to marry Désirée, he is “reminded that she is nameless,” while he has “one of the oldest and proudest in Louisiana.” What is the significance placed on names in this passage? How does the importance placed on names relate to the events later and at the end of the story?
2. Early in the story, the narrator notes that Armand’s mother never wanted to leave Paris to come to L’Abri. Given what we learn at the end of the story, can we make any assumptions about why she desired to stay in France? What can we say about the relationship between European metropolises and the plantations of the American south as outlined in this story?
3. Throughout the story, Armand’s treatment of the slaves at L’Abri changes from cruel to kind and back again. What accounts for this change in behavior? What is the relationship between the source of Armand’s mood changes and his shift in attitude toward the slaves?
4. When Désirée protests to Armand that her skin is white, he replies, “As white as La Blanche’s.” Who is La Blanche? What does the name La Blanche mean? What does the existence of La Blanche mean for this antebellum society’s ideas about race and skin color?
5. Throughout the story, Désirée is associated with statuary. She is found by a stone pillar, described as “the idol of Valmondé,” and when she reads the letter from Madame Valmondé, she sits still “like a stone image.” How does this imagery reflect on the larger themes of the story? What might it say about conceptions of gender or race in this antebellum southern society?
6. At the end of the story, rather than going home to Valmondé, Désirée takes her child and walks off into the bayou. What does this decision say about Désirée’s thoughts about her and her child’s position in society? What do you think will be the ultimate fate of Désirée and her baby?

Attribution:

Rozier, Travis. “Désirée’s Baby Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Story of an Hour (1894)

Read [Story of an Hour](#).

Chopin, Kate. "Story of an Hour." In *Kate Chopin: Complete Novels and Stories*, 756-58. The Library of America, 2000. http://www.loa.org/images/pdf/Chopin_Story_Hour.pdf.

"Story of an Hour" Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. After Mrs. Mallard locks herself in the room, she stares out the window. What does she see outside? What is the significance of this imagery?
2. When Mrs. Mallard first notices the feeling of joy arising within herself, she attempts to repress it. Why do you think she tries to deny this feeling? How successful is this attempt?
3. Mrs. Mallard notes that her marriage to Brently was loving, nor does she indicate any major issues such as domestic abuse or infidelity. Find some passages that indicate some of the problems Mrs. Mallard felt in her marriage. Can you summarize why she feels so relieved in a few sentences? Are Mrs. Mallard's complaints specific to her marriage to Brently, or do they apply to the institution of marriage more broadly?
4. What is the role of heart disease in this story? Where do we see images related to her condition, and what do they tell us? What is the significance of the last line of the story?
5. Mrs. Mallard calls love "the unsolved mystery." Describe her understanding of love and its role in marriage. How does it relate to her new feeling of joy?
6. As the website notes, this story is based on the death of Kate Chopin's father. How did the untimely death of her father change life for her widowed mother? Does knowing that Chopin based this story on personal experience change the way you read it?

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James Joyce (1882-1941)

Araby (1914)

North Richmond Street, being blind, 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*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant* and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*. 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, 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* 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*. 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 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*. When I left the kitchen he was about to recite the opening lines of the piece to my aunt.

I held a florin 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 houses 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 *Café Chantant* were written in coloured lamps, two men were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.

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.”

“O, 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.

Joyce, James. “Araby.” In *Dubliners*. 1914; Project Gutenberg, September 2001.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2814/2814-h/2814-h.htm#chap03>.

“Araby” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. The narrator spends the first few paragraphs describing the setting. Does anything stand out in the way the neighborhood, street, or house where the protagonist lives are described?
2. In the second paragraph, the narrator recounts finding several books left behind by the last tenant. Do some light research into the titles of these books. How are they significant to the story?
3. The narrator describes going to the market with his aunt. How does he characterize these trips? He sees the people they encounter as a “throng of foes.” Why? What does this say about how he views himself?
4. What does his encounter with the young woman and the two young men seem to mean for the narrator? He “remark[s] their English accents.” Does this have any significance, given that the story takes place in Ireland?
5. At the end of the story, the narrator sees himself “as a creature driven and derided by vanity.” What does this mean?

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Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923)

Miss Brill (1920)

Although it was so brilliantly fine—the blue sky powdered with gold and great spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques—Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur. The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill from a glass of iced water before you sip, and now and again a leaf came drifting—from nowhere, from the sky. Miss Brill put up her hand and touched her fur. Dear little thing! It was nice to feel it again. She had taken it out of its box that afternoon, shaken out the moth-powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed the life back into the dim little eyes. "What has been happening to me?" said the sad little eyes. Oh, how sweet it was to see them snap at her again from the red eiderdown!... But the nose, which was of some black composition, wasn't at all firm. It must have had a knock, somehow. Never mind—a little dab of black sealing-wax when the time came—when it was absolutely necessary.... Little rogue! Yes, she really felt like that about it. Little rogue biting its tail just by her left ear. She could have taken it off and laid it on her lap and stroked it. She felt a tingling in her hands and arms, but that came from walking, she supposed. And when she breathed, something light and sad—no, not sad, exactly—something gentle seemed to move in her bosom.

There were a number of people out this afternoon, far more than last Sunday. And the band sounded louder and gayer. That was because the Season had begun. For although the band played all the year round on Sundays, out of season it was never the same. It was like some one playing with only the family to listen; it didn't care how it played if there weren't any strangers present. Wasn't the conductor wearing a new coat, too? She was sure it was new. He scraped with his foot and flapped his arms like a rooster about to crow, and the bandsmen sitting in the green rotunda blew out their cheeks and glared at the music. Now there came a little "flutey" bit—very pretty!—a little chain of bright drops. She was sure it would be repeated. It was; she lifted her head and smiled.

Only two people shared her "special" seat: a fine old man in a velvet coat, his hands clasped over a huge carved walking-stick, and a big old woman, sitting upright, with a roll of

knitting on her embroidered apron. They did not speak. This was disappointing, for Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation. She had become really quite expert, she thought, at listening as though she didn't listen, at sitting in other people's lives just for a minute while they talked round her.

She glanced, sideways, at the old couple. Perhaps they would go soon. Last Sunday, too, hadn't been as interesting as usual. An Englishman and his wife, he wearing a dreadful Panama hat and she button boots. And she'd gone on the whole time about how she ought to wear spectacles; she knew she needed them; but that it was no good getting any; they'd be sure to break and they'd never keep on. And he'd been so patient. He'd suggested everything—gold rims, the kind that curved round your ears, little pads inside the bridge. No, nothing would please her. "They'll always be sliding down my nose!" Miss Brill had wanted to shake her.

The old people sat on the bench, still as statues. Never mind, there was always the crowd to watch. To and fro, in front of the flower-beds and the band rotunda, the couples and groups paraded, stopped to talk, to greet, to buy a handful of flowers from the old beggar who had his tray fixed to the railings. Little children ran among them, swooping and laughing; little boys with big white silk bows under their chins, little girls, little French dolls, dressed up in velvet and lace. And sometimes a tiny staggerer came suddenly rocking into the open from under the trees, stopped, stared, as suddenly sat down "flop," until its small high-stepping mother, like a young hen, rushed scolding to its rescue. Other people sat on the benches and green chairs, but they were nearly always the same, Sunday after Sunday, and—Miss Brill had often noticed—there was something funny about nearly all of them. They were odd, silent, nearly all old, and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd just come from dark little rooms or even—even cupboards!

Behind the rotunda the slender trees with yellow leaves down drooping, and through them just a line of sea, and beyond the blue sky with gold-veined clouds.

Tum-tum-tum tiddle-um! tiddle-um! tum tiddley-um tum ta! blew the band.

Two young girls in red came by and two young soldiers in blue met them, and they laughed and paired and went off arm-in-arm. Two peasant women with funny straw hats passed, gravely, leading beautiful smoke-coloured donkeys. A cold, pale nun hurried by. A beautiful woman came along and dropped her bunch of violets, and a little boy ran after to hand them to her, and she took them and threw them away as if they'd been poisoned. Dear me! Miss Brill didn't know whether to admire that or not! And now an ermine toque and a gentleman in grey met just in front of her. He was tall, stiff, dignified, and she was wearing the ermine toque she'd bought when her hair was yellow. Now everything, her hair, her face, even her eyes, was the same colour as the shabby ermine, and her hand, in its cleaned glove, lifted to dab her lips, was a tiny yellowish paw. Oh, she was so pleased to see him—delighted! She rather thought they were going to meet that afternoon. She described where she'd been—everywhere, here, there, along by the sea. The day was so

charming—didn't he agree? And wouldn't he, perhaps?... But he shook his head, lighted a cigarette, slowly breathed a great deep puff into her face, and even while she was still talking and laughing, flicked the match away and walked on. The ermine toque was alone; she smiled more brightly than ever. But even the band seemed to know what she was feeling and played more softly, played tenderly, and the drum beat, "The Brute! The Brute!" over and over. What would she do? What was going to happen now? But as Miss Brill wondered, the ermine toque turned, raised her hand as though she'd seen some one else, much nicer, just over there, and pattered away. And the band changed again and played more quickly, more gayly than ever, and the old couple on Miss Brill's seat got up and marched away, and such a funny old man with long whiskers hobbled along in time to the music and was nearly knocked over by four girls walking abreast.

Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it! How she loved sitting here, watching it all! It was like a play. It was exactly like a play. Who could believe the sky at the back wasn't painted? But it wasn't till a little brown dog trotted on solemn and then slowly trotted off, like a little "theatre" dog, a little dog that had been drugged, that Miss Brill discovered what it was that made it so exciting. They were all on the stage. They weren't only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting. Even she had a part and came every Sunday. No doubt somebody would have noticed if she hadn't been there; she was part of the performance after all. How strange she'd never thought of it like that before! And yet it explained why she made such a point of starting from home at just the same time each week—so as not to be late for the performance—and it also explained why she had quite a queer, shy feeling at telling her English pupils how she spent her Sunday afternoons. No wonder! Miss Brill nearly laughed out loud. She was on the stage. She thought of the old invalid gentleman to whom she read the newspaper four afternoons a week while he slept in the garden. She had got quite used to the frail head on the cotton pillow, the hollowed eyes, the open mouth and the high pinched nose. If he'd been dead she mightn't have noticed for weeks; she wouldn't have minded. But suddenly he knew he was having the paper read to him by an actress! "An actress!" The old head lifted; two points of light quivered in the old eyes. "An actress—are ye?" And Miss Brill smoothed the newspaper as though it were the manuscript of her part and said gently; "Yes, I have been an actress for a long time."

The band had been having a rest. Now they started again. And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill—a something, what was it?—not sadness—no, not sadness—a something that made you want to sing. The tune lifted, lifted, the light shone; and it seemed to Miss Brill that in another moment all of them, all the whole company, would begin singing. The young ones, the laughing ones who were moving together, they would begin, and the men's voices, very resolute and brave, would join them. And then she too, she too, and the others on the benches—they would come in with a kind of accompaniment—something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful—moving.... And Miss Brill's eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company. Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought—though what they understood she didn't know.

Just at that moment a boy and girl came and sat down where the old couple had been. They were beautifully dressed; they were in love. The hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht. And still soundlessly singing, still with that trembling smile, Miss Brill prepared to listen.

"No, not now," said the girl. "Not here, I can't."

"But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" asked the boy. "Why does she come here at all—who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"

"It's her fu-fur which is so funny," giggled the girl. "It's exactly like a fried whiting."

"Ah, be off with you!" said the boy in an angry whisper. Then: "Tell me, ma petite chère—"

"No, not here," said the girl. "Not yet."

On her way home she usually bought a slice of honey-cake at the baker's. It was her Sunday treat. Sometimes there was an almond in her slice, sometimes not. It made a great difference. If there was an almond it was like carrying home a tiny present—a surprise—something that might very well not have been there. She hurried on the almond Sundays and struck the match for the kettle in quite a dashing way.

But to-day she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room—her room like a cupboard—and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying.

Mansfield, Katherine. "Miss Brill." In *The Garden Party and Other Stories*. 1922; Project Gutenberg, August 20, 2008. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1429/1429-h/1429-h.htm#chap09>.

"Miss Brill" Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. The story begins with a detailed description of how Miss Brill cares for her fur. What does this description tell us about Miss Brill? What is her relationship to the fur? She calls the fur "[l]ittle rogue." What is the meaning of the word rogue in this context? What does that tell us about Miss Brill and the fur?
2. Besides the fur, we get a lot of descriptions of people's clothing. What does her attention to clothing tell us about Miss Brill? Pick out a few examples of such

descriptions. What do they tell us about the people wearing them? What do they tell us about Miss Brill's attitude toward people?

3. In the middle of the story, Miss Brill imagines she and all the people she watches are actors in a performance. What is the significance of this vision? How does it reflect Miss Brill's world view? What does it say about the way she perceives her relationship to these other people?
4. Miss Brill thinks about a man to whom she reads newspapers several times a week. What are her thoughts on this man? What do they tell us about Miss Brill?
5. Twice in the story, Miss Brill has an ambiguous feeling that she thinks might be sadness before denying that it is sadness. What do these moments tell us about Miss Brill? Is he merely sad, or is it more complicated than that? What is her relationship to her own emotions?
6. At the end of the story, who is crying? Why do you think Mansfield decided to write this moment this way?

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Rozier, Travis. "Miss Brill Questions and Activities for Further Analysis." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

A Cup of Tea (1922)

Rosemary Fell was not exactly beautiful. No, you couldn't have called her beautiful. Pretty? Well, if you took her to pieces...But why be so cruel as to take anyone to pieces? She was young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well dressed, amazingly well read in the newest of the new books, and her parties were the most delicious mixture of the really important people and...artists-quaint creatures, discoveries of hers, some of them too terrifying for words, but others quite presentable and amusing.

Rosemary had been married two years. She had a duck of a boy. No, not Peter—Michael. And her husband absolutely adored her. They were rich, really rich, not just comfortably well off, which is odious and stuffy and sounds like one's grandparents. But if Rosemary wanted to shop she would go to Paris as you and I would go to Bond Street. If she wanted to buy flowers, the car pulled up at that perfect shop in Regent Street, and Rosemary inside the shop just gazed in her dazzled, rather exotic way, and said: "I want those and those and those. Give me four bunches of those. And that jar of roses. Yes, I'll have all the roses in the jar. No, no lilac. I hate lilac. It's got no shape." The attendant bowed

and put the lilac out of sight, as though this was only too true; lilac was dreadfully shapeless. "Give me those stumpy little tulips. Those red and white ones." And she was followed to the car by a thin shopgirl staggering under an immense white paper armful that looked like a baby in long clothes. ...

One winter afternoon she had been buying something in a little antique shop in Curzon Street. It was a shop she liked. For one thing, one usually had it to oneself. And then the man who kept it was ridiculously fond of serving her. He beamed whenever she came in. He clasped his hands; he was so gratified he could scarcely speak. Flattery, of course. All the same, there was something

"You see, madam," he would explain in his low respectful tones, "I love my things. I would rather not part with them than sell them to someone who does not appreciate them, who has not that fine feeling which is so rare. ..." And, breathing deeply he unrolled a tiny square of blue velvet and pressed it on the glass counter with his pale finger-tips.

Today it was a little box. He had been keeping it for her. He had shown it to nobody as yet. An exquisite little enamel box with a glaze so fine it looked as though it had been baked in cream. On the lid a minute creature stood under a flowery tree, and a more minute creature still had her arms around his neck. Her hat, really no bigger than a geranium petal, hung from a branch; it had green ribbons. And there was a pink cloud like a watchful cherub floating above their heads. Rosemary took her hands out of her long gloves. She always took off her gloves to examine such things. Yes, she liked it very much. She loved it; it was a great duck. She must have it. And, turning the creamy box, opening and shutting it, she couldn't help noticing how charming her hands were against the blue velvet. The shopman, in some dim cavern of his mind, may have dared to think so too. For he took a pencil, leant over the counter, and his pale bloodless fingers crept timidly towards those rosy, flashing ones, as he murmured gently: "If I may venture to point out to madam, the flowers on the little lady's bodice."

"Charming!" Rosemary admired the flowers. But what was the price? For a moment the shopman did not seem to hear. Then a murmur reached her. "Twenty-eight guineas, madame."

"Twenty-eight guineas." Rosemary gave no sign. She laid the little box down; she buttoned her gloves again. Twenty-eight guineas. Even if one is rich . . . She looked vague. She stared at a plump tea-kettle like a plump hen above the shopman's head, and her voice was dreamy as she answered: "Well, keep it for me—will you? I'll ..."

But the shopman had already bowed as though keeping it for her was all any human being could ask. He would be willing, of course, to keep it for her for ever.

The discreet door shut with a click. She was outside on the step, gazing at the winter afternoon. Rain was falling, and with the rain it seemed the dark came too, spinning down like ashes. There was a cold bitter taste in the air, and the new-lighted lamps looked sad.

Sad were the lights in the houses opposite. Dimly they burned as if regretting something. And people hurried by, hidden under their hateful umbrellas. Rosemary felt a strange pang. She pressed her muff to her breast; she wished she had the little box, too, to cling to. Of course, the car was there. She'd only to cross the pavement. But still she waited. There are moments, horrible moments in life, when one emerges from shelter and looks out, and it's awful. One oughtn't to give way to them. One ought to go home and have an extra-special tea. But at the very instant of thinking that, a young girl, thin, dark, shadowy—where had she come from?—was standing at Rosemary's elbow and a voice like a sigh, almost like a sob, breathed: "Madame, may I speak to you a moment?"

"Speak to me?" Rosemary turned. She saw a little battered creature with enormous eyes, someone quite young, no older than herself, who clutched at her coat-collar with reddened hands, and shivered as though she had just come out of the water.

"M-madame," stammered the voice. "Would you let me have the price of a cup of tea?"

"A cup of tea?" There was something simple, sincere in that voice; it wasn't in the least the voice of a beggar. "Then have you no money at all?" asked Rosemary.

"None, madam," came the answer.

"How extraordinary!" Rosemary peered through the dusk, and the girl gazed back at her.

How more than extraordinary! And suddenly it seemed to Rosemary such an adventure. It was like something out of a novel by Dostoevsky, this meeting in the dusk. Supposing she took the girl home? Supposing she did do one of those things she was always reading about or seeing on the stage, what would happen? It would be thrilling. And she heard herself saying afterwards to the amazement of her friends: "I simply took her home with me," as she stepped forward and said to that dim person beside her: "Come home to tea with me."

The girl drew back startled. She even stopped shivering for a moment. Rosemary put out a hand and touched her arm. "I mean it," she said, smiling. And she felt how simple and kind her smile was. "Why won't you? Do. Come home with me now in my car and have tea."

"You—you don't mean it, madam," said the girl, and there was pain in her voice.

"But I do," cried Rosemary. "I want you to. To please me. Come along."

The girl put her fingers to her lips and her eyes devoured Rosemary. "You're—you're not taking me to the police station?" she stammered.

"The police station!" Rosemary laughed out. "Why should I be so cruel? No, I only want to make you warm and to hear—anything you care to tell me."

Hungry people are easily led. The footman held the door of the car open, and a moment later they were skimming through the dusk. .

“There!” said Rosemary. She had a feeling of triumph as she slipped her hand through the velvet strap. She could have said, “Now I’ve got you,” as she gazed at the little captive she had netted. But of course she meant it kindly. Oh, more than kindly. She was going to prove to this girl that—wonderful things did happen in life, that—fairy godmothers were real, that—rich people had hearts, and that women were sisters. She turned impulsively, saying: “Don’t be frightened. After all, why shouldn’t you come back with me? We’re both women. If I’m the more fortunate, you ought to expect ...”

But happily at that moment, for she didn’t know how the sentence was going to end, the car stopped. The bell was rung, the door opened, and with a charming, protecting, almost embracing movement, Rosemary drew the other into the hall. Warmth, softness, light, a sweet scent, all those things so familiar to her she never even thought about them, she watched that other receive. It was fascinating. She was like the little rich girl in her nursery with all the cupboards to open, all the boxes to unpack.

“Come, come upstairs,” said Rosemary, longing to begin to be generous. “Come up to my room.” And, besides, she wanted to spare this poor little thing from being stared at by the servants; she decided as they mounted the stairs she would not even ring for Jeanne, but take off her things by herself. The great thing was to be natural!

And “There!” cried Rosemary again, as they reached her beautiful big bedroom with the curtains drawn, the fire leaping on her wonderful lacquer furniture, her gold cushions and the primrose and blue rugs.

The girl stood just inside the door; she seemed dazed. But Rosemary didn’t mind that.

“Come and sit down,” she cried, dragging her big chair up to the fire, “in this comfy chair. Come and get warm. You look so dreadfully cold.”

“I daren’t, madam,” said the girl, and she edged backwards.

“Oh, please,”—Rosemary ran forward—you mustn’t be frightened, you mustn’t, really. Sit down, and when I’ve taken off my things we shall go into the next room and have tea and be cosy. Why are you afraid?” And gently she half pushed the thin figure into its deep cradle.

But there was no answer. The girl stayed just as she had been put, with her hands by her sides and her mouth slightly open. To be quite sincere, she looked rather stupid. But Rosemary wouldn’t acknowledge it. She leant over her, saying: “Won’t you take off your hat? Your pretty hair is all wet. And one is so much more comfortable without a hat, isn’t one?”

There was a whisper that sounded like "Very good, madam," and the crushed hat was taken off.

"Let me help you off with your coat, too," said Rosemary.

The girl stood up. But she held on to the chair with one hand and let Rosemary pull. It was quite an effort. The other scarcely helped her at all. She seemed to stagger like a child, and the thought came and went through Rosemary's mind, that if people wanted helping they must respond a little, just a little, otherwise it became very difficult indeed. And what was she to do with the coat now? She left it on the floor, and the hat too. She was just going to take a cigarette off the mantelpiece when the girl said quickly, but so lightly and strangely: "I'm very sorry, madam, but I'm going to faint. I shall go off, madam, if I don't have something."

"Good heavens, how thoughtless I am!" Rosemary rushed to the bell.

"Tea! Tea at once! And some brandy immediately!"

The maid was gone again, but the girl almost cried out. "No, I don't want no brandy. I never drink brandy. It's a cup of tea I want, madam." And she burst into tears.

It was a terrible and fascinating moment. Rosemary knelt beside her chair.

"Don't cry, poor little thing," she said. "Don't cry." And she gave the other her lace handkerchief. She really was touched beyond words. She put her arm round those thin, bird-like shoulders.

Now at last the other forgot to be shy, forgot everything except that they were both women, and gasped out: "I can't go on no longer like this. I can't bear it. I shall do away with myself. I can't bear no more."

"You shan't have to. I'll look after you. Don't cry any more. Don't you see what a good thing it was that you met me? We'll have tea and you'll tell me everything. And I shall arrange something. I promise. *Do* stop crying. It's so exhausting. Please!"

The other did stop just in time for Rosemary to get up before the tea came. She had the table placed between them. She plied the poor little creature with everything, all the sandwiches, all the bread and butter, and every time her cup was empty she filled it with tea, cream and sugar. People always said sugar was so nourishing. As for herself she didn't eat; she smoked and looked away tactfully so that the other should not be shy.

And really the effect of that slight meal was marvellous. When the tea-table was carried away a new being, a light, frail creature with tangled hair, dark lips, deep, lighted eyes, lay back in the big chair in a kind of sweet languor, looking at the blaze. Rosemary lit a fresh cigarette; it was time to begin.

“And when did you have your last meal?” she asked softly.

But at that moment the door-handle turned.

“Rosemary, may I come in?” It was Philip.

“Of course.”

He came in. “Oh, I’m so sorry,” he said, and stopped and stared.

“It’s quite all right,” said Rosemary smiling. “This is my friend, Miss—”

“Smith, madam,” said the languid figure, who was strangely still and unafraid.

“Smith,” said Rosemary. “We are going to have a little talk.”

“Oh, yes,” said Philip. “Quite,” and his eye caught sight of the coat and hat on the floor. He came over to the fire and turned his back to it. “It’s a beastly afternoon,” he said curiously, still looking at that listless figure, looking at its hands and boots, and then at Rosemary again.

“Yes, isn’t it?” said Rosemary enthusiastically. “Vile.”

Philip smiled his charming smile. “As a matter of fact,” said he, “I wanted you to come into the library for a moment. Would you? Will Miss Smith excuse us?”

The big eyes were raised to him, but Rosemary answered for her. “Of course she will.” And they went out of the room together.

“I say,” said Philip, when they were alone. “Explain. Who is she? What does it all mean?”

Rosemary, laughing, leaned against the door and said: “I picked her up in Curzon Street. Really. She’s a real pick-up. She asked me for the price of a cup of tea, and I brought her home with me.”

“But what on earth are you going to do with her?” cried Philip.

“Be nice to her,” said Rosemary quickly. “Be frightfully nice to her. Look after her. I don’t know how. We haven’t talked yet. But show her—treat her—make her feel— ”

“My darling girl,” said Philip, “you’re quite mad, you know. It simply can’t be done.”

“I knew you’d say that,” retorted Rosemary. “Why not? I want to. Isn’t that a reason? And besides, one’s always reading about these things. I decided—”

“But,” said Philip slowly, and he cut the end of a cigar, “she’s so astonishingly pretty.”

"Pretty?" Rosemary was so surprised that she blushed. "Do you think so? I—I hadn't thought about it."

"Good Lord!" Philip struck a match. "She's absolutely lovely. Look again, my child. I was bowled over when I came into your room just now. However...I think you're making a ghastly mistake. Sorry, darling, if I'm crude and all that. But let me know if Miss Smith is going to dine with us in time for me to look up *The Milliner's Gazette*."

"You absurd creature!" said Rosemary, and she went out of the library, but not back to her bedroom. She went to her writing-room and sat down at her desk. Pretty! Absolutely lovely! Bowled over! Her heart beat like a heavy bell. Pretty! Lovely! She drew her cheque book towards her. But no, cheques would be no use, of course. She opened a drawer and took out five pound notes, looked at them, put two back, and holding the three squeezed in her hand, she went back to her bedroom.

Half an hour later Philip was still in the library, when Rosemary came in.

"I only wanted to tell you," said she, and she leaned against the door again and looked at him with her dazzled exotic gaze, "Miss Smith won't dine with us tonight."

Philip put down the paper. "Oh, what's happened? Previous engagement?"

Rosemary came over and sat down on his knee. "She insisted on going," said she, "so I gave the poor little thing a present of money. I couldn't keep her against her will, could I?" she added softly.

Rosemary had just done her hair, darkened her eyes a little, and put on her pearls. She put up her hands and touched Philip's cheeks.

"Do you like me?" said she, and her tone, sweet, husky, troubled him.

"I like you awfully," he said, and he held her tighter. "Kiss me."

There was a pause.

Then Rosemary said dreamily, "I saw a fascinating little box today. It cost twenty-eight guineas. May I have it?"

Philip jumped her on his knee. "You may, little wasteful one," said he.

But that was not really what Rosemary wanted to say.

"Philip," she whispered, and she pressed his head against her bosom, "am I pretty?"

Mansfield, Katherine. "A Cup of Tea." In *The Doves' Nest and Other Stories*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1924, 50-64. Hathi Trust.

“A Cup of Tea” Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. At the beginning of the story, the narrator suggests that Rosemary’s parties are notable for the artists she invites, whom the narrator describes as her “discoveries” and distinguishes from the “important people.” What is the significance of this detail? What does it tell us about Rosemary’s social set?
2. Mansfield makes use of free indirect discourse in this story, sometimes narrating from an independent viewpoint, other times giving us access to Rosemary’s thoughts. What purpose does this choice serve for this story? Find at least three moments when it seems important that we either see through Rosemary’s point of view or that we get an independent perspective.
3. When we do get an independent narrative voice, it is not bland or objective. The narrator often editorializes and sounds like another member of Rosemary’s upper-class clique. What is the effect of this voice? How does it affect the overall tone of the story?
4. We get a few descriptions of Rosemary dealing with shop attendants. How would you describe her attitude toward these people? What does it tell us about Rosemary? When the shopkeeper panders to Rosemary, she knows it is flattery, but thinks, “there was something....” What is that “something”?
5. Rosemary declines to buy the box when the shopkeeper offers it to her, but she changes her mind at the end of the story. What is the significance of the box? Review the scene in which Rosemary considers the box. What stands out to you in its description? Why is Rosemary drawn to it? Why do you think she changes her mind about buying it?
6. Rosemary sets out to show Miss Smith that “women are sisters,” and when Miss Smith breaks down, it is because she “forgot everything except that they were both women.” What role does gender play in the story? Are the experiences of all people who share a gender identity the same? What other factors contribute to the disconnect between Rosemary and Miss Smith?
7. Identify three moments in the story that demonstrate that Rosemary’s actions are not motivated by compassion.

Attribution:

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Zora Neale Hurston (1894-1960)

Spunk (1925²)

I

A giant of a brown-skinned man sauntered up the one street of the Village and out into the palmetto thickets with a small pretty woman clinging lovingly to his arm.

“Looka theah, folkses!” cried Elijah Mosley, slapping his leg gleefully. “Theah they go, big as life an’ brassy as tacks.”

All the loungers in the store tried to walk to the door with an air of nonchalance but with small success.

“Now pee-eople!” Walter Thomas gasped. “Will you look at ’em!”

“But that’s one thing Ah likes about Spunk Banks—he ain’t skeered of nothin’ on God’s green footstool—*nothin!* He rides that log down at saw-mill jus’ like he struts ’round wid another man’s wife—jus’ don’t give a kitty. When Tes’ Miller got cut to giblets on that circle-saw, Spunk steps right up and starts ridin’. The rest of us was skeered to go near it.”

A round-shouldered figure in overalls much too large, came nervously in the door and the talking ceased. The men looked at each other and winked.

“Gimme some soda-water. Sass’prilla Ah reckon,” the new--comer ordered, and stood far down the counter near the open pickled pig-feet tub to drink it.

Elijah nudged Walter and turned with mock gravity to the new-comer.

“Say, Joe, how’s everything up yo’ way? How’s yo’ wife?”

Joe started and all but dropped the bottle he held in his hands. He swallowed several times painfully and his lips trembled.

“Aw ’Lige, you oughtn’t to do nothin’ like that,” Walter grumbled. Elijah ignored him.

“She jus’ passed heah a few minutes ago goin’ thata way,” with a wave of his hand in the direction of the woods.

² Awarded second prize, *Opportunity* contest, 1925

Now Joe knew his wife had passed that way. He knew that the men lounging in the general store had seen her, moreover, he knew that the men knew *he* knew. He stood there silent for a long moment staring blankly, with his Adam's apple twitching nervously up and down his throat. One could actually see the pain he was suffering, his eyes, his face, his hands and even the dejected slump of his shoulders. He set the bottle down upon the counter. He didn't bang it, just eased it out of his hand silently and fiddled with his suspender buckle.

"Well, Ah'm goin' after her to-day. Ah'm goin' an' fetch her back. Spunk's done gone too fur."

He reached deep down into his trouser pocket and drew out a hollow ground razor, large and shiny, and passed his mois-tened thumb back and forth over the edge.

"Talkin' like a man, Joe. Course that's yo' fambly affairs, but Ah like to see grit in anybody."

Joe Kanty laid down a nickel and stumbled out into the street.

Dusk crept in from the woods. Ike Clarke lit the swinging oil lamp that was almost immediately surrounded by candle--flies. The men laughed boisterously behind Joe's back as they watched him shamle woodward.

"You oughtn't to said whut you did to him, Lige—look how it worked him up," Walter chided.

"And Ah hope it did work him up. 'Tain't even decent for a man to take and take like he do."

"Spunk will sho' kill him."

"Aw, Ah doan't know. You never kin tell. He might turn him up an' spank him fur gettin' in the way, but Spunk wouldn't shoot no unarmed man. Dat razor he carried outa heah ain't gonna run Spunk down an' cut him, an' Joe ain't got the nerve to go up to Spunk with it knowing he totes that Army .45. He makes that break outa heah to bluff us. He's gonna hide that razor behind the first likely palmetto root an' sneak back home to bed. Don't tell me nothin' 'bout that rabbit-foot colored man. Didn't he meet Spunk an' Lena face to face one day las' week an' mumble sumthin' to Spunk 'bout lettin' his wife alone?"

"What did Spunk say?" Walter broke in—"Ah like him fine but 'tain't right the way he carries on wid Lena Kanty, jus' cause Joe's timid 'bout fightin'."

"You wrong theah, Walter. 'Tain't cause Joe's timid at all, it's cause Spunk wants Lena. If Joe was a passle of wile cats Spunk would tackle the job just the same. He'd go after *anything* he wanted the same way. As Ah wuz sayin' a minute ago, he tole Joe right to his face that Lena was his. 'Call her,' he says to Joe. 'Call her and see if she'll come. A woman

knows her boss an' she answers when he calls.' 'Lena, ain't I yo' husband?' Joe sorter whines out. Lena looked at him real disgusted but she don't answer and she don't move outa her tracks. Then Spunk reaches out an' takes hold of her arm an' says: 'Lena, youse mine. From now on Ah works for you an' fights for you an' Ah never wants you to look to nobody for a crumb of bread, a stitch of close or a shingle to go over yo' head, but *me* long as Ah live. Ah'll git the lumber foh owah house to-morrow. Go home an' git yo' things to--gether!'

"'Thass mah house,' Lena speaks up. 'Papa gimme that.'

"'Well,' says Spunk, 'doan give up whut's yours, but when youse inside don't forgit youse mine, an' let no other man git outa his place wid you!'

"Lena looked up at him with her eyes so full of love that they wuz runnin' over, an' Spunk seen it an' Joe seen it too, and his lip started to tremblin' and his Adam's apple was galloping up and down his neck like a race horse. Ah bet he's wore out half a dozen Adam's apples since Spunk's been on the job with Lena. That's all he'll do. He'll be back heah after while swallowin' an' workin' his lips like he wants to say somethin' an' can't."

"But didn't he do *nothin'* to stop 'em?"

"Nope, not a frazzlin' thing—jus' stood there. Spunk took Lena's arm and walked off jus' like nothin' ain't happened and he stood there gazin' after them till they was outa sight. Now you know a woman don't want no man like that. I'm jus' waitin' to see whut he's goin' to say when he gits back."

II

But Joe Kanty never came back, never. The men in the store heard the sharp report of a pistol somewhere distant in the palmetto thicket and soon Spunk came walking leisurely, with his big black Stetson set at the same rakish angle and Lena clinging to his arm, came walking right into the general store. Lena wept in a frightened manner.

"Well," Spunk announced calmly, "Joe come out there wid a meatax an' made me kill him."

He sent Lena home and led the men back to Joe—Joe crumpled and limp with his right hand still clutching his razor.

"See mah back? Mah cloes cut clear through. He sneaked up an' tried to kill me from the back, but Ah got him, an' got him good, first shot," Spunk said.

The men glared at Elijah, accusingly.

“Take him up an’ plant him in ‘Stoney lonesome,’” Spunk said in a careless voice. “Ah didn’t wanna shoot him but he made me do it. He’s a dirty coward, jumpin’ on a man from behind.”

Spunk turned on his heel and sauntered away to where he knew his love wept in fear for him and no man stopped him. At the general store later on, they all talked of locking him up until the sheriff should come from Orlando, but no one did anything but talk.

A clear case of self-defense, the trial was a short one, and Spunk walked out of the court house to freedom again. He could work again, ride the dangerous log-carriage that fed the singing, snarling, biting, circle-saw; he could stroll the soft dark lanes with his guitar. He was free to roam the woods again; he was free to return to Lena. He did all of these things.

III

“Whut you reckon, Walt?” Elijah asked one night later. “Spunk’s gittin’ ready to marry Lena!”

“Naw! Why, Joe ain’t had time to git cold yit. Nohow Ah didn’t figger Spunk was the marryin’ kind.”

“Well, he is,” rejoined Elijah. “He done moved most of Lena’s things—and her along wid ‘em—over to the Bradley house. He’s buying it. Jus’ like Ah told yo’ all right in heah the night Joe wuz kilt. Spunk’s crazy ‘bout Lena. He don’t want folks to keep on talkin’ ‘bout her—thass reason he’s rushin’ so. Funny thing ‘bout that bob-cat, wan’t it?”

“What bob-cat, ‘Lige? Ah ain’t heered ‘bout none.”

“Ain’t cher? Well, night befo’ las’ was the fust night Spunk an’ Lena moved together an’ jus’ as they was goin’ to bed, a big black bob-cat, black all over, you hear me, *black*, walked round and round that house and howled like forty, an’ when Spunk got his gun an’ went to the winder to shoot it, he says it stood right still an’ looked him in the eye, an’ howled right at him. The thing got Spunk so nervoused up he couldn’t shoot. But Spunk says twan’t no bob-cat nohow. He says it was Joe done sneaked back from Hell!”

“Humph!” sniffed Walter, “he oughter be nervous after what he done. Ah reckon Joe come back to dare him to marry Lena, or to come out an’ fight. Ah bet he’ll be back time and agin, too. Know what Ah think? Joe wuz a braver man than Spunk.”

There was a general shout of derision from the group.

“Thass a fact,” went on Walter. “Lookit whut he done; took a razor an’ went out to fight a man he knowed toted a gun an’ wuz a crack shot, too; ‘nother thing Joe wuz skeered of Spunk, skeered plumb stiff! But he went jes’ the same. It took him a long time to get his nerve up. ‘Tain’t nothin’ for Spunk to fight when he ain’t skeered of nothin’. Now, Joe’s done come back to have it out wid the man that’s got all he ever had. Y’ll know Joe ain’t never

had nothin' nor wanted nothin' besides Lena. It musta been a h'ant cause ain' nobody never seen no black bob-cat."

"Nother thing," cut in one of the men, "Spunk wuz cussin' a blue streak to-day 'cause he 'lowed dat saw wuz wobblin'—almos' got 'im once. The machinist come, looked it over an' said it wuz alright. Spunk musta been leanin' t'wards it some. Den he claimed somebody pushed 'im but 'twant nobody close to 'im. Ah wuz glad when knockin' off time come. I'm skeered of dat man when he gits hot. He'd beat you full of button holes as quick as he's look atcher."

IV

The men gathered the next evening in a different mood, no laughter. No badinage this time.

"Look, 'Lige, you goin' to set up wid Spunk?"

"Naw, Ah reckon not, Walter. Tell yuh the truth, Ah'm a lil bit skittish. Spunk died too wicket—died cussin' he did. You know he thought he wuz done outa life."

"Good Lawd, who'd he think done it?"

"Joe."

"Joe Kanty? How come?"

"Walter, Ah b'leeve Ah will walk up thata way an' set. Lena would like it Ah reckon."

"But whut did he say, 'Lige?"

Elijah did not answer until they had left the lighted store and were strolling down the dark street.

"Ah wuz loadin' a wagon wid scantlin' right near the saw when Spunk fell on the carriage but 'fore Ah could git to him the saw got him in the body—awful sight. Me an' Skint Mil-ler got him off but it was too late. Anybody could see that. The fust thing he said wuz: 'He pushed me, 'Lige—the dirty hound pushed me in the back!'—He was spittin' blood at ev'ry breath. We laid him on the sawdust pile with his face to the East so's he could die easy. He helt mah han' till the last, Walter, and said: 'It was Joe, 'Lige—the dirty sneak shoved me . . . he didn't dare come to mah face . . . but Ah'll git the son-of-a-wood louse soon's Ah get there an' make hell too hot for him. . . . Ah felt him shove me. . . .' Thass how he died."

"If spirits kin fight, there's a powerful tussle goin' on some- where ovah Jordan 'cause Ah b'leeve Joe's ready for Spunk an' ain't skeered any more—yas, Ah b'leeve Joe pushed 'im mahself."

They had arrived at the house. Lena's lamentations were deep and loud. She had filled the room with magnolia blossoms that gave off a heavy sweet odor. The keepers of the wake tipped about whispering in frightened tones. Everyone in the village was there, even old Jeff Kanty, Joe's father, who a few hours before would have been afraid to come within ten feet of him, stood leering triumphantly down upon the fallen giant as if his fingers had been the teeth of steel that laid him low.

The cooling board consisted of three sixteen-inch boards on saw horses, a dingy sheet was his shroud.

The women ate heartily of the funeral baked meats and wondered who would be Lena's next. The men whispered coarse conjectures between guzzles of whiskey.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Spunk." In *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, edited by Alain Locke. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925, 105-111. Hathi Trust.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=inu.30000005027994&view=1up&seq=9&skin=2021>.

"Spunk" Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Though we have a third-person omniscient narrator, we learn about most of the events of the plot from the men who talk at the store. Why do you think Hurston chose to write the story this way? What role does town gossip play in the story?
2. Hurston writes her characters' dialogue in dialect. What is the effect of this choice? How does the dialogue differ from the narration and what does this say about our characters or narrator?
3. The men talk a lot about bravery and fear. How do they seem to define bravery? What do they see as making a man a coward? Do the events of the story challenge these ideas or confirm them?
4. The men at the store sometimes do more than just talk about Spunk and Joe. What actions do they take, and how do they influence the events? What does their behavior tell us about these men?
5. Zora Neale Hurston studied anthropology at Columbia University and did fieldwork collecting African American folklore. How does that biographical background influence the way you might read this story?

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Sample Analysis of a Short Story

Travis Rozier and R. Paul Cooper

How to Read this Section

This section contains two parts. First, you will find the prompt. The prompt is a very important element in any writing assignment. Don't be fooled by the fact it is short! Even though it is a short document, it highlights and makes clear every element you will need to complete the given assignment effectively. When writing an essay, the prompt is where you will both begin and end. Seriously. Before you begin, familiarize yourself with the prompt, and before you submit your final draft, give the prompt one final read over, making sure you have not left anything out. *When* you visit the University Writing Center and Libraries, they can better help if you bring along the prompt. Both the [Writing Center](#)³ and the [Libraries](#)⁴ provide indispensable tools to aid students, so take advantage of their services.

The second part of this section contains a simulated student essay—the essay is not an actual student essay, but an essay written to demonstrate a strong student essay. The essay in this section is not meant to represent a “perfect” essay; it has its faults. However, this essay is an effective response to the given prompt. The “student” essay will be represented in a wide column on the left, and the grader’s commentary will be represented in a smaller column on the right. Use the example and the comments to help you think about how you might organize your own essay, to think about whether you will make similar—or different—choices.

³ University Writing Center, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/>.

⁴ Texas A&M University Libraries, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://library.tamu.edu/>.

Sample Prompt

Assignment Description: For this essay, you will choose a short story and write an analysis that offers an interpretation of the text. You should identify some debatable aspect of the text and argue for your interpretation using your analysis of the story supported by textual evidence.

Content: The essay should have a clear argumentative thesis that makes a debatable claim about the text. When analyzing the text, you should consider the elements of the short story discussed in class (plot, narration, character, setting, tone and style, theme, symbol, etc.). However, you should only analyze those elements that are important to understanding your interpretation of the text. You should also convey the implications of your specific claim about the text for how we might interpret the text as a whole. How does your argument shape the way we read meaning into the text?

Research Expectations: As this is not a research paper, you should use no more than two or three outside, scholarly sources, and these should be confined to historical, biographical, or literary context. In other words, they should not offer any analysis of the text itself. All the interpretative work in this paper should be produced by your own readings of the text in light of relevant contexts.

Format: All citations should adhere to current MLA 8 guidelines, and a Works Cited page including entries for the primary text and any secondary sources is also required. You will also be graded on form and correctness, so make sure you edit and proofread carefully for grammar, punctuation, etc.

Scope/Page Count: Word count should fall between 900–1200 words (3–4 pages).

| Student Essay | Instructor Annotations |
|--|---|
| Hannah Elizabeth Bowling Dr. Travis Rozier ENGL 203 14 June 2021 “Blood for Blood”: Marital Conflict in “A Red Girl’s Reasoning” | Using a brief, attention-grabbing quote is a common way to write an engaging title. The quote should be followed by a colon and a clear statement about the subject of the essay. This title is a good example of this technique. |

Despite being predominantly white by blood, Pauline Johnson considered herself a Native American Indian, as did the Canadian government of the early twentieth century (Betty 1). She spent much of her life writing and performing poetry, acting as a type of sensationalist because of her Indian ancestry. Keller Betty, a biographer, writes, “Many people in her audiences paid to see her mainly because they wanted to see an Indian. She was perfectly aware of this and though at times she felt like some kind of freak side-show attraction, she willingly capitalized on her Indian identity” (64). In writing “A Red Girl’s Reasoning,” Johnson explores this liminality, her existence in the space between belonging and unbelonging through Christie McDonald, a mixed-race young woman like herself. Like Christie, Johnson was both a part of and yet separate from Canadian middle-class society in the early 1900s because of her Indian heritage. Christie, unlike Johnson, marries a young white man named Charlie McDonald. In Charlie, though, Christie does not find mooring for her liminality. In his treatment of her in the time leading up to the party and their conversation immediately afterward, Charlie shows himself to fetishize Christie for her Indigenusness rather than actually love her.

The writer introduces the essay with some biographical context, showing the reader that the author of the story had a personal connection to the subject matter. They even do some light research into the author’s biography to support this claim.

Students often believe you need to use complex, technical language in academic writing to sound intellectual. However, good academic writing should strive for clarity and concision. That said, there are times when using difficult words can be useful, as long as the writer makes their meaning clear. Here, the writer uses the word “liminality,” a word many readers may have to look up. The writer makes it clear, however, that the liminality, or in-between space, they refer to is Christie’s “existence in the space between belonging and unbelonging” to white society. Now, when the writer uses the term “liminality” later in the essay, it brings this entire idea with it.

The writer has a clear thesis that makes an arguable claim about the story. They could perhaps offer a better explanation of the word “fetishize,” meaning here to objectify something by reducing it to one desirable characteristic, but in a college essay it is also fine to assume the reader has a certain level of vocabulary or can look up the word

| | |
|---|---|
| | in the dictionary if they are unfamiliar with it.. |
| <p>At the beginning of “A Red Girl’s Reasoning,” Charlie is introduced to the reader in conversation with his father-in-law while waiting for Christie to appear. When Jimmy Robinson tells Charlie that he does not understand Indigenous people or their cultures as well Robinson, who has lived over twenty years in native lands, Charlie balks at this assessment: “But I’m just as fond of them” and “I get on with them too, now, don’t I?” are his cries in response (Johnson 1). This incident highlights Charlie’s insistence on always being correct, regardless of whether or not he is actually right or not. It also foreshadows how his insistence at always being right will later create marital conflict with his new bride.</p> | <p>Notice a tiny proofreading error—the word “as” is missing after the word “well”; while it’s a small oversight, it still causes the reader to have to work to figure out what’s missing in the sentence.</p> |
| <p>After their brief wedding and before the pivotal party scene, Charlie becomes vain at his new-found celebrity, thanks to Christie’s Indigenousness: “He was proud that she had ‘taken’ so well among his friends, proud that she bore herself so complacently in the drawing-rooms of the wives of pompous Government officials, but doubly proud of her almost abject devotion to him” (Johnson 3). He also becomes jealous; at the thought, instigated by Mrs. Stuart, that Joe does not love Christie nearly as much as she deserves, he confronts his brother about the matter. “I’ve never asked you yet what you thought of her, Joe,” he ponders with his brother (4).</p> | <p>The writer begins this paragraph by making a claim and immediately providing textual evidence to support it. Notice, too, that they vary the way they introduce quotes throughout the paper, sometimes using colons and at other times blending quoted material with their own writing. This variety is important in making your writing dynamic and engaging.</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Unsatisfied with his brother’s answer of “I’m glad she loves you,” Charlie tells Joe that “If she hated you, you’d get out. If she loved you I’d <i>make</i> you get out” (4). This scene, while seemingly a minor incident in the text, becomes alarming when coupled with Charlie’s discussion with Jimmy Robinson. Both incidents highlight that Charlie views Christie as an object: he balks at the idea that she exists outside of his narrow understanding of what an Indian is, and he is primarily interested in the social advancement opportunity she presents to him as “the rage” of polite society that winter (3). Like everyone else in Ottawa, he perceives her as “a potent charm to acquire popularity” (3). It is not until the social faux pas she makes at the Lieutenant-Governor’s dance that his good opinion of her is tarnished.</p> | <p>Here, the writer proves the major claim of the argument, that Charlie fetishizes Christie by reducing her to her Indigeness.</p> <p>This is a nice transition sentence that leads us into the next paragraph and the next idea of the essay. Now that the writer has proved that Charlie fetishizes Christie, they’ll show us the consequences on their marriage.</p> |
| <p>At the party, when confronted by numerous individuals as to the nature of her father and mother’s marriage, Christie admits that they were not married by a priest. Horrified by this lack of propriety and despite her clarification that “the marriage was performed by Indian rites,” guests like Captain Logan and Mrs. Stuart immediately begin to gossip at hints of impropriety in Christie and Charlie’s marriage itself (Johnson 6). “Poor old Charlie has always thought so much of honorable birth,” Captain Logan says, perhaps the most damning indictment of Charlie’s character in the short story (6).</p> | |

Charlie, who was not made privy to this information before his marriage, is beyond angry by this news. What he is angry about is not the information being withheld from him, though; instead, he is angry with Christie at ruining her, and therefore his, reputation.

Immediately after the disastrous party, Charlie skulks off by himself before returning home to confront Christie. At the sight of her, he cries “You have disgraced me; and, moreover, you have disgraced yourself and both your parents” (Johnson 7). When Christie throws in his face the fact that he “who [has] studied my race and their laws for years” accuses her of bastardry, Charlie is affronted: “Your father was a fool not to insist upon the law, and so was the priest” (6-7). Despite studying and understanding Indian culture for years and marrying an Indian woman, Charlie insists that Christie’s parents “live in more civilized times” and should therefore have had a Christian wedding with a priest in order to authorize their marriage (8). Ultimately, however, Christie wears down Charlie’s ignorant arguments until he cries “the trouble is they won’t keep their mouths shut” (8). Even in this moment of intense argument with Christie over a subject that ultimately proves the end of their marriage, Charlie cannot stop prioritizing the opinions of those in white Ottawa society. Because of her announcement, Charlie has been made a fool in front of his friends, colleagues, and the city writ-large, and his anger at this prompts him to announce “God knows”

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| <p>when Christie asks whether it would have made a difference when deciding to marry her (8).</p> | |
| <p>In conclusion, Charlie views Christie as an object by which to buy social favor in white Canadian society by virtue of her Indigenoussness; this fetishization of her fame as a “civilized” Indian woman ultimately proves the undoing of their marriage when he cannot cope with her lack of conformity. He alienates Christie from white society by castigating her for her parents’ lack of “propriety” (by a white man’s standard) and refusing to recognize the validity of her people’s customs. Christie occupies a liminal space between being white and being Indigenous that cannot support Charlie’s racist attempts to capitalize on her beauty and appeal to society as the new “rage” for his own social gain. Through Christie, Pauline Johnson explores the fraught nature of being an Indian in a white man’s world, while through Charlie, Johnson exposes how white society commodifies the lives and cultures of Indigenous people during the early twentieth century.</p> | <p>The conclusion wraps up the essay nicely by going back through the argument and restating it in new language.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Works Cited</p> <p>Betty, Keller. <i>Pauline: A Biography of Pauline Johnson</i>. Douglas & McIntyre, 1981.</p> | |

Johnson, E. Pauline. "A Red Girl's Reasoning." *Canadian Literature*, 2013, https://canlit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/red_girls_reasoning.pdf.

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Bowling, Hannah Elizabeth. "Short Story: 'Blood for Blood': Marital Conflict in 'A Red Girl's Reasoning.'" In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

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Novella

*The borders of the country between these two more orderly regions [the short story and the novel] are ill-defined, but at some point the writer wakes up with alarm and realizes that he's come or is coming to a really terrible place, an anarchy-ridden literary banana republic called the "novella."*¹

—Stephen King, "Afterword," *Different Seasons: Four Novellas*

Introduction

Claire Carly-Miles and Kimberly Clough

Novellas are generally understood to be literary works that are longer than short stories and shorter than novels. Sometimes they are defined as fiction that ranges in length from 50–200 pages, and many novella definitions include a word count. Take a look at literary awards for the novella, and you will find a word count rather than a page range applied. What you will not find, however, is an exact, universal word count: the range is anywhere between 10,000–40,000 words, a length closer to a brief novel than a short story, and, unlike most short stories, many novellas rely on chapter divisions. However, novellas do not always have chapter divisions, which is why word count is an important distinction.

What should begin to emerge here in our attempt to delineate the novella is that the form defies easy definition. As Stephen King implies in the **epigraph** to this chapter, novellas are the misfit of the literary world. Because there is no universal definition for the novella and they more closely resemble a novel than a short story, a literary work could be labeled by some as a novel and by others a novella. This raises the question: what sets the novella apart from other literary forms? To begin, we agree with scholars who argue that the novella is more than just a word count. While length is the first signal that a written work may be a novella, another defining feature of this form is its intense focus on a single character or **conflict**. This intense focus sets the novella apart from the novel and the short story in a few ways. Judith Leibowitz writes that a novella "can be described as an intensive analysis of a limited area with wide, undeveloped implications."² Leibowitz argues,

Whereas the short story limits material and the novel extends it, the novella does both in such a way that a special kind of narrative structure results, one which produces a generically distinct effect: the double effect of intensity and expansion. Since the motifs in a novella are usually part of a closely associated cluster of themes, the same material remains in focus, while in the novel, the central focus shifts. By means of this

¹ Stephen King, *Afterword to Different Seasons: Four Novellas* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 665.

² Judith Leibowitz, "Narrative Purpose in the Novella" (PhD diss., UCLA, 1970), 13, USC Libraries Digital Collections, <https://digitallibrary.usc.edu/digital/collection/p15799coll18/id/441458>.

treatment of theme,. . . all the motifs are interrelated, permitting the novella to achieve an intense and constant focus on the subject. At the same time, since the implications of each motif are suggested but not explicitly developed, the novella is eminently a narrative of suggestion.³

As Liebowitz points out above, novellas are able to do two things: they achieve “intensity” as they must focus on one character or conflict, using patterns and themes to develop the way we understand that focal point more quickly than a novel does, and they also achieve “expansion” in that they are not as restricted by space as the short story is. In other words, novellas occupy a space between the short story and the novel, accomplishing things neither can achieve because of their own characteristics.

In contrast to the novel, one of the ways the novella accomplishes its intensity is through avoiding subplots and hosts of minor characters, instead narrowly focusing on a central **protagonist** or **conflict**. Because of its limited length, a novella accomplishes this focus by condensing meaning through the use of literary elements (such as **symbols**, **motifs**, **imagery**, **figurative language**). Such elements occur frequently and may be more interrelated in order to establish or hint at the novella’s **theme(s)**, unlike in longer works where, for example, symbols and motifs can signal multiple unrelated themes. For example, in *The Awakening* (1899), Kate Chopin creates one motif by using birds symbolically at important moments in the narrative. The novel opens with caged birds, one of the characters likens artists to birds in that they must be able to fly above conventions, Edna moves to a home called the Pigeon House, and the novel’s ending contains an image of a bird. All of these entwine to create a concentrated vein of meaning running throughout the work. In contrast, Charlotte Brontë also incorporates bird imagery in her novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). Here, however, the bird imagery is diffused over a much longer period of time and can be interpreted more widely.

While the novella’s shorter length and intensity of focus set it apart from the novel, these same features make it akin to the short story. Unlike the short story, the novella occupies more space in which to develop its intense focus on one character within limited settings. In contrast to the short story, the novella has the ability to expand and develop its exploration of a **protagonist** and other literary elements while still maintaining its characteristic keen focus. Take, for instance, Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” (1894), which takes place over the course of one hour in one house. The story is intense, but any expansion of its ideas is not included. Rather, Chopin uses **symbols**, repetition, and **irony** to quickly present a snapshot of Mrs. Mallard’s life. By comparison, Chopin presents the reader with a much more detailed portrait of Edna over a longer period of time and in different locales in *The Awakening*.

³ Judith Liebowitz, “Narrative Purpose in the Novella” (PhD diss., UCLA, 1970), 17, USC Libraries Digital Collections, <https://digitallibrary.usc.edu/digital/collection/p15799coll18/id/441458>.

Liebowitz’s definition of the novella as demonstrating both intensity and expansion fits a number of works, including Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (1937), Chopin’s *The Awakening*, and Nnedi Okorafor’s *Binti* (2015). In addition, as is apparent in this short list, novellas may cover any genre of fiction that a short story or novel may, from horror (*Turn of the Screw*) to realism (*Of Mice and Men* and *The Awakening*) to science fiction (*Binti*) and beyond.

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Brief History and Evolution of the Novella

Kimberly Clough

The word “novella” is an Italian word meaning “novelty,” and as such, signified a new form of literature when the term first came into use in the fourteenth century. It was not a short story (a form that existed much earlier, arising from fables and parables, as detailed in the preceding chapter), nor was it a novel (a form popularized four centuries later in the eighteenth century and discussed in the following chapter). The term was first applied to texts that today we would not recognize as novellas, such as the collections of related stories in Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (1349–53) and Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (1392). Frequently-cited archetypes in literary histories of the novella are Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and *Novelle* (1828), James’s *Daisy Miller* (1878) and *The Turn of the Screw*, Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilich* (1886), Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1915). Literary overviews often gesture to present-day use of the novella by authors such as King and Ian McEwan. It should be noted that the quote from King that begins this chapter is tongue-in-cheek; it appears in the afterword of his novella collection, two of which inspired the critically-acclaimed films *Stand By Me* (1986) and *Shawshank Redemption* (1994).

What you might have noticed in the above history is the prominence of white male authors, particularly those from western Europe (the exception being the U.S. authors King and James, though the latter became a British citizen). These, however, are not the only writers who influenced the novella’s development. Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave* (1688) predates many of the commonly-listed archetypal examples and is sometimes labeled as a

novella because of its length and focus on the eponymous character. In the late nineteenth century, novellas written by women, notably George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil* (1859) in Britain and Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask; or, A Woman's Power* (1866) in the United States, helped shape the form. Among more recent work written by women that has greatly contributed to the novella's persistence are Nadine Gordimer's *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), Ursula le Guin's *The Word for World Is Forest* (1976), and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984).

The absence of authors in literary histories who are not white men is in part due to the ways that the contributions made by women and people of color have been downplayed or ignored. A prime example is Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859). While she was one of the first Black Americans to publish a novella, Wilson's work was largely ignored (for various reasons) until literary critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr. rediscovered and republished her novella in the 1980s. *The Awakening* provides another example of a work that has received belated scholarly interest. Chopin was a well-known author during her lifetime, but literary scholarship did not rigorously engage with her novellas until the 1950s. Scholars are working to revise our understanding of literary history by reviving discourse on works that have been ignored and by rediscovering texts not in popular circulation (i.e., out of print) in archives. Librarians are also playing a key role by digitizing texts that are out of print or exist in limited physical copies. These efforts allow scholars around the world access to under-researched texts.

An additional issue with the current understanding of the novella is that histories generally focus on Anglophone texts (i.e., in English) or those written in European languages. However, authors around the globe write novellas in many different languages. Before being translated into English, Naguib Mahfouz's *The Beggar* (1965) and Haruki Murakami's *The Strange Library* (1983) were written in Arabic and Japanese, respectively. Similarly, Chilean author Roberto Bolaño's *The Cowboy Graves: Three Novellas* (2017) was originally composed in Spanish. The result of academia's growing inclusivity, both in who is allowed into scholarly conversations and the topics of study, has been an increasing awareness and appreciation of the novella in many different languages and cultures.

Further, in recent years, novellas have been gaining popularity with **young adult**, **science fiction**, and **fantasy** authors. These writers are changing the use of the form as well as making it more inclusive. For instance, fantasy author Nghi Vo's *The Empress of Salt and Fortune* (2020) features non-binary and queer characters. Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone's co-authored *This Is How You Lose the Time War* (2020) is both **science fiction** and **epistolary**, which means it is written as though the characters are corresponding through letters. Okofora's *Binti* is the first in a trilogy written for young adult audiences and reimagines the practices of the Himba people, a semi-nomadic group generally located in Namibia, in a futuristic science fiction setting.

Other contemporary authors use the novella form to re-envision worlds crafted in previous literary works. In *The Ballad of Black Tom* (2016), Victor LaValle challenges the racism present in H. P. Lovecraft’s short story “The Horror at Red Hook” (1927) by rewriting the events from the perspective of a Black man. By contrast, some young adult writers publish additional content about the worlds they have created in the novella form. The novels in the *Shatter Me* series are primarily written from the perspective of a single **protagonist**, but their author Tahereh Mafi has also published several companion novellas from other characters’ perspectives. These novellas fill in gaps of the story left out of the novels or narrate the novels’ events from other characters’ points of view. Since the audience is expected to have read the novel series, these novellas can focus intensely on the specific characters’ **internal conflicts** as opposed to worldbuilding. In doing so, these novellas not only fulfill the general word count expectations that qualify a work as being a novella, but they (more importantly) also adhere to the intense focus of other standalone texts mentioned in this chapter.

The novella continues to evolve as authors innovate the form, and our understanding of the novella—its past, present, and future—continues to expand as scholars are more inclusive of works by a diverse range of authors.

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Key Components of Novellas

Claire Carly-Miles, Kimberly Clough, Sarah LeMire, and Kathy Anders

Many **close reading** strategies that apply to other literary forms also apply to novellas. For example, as with short stories, novels, drama, and film, you will want to identify and think about the novella’s major elements in order to prepare to dive deeper. You can begin to do this by annotating specific passages in the work. Think about these notes as the beginnings of a conversation with the literary text. Essentially, as you read, the work speaks to you; in making notes, you speak back to it, noting the things that strike you as curious, unusual, or just plain interesting. These annotations serve many purposes:

- They can help you discover significant patterns. For example, you may notice that Chopin repeats the word “solitude” seven times throughout *The Awakening*. How might

this observation deepen your understanding of what Chopin is trying to convey about Edna and her world?

- They may guide your engagement with the scholarly conversation. During your research, you might discover that, in her notebook, Chopin added the words “A Solitary Soul” beneath the title.⁴ Once you know this, how does the repetition of the word “solitude” and its meaning to the story as a whole expand?
- Your notes can identify areas that you need to research, such as details about the setting, definitions of unfamiliar words, and translations of words in other languages. You might even jot down definitions or translations in the margins to help you when you are participating in classroom discussions and reexamining the section when writing your literary analysis essay.
- All of the above contribute to achieving a deeper understanding of the work as a whole. This will prepare you to engage in classroom dialogues and write your literary essay. (See Chapter 1 for a sample annotated page from one author’s own copy of *The Awakening*.)

When reading or working with digital texts, you can use free online tools like [Hypothesis](#) to make annotations.⁵ In *Hypothesis*, you can annotate a web page by yourself or with a group. Your annotations in *Hypothesis* can be made private (only you or people you select see your notes) or public (accessible to anyone using the tool). Your instructor may even use *Hypothesis* to facilitate a class or group annotated copy of an assigned text, so you can virtually read along with your classmates and instructor.

As with any short piece of literature, consider why each element is included. For example, why does Chopin use so many words to describe the locations in *The Awakening*? This is notable because this novella is so short that publishers often include a selection of Chopin’s short stories when releasing it in hardcopy or digital editions. Below, we will focus on specific literary elements of the novella, many of which are shared by other forms, with examples from *The Awakening*. When applicable, we will compare *The Awakening* with other literary texts mentioned in this textbook to illustrate the novella’s specificities.

Plot & Conflict

In addition to novellas often focusing on a singular character, you may also think about the intensity of novellas as produced by a limited **plot**. While their storylines likely involve the same plot elements (**rising action**, **conflict**, **climax**, **falling action**, and **resolution** or perhaps **denouement**) applicable to much conventional narrative fiction, novellas compress those elements, creating a form between the short story and the novel in its ability to focus intensely but develop more extensively. Similar to the short story, a novella concentrates on a

⁴ Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1994), 2.

⁵ Hypothesis, last modified 2021, <https://web.hypothes.is/>.

singular plot but can explore it in more detail than the length of a short story allows; however, the novella's plot is more restricted in length and scope than a novel.

For example, in *The Awakening*, the arc of the plot focuses entirely on Edna and the struggles that ensue for her. In terms of the length of time covered in the novella, Edna's "awakening" spans only a few months, from summer to autumn. In comparison, a short story such as Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" (1893) takes place over a shorter period of time (with only glimpses of action over the course of about two months), and a novel like *Jane Eyre* extends over Jane's lifetime, from childhood to adulthood. Novels have more room and therefore a greater capacity for development of plot, whether over time or in terms of detail or both. In addition, *Jane Eyre* includes multiple **subplots** (like the mystery of the woman in the attic), whereas the storyline of *The Awakening* concentrates intensely and solely upon Edna's **internal conflict**.

Conflict in any narrative fiction is usually the driving force of the plot. Generally, plots follow a typical trajectory, all the parts of which are related to the conflict:

1. The **rising action** provides the reader with the circumstances of the conflict;
2. The **climax** directly involves the conflict;
3. The **resolution** is the settling of the conflict, whether satisfactorily or not;
4. Finally, the **falling action** and/or **denouement** give us an idea of what happens after the conflict has been settled.

Conflict can be internal, external, or both, and these types of conflict are often very much intertwined with one another in novellas. For example, Edna attempts to express her internal conflict to Adèle when she states in Chapter XVI: "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me."⁶ Here, she begins to wrestle with the idea of what constitutes her essential self as opposed to her life, and this internal conflict is certainly tied to external conflicts over gender roles, perceptions of women's sexuality, and expectations for mothers. While internalizing her conflict, she also struggles externally in her societal roles. The two types of conflict inform one another in telling ways as Edna finds that her inability to live authentically is a direct result of the ways in which she is viewed as a woman, a wife, and a mother in her time and place.

Narrator

As in other literary forms, identifying the **point of view** (the perspective of the storytelling) helps situate us as readers. To identify the point of view, it is helpful to describe the **narrator**, or who is telling the story. Literary scholars use the following terms to describe the

⁶ Kate Chopin, *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories* (Project Gutenberg, 1994), chap. xvi, last modified February 28, 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/160/160-h/160-h.htm>.

narrator(s). A **first-person narrator** speaks from their own perspective, often using the pronoun “I.” Jane in *Jane Eyre* is the first-person narrator, and all thoughts, feelings, and actions come from her perspective. A **second-person narrator** directly addresses the reader(s) as “you,” pulling the reader in as a character in the story. A second-person narrator would say something like, “You walk down the street,” to indicate the action of the story. This narrative style is not common in fiction but does occasionally appear, such as in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* (1996). A **third-person narrator** tells the plot without using “I” pronouns; the narrator in this style seems disembodied from the text because they are likely not a character. It is tempting to conflate a third-person narrator with the author, but remember that writing fiction is an imaginative act. Literature is not an exact replica of reality; it is also a way for authors to imagine scenarios and other perspectives. This means that the viewpoint of the narrator is not necessarily the same as that of the author.

One way to recognize the difference between the narrator and the author is when the narrator does not know everything that the creator of the novella’s world presumably would. Narrators can be **omniscient**, or all-seeing, which means that they know and can describe everything in the storyworld, including what all of the characters are thinking and what motivates each of them. In contrast, a **limited narrator** is restricted to a particular character; in this point of view, the author only writes what a specific character would know or feel. If the seemingly disembodied storyteller is only telling you things that a specific character would know, this is an example of a third-person limited narrator.

Remember from the chapter on the short story that narrators can be **unreliable**, which means that they may not be telling a credible story. To determine if a narrator is reliable or unreliable, practice fact-checking their statements with evidence from the text.

Characters

Due to its focused concentration, the novella generally has fewer characters in contrast to the novel, which has the textual space to include many characters (sometimes developing them and sometimes not). As you will see in Chapter 5, *Jane Eyre* focuses on the titular character but contains many other **dynamic** characters (characters that change significantly over the course of the story). In contrast, **static** characters do not change during the story. Characters can also be **flat** (undeveloped) or **round** (complex and well-developed).

Since novellas often focus on the **protagonist** (main character), the other characters are often flat and static. These characters often act as foils. The term “**foil**” originates in jewelry making, where a piece of foil was used to cover the back of a gemstone in its setting in order to make it shine and glitter more intensely. In the literary sense, the purpose of a **foil** is to provide a contrast to another character, often the protagonist. Character qualities are illuminated (or made to shine more intensely) through this comparison. In *The Awakening*, consider how the

character of Adèle acts as a foil to Edna. What does comparing these two women illuminate about Edna?

When populating character lists, remember to look out for characters without names. *The Awakening* has several unnamed characters, such as the lady in black on Grand Isle. Characters who are (what we would now refer to as) Black Americans also appear, often not by name but by outdated terms that denoted race and class in post-Civil War Louisiana.

Setting

As mentioned in Chapter 3, “The Short Story,” **setting** includes both location and time. When reading a novella, you may easily skim over the details of time period and locale, but setting is integral to the development of the plot and conflict. Consider how different *The Awakening* would be if it was set in a landlocked U.S. state like Edna’s birthplace of Kentucky. How would the novella’s plot and theme develop differently without the ocean? As you will see in the sample essay at the end of this chapter, setting is very important for the plot of *The Awakening*.

Researching the time period or location, especially when you are unfamiliar with one or both, can illuminate your understanding of the text. Histories or geographies of a place can help you get a sense of what a novella’s setting might be like, and works of art can visually represent how places looked. You could explore the TAMU Libraries’ Quick Search for books and articles about nineteenth-century Louisiana or about the experiences of women in the South during this time period to help you better understand the subtleties of the text. There are also databases like Artstor where you can look up works of visual art like photographs and paintings that can help you envision the space inhabited by the characters.

Additionally, since *The Awakening* is a novella, the setting is limited to only two major locations: Grand Isle and New Orleans. Because there are only two, we may easily consider how those compare to one another and what meanings Chopin creates with that comparison. What major events take place in Grand Isle? What happens in New Orleans? Where does the novella begin and end? How does Chopin use these two particular settings to reveal important information about Edna’s experiences? The sample essay at the end of this chapter develops an interesting argument about these two settings and the ways in which Chopin employs them to contribute to the meaning of her work.

Symbols & Motifs

As you read in Chapter 3, which discusses the short story, **symbols** work in literature in many ways, including as **conventional symbols** (such as a wedding ring), characters who may function in part as symbols, symbolic settings, and **symbolic acts**. Symbols may be “universal,” a term intended to signal that these symbols are easily recognized by many people (although the concept of universality is a slippery one in our world where so many different cultures

exist, with some symbols shared but many more that are culturally specific). In every way, however, symbols work to compress meaning into a very small space. As mentioned in Chapter 3, birds are often identified as symbols of freedom and, when they are caged, as symbols of oppressed freedom. Take a look at the first few lines of *The Awakening*:

A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over:

“*Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi!* That’s all right!”

He could speak a little Spanish, and also a language which nobody understood, unless it was the mocking-bird that hung on the other side of the door, whistling his fluty [*sic*] notes out upon the breeze with maddening persistence.⁷

A group of symbols that are akin to one another make up a motif. **Motifs** are, simply put, repeating and meaningful patterns. If you’ve studied music, you may be familiar with the term *leitmotif*, a particular strain of music that is repeated throughout the work to signal a certain character, location, or action. Sergei Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* is an excellent example of *leitmotif*, wherein not only particular strings of notes but also particular instruments signify specific characters. In literature, motifs are often achieved by the repetition of symbols. After you’ve read *The Awakening* in its entirety, you may want to consider how the accumulation of similar symbols (for example, the green and yellow parrot, the mockingbird, Mademoiselle Reisz’s definition of an artist, Edna’s “Pigeon House,” and the bird in the conclusion) all work together to create a motif in the novella. What do you think that motif may be, and why is it important to consider how all of these symbols work together as a motif in order to help us achieve a deeper understanding of Chopin’s work?

Looking ahead to *Jane Eyre*, you’ll notice that birds again play a symbolic role in the meaning of the novel. Similar to *The Awakening*, this novel uses these symbols to create a motif that adds to the reader’s understanding of Jane’s life and progress. Unlike the novella, however, where this motif is focused upon intensely in a very brief space, *Jane Eyre* interweaves these symbols at particularly significant points in her narrative. This is in part because the novel is an expanded form with many settings and characters, and so it has the time and room to develop the idea of the significance of birds more slowly and with much more information to go on in order to understand, over time, what they may signify. For the novella, however, where time and space are short, meaning(s) must be compressed, and symbols, packing together to make a motif, may be used more frequently in order to convey meaning(s) more effectively.

⁷ Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories*. August 1994; Project Gutenberg, February 28, 2021. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/160/160-h/160-h.htm>.

Word Choice

As with every piece of literature, you should pay particular attention to the earliest words the author gives you to read: the title of the work. You may not (and probably won't) have a sound theory about the title's meaning until you've finished the piece, but you can begin to consider why the author named their work in this way. Further, as you read, you'll begin to formulate ideas and arguments about what the title might signify (keeping in mind that there may be many meanings in the work and thus many ways in which the title may function to point to those meanings). Authors may also include **epigraphs**, which are quotations from other works placed at the beginning of a text (the text as a whole or chapter divisions) that help to set the tone of the piece. This chapter, for example, includes an epigraph to immediately let our readers know that the novella is a difficult form to define.

As you consider the author's diction, take time to look up unfamiliar words and translate non-English phrases. This will not only help broaden your vocabulary, but you may discover important meanings that may have been glossed over or misunderstood. *The Awakening* contains words that are not frequently used in modern-day English, and to glance quickly over these words means that you will miss things that are important to a deeper understanding of the novella. For instance, consider setting again: the action of *The Awakening* takes place in Louisiana among nineteenth-century upper-class families, many of them Creole, thus making the use of French words and phrases frequent and vital to understanding the characters. In order to illustrate this point, let us return to a quotation we examined above. The first sentence of the novella includes French (spoken by a parrot in a cage):

A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over:

“*Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi!* [Go away! Go away! Good Heavens!] That's all right!”⁸

The bracketed phrase translates the French to English. These words—what they mean and the symbolism attached to who repetitively squawks them—immediately establishes an image of confinement and frustration before we are even introduced to Edna, herself.

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⁸ Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories*. August 1994; Project Gutenberg, February 28, 2022. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/160/160-h/160-h.htm>.

Writing About Novellas

Claire Carly-Miles, Kimberly Clough, Sarah LeMire, and Kathy Anders

When writing a literary analysis essay, your goal is to create an argument about the text using close readings as supporting evidence. Instead of merely cataloging the literary elements you can identify in a text, literary analysis essays argue how the text can or should be read based upon close analysis of those elements. Listing literary elements remains on the surface of the text, whereas literary analysis engages with the subtext, providing an interesting reading of the text that would not immediately be apparent to a first-time reader.

You might be tempted to cram as many literary terms into your essay as possible to show your understanding of the textbook readings. Most instructors, however, care more about your demonstration of your close reading skills and your creation of a strong argument than if you use the term “foil.” Be especially careful when including literary terms that you are not entirely comfortable talking about. Strive, instead, to use language that you know the meaning of rather than use vocabulary with nuances that you may not fully understand. When you encounter terms that you are not sure about or need other assistance with your essay, ask your instructor for help.

Generating Ideas to Write About

So, how do you identify what you want to write about? Think back to our discussion earlier in this chapter (or in Chapter 1) about engaging in a conversation with the work you’re reading. You have done this by annotating things that strike you about the text. For example, as we discussed in the section on symbols, those birds that Chopin mentions in the first few sentences of the novella are pretty interesting, and they become even more interesting as you begin to note that birds or birdlike images appear frequently throughout the text.

In addition to the annotations you make as you are reading (and rereading) the text, you might also consider generating ideas by using data visualization tools. [Voyant](https://voyant-tools.org/) is a free website that allows you to upload all or portions of a text.⁹ Once you upload a text, you can use *Voyant* to make word clouds of most frequently used terms, trace how frequently a word is used at different points within a text, and more. You can use this tool to analyze words that you already know are important, and it might identify some words that are repeated more frequently than you might have originally thought. For example, you can use *Voyant* to search

⁹ Stèfan Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell. “Voyant Tools.” *Voyant*, 2021. <https://voyant-tools.org/>.

for “bird” in the novella. How many times and in what specific contexts might you find the word appearing? Does the word appear more frequently at a certain point in the novella? You might also search for another word that strikes you as critically important to a deeper understanding of the text.

When using digital humanities tools, keep a few things in mind. Tools like *Voyant* work best with longer written texts (as opposed to a short poem where it is easy to count the number of times a word appears) that are digital (so you do not have to type up, say, a one-hundred page novella). When using a digital text, you should also consider its quality: is it accurate to the original version? Does it include any material that you need to exclude? For instance, *Project Gutenberg's* copy of *The Awakening* includes a selection of short stories that you will need to eliminate to produce an accurate analysis of the novella.

Once you identify a pattern in the text or something else that seems significant to you as you've been reading and annotating, you can begin to think about the argument you want to make about that pattern or significant thing. Why is it important to notice? What might it mean?

Making Claims

As reiterated in this textbook, there is no single meaning that is present in a text; however, this doesn't mean that you can make up or say whatever you want in your essay about the text. Rather, think in terms of credible (and therefore valid) arguments instead of “right” and “wrong” arguments. Say we want to make the following claim about *The Awakening*: “The parrot, not Edna, is the protagonist.” You can already see how this position is not a credible one. If there's any doubt about this, you only have to think about how many times the parrot is mentioned in the text and how many times Edna is mentioned.

Not only must your claim be valid, but it also must be arguable and not obvious to every reader. If you were to claim, “The word ‘bird’ appears in *The Awakening*,” no one would argue with you; you are simply stating a fact. Based on your use of digital tools, you might be tempted to argue that the word “bird” appears frequently. This claim, however, stays on the surface; you will still need to analyze and relate this textual evidence to a larger argument about the work. You will want to begin to think about *why* the frequency of the word “bird” is important in the text. Once you begin to identify a potential credible argument about your observations or data, you will then consider the pieces of the text that lead you to that meaning.

Using and Analyzing Evidence

When making a claim about any piece of literature, you should be able to support that claim with evidence from the text, and the text itself should not have glaring evidence that

undercuts your claim. Returning to the idea of Chopin's including birds frequently throughout her novella, you might note where birds (or bird references) appear and ask yourself how those appearances relate to the other major literary elements in the text. If birds seem to be important because they appear often in *The Awakening*, *how* and *why* are they important? Do they relate to the plot in some way? How might they be relevant to a deeper understanding of Edna's character and other characters in the book?

Researching

In addition to supporting your analysis with evidence from the text, you also want to establish credibility through research and inclusion of scholarly/reputable sources. While you may be able to find some scholarly sources via search engines like Google, search engines also retrieve many other types of sources like news articles, blogs, and other websites. You may find it difficult to sift through these types of search results to find specific types of sources, like scholarly journal articles. If you do locate a scholarly source via a search engine, you may find that the source is paywalled, meaning you'll be asked to pay a fee to access the source.

Libraries like Texas A&M's subscribe to databases that contain more specific types of sources. For example, there are databases of newspaper articles, databases of government information, and databases of scholarly and academic sources. Some databases contain materials targeted to a specific discipline. *MLA International Bibliography* is a popular database for those studying literature. Other databases are used by a group of disciplines. For instance, *JSTOR* is a database commonly used in the humanities and social sciences. Using databases like *MLA International Bibliography* and *JSTOR* will help you find relevant scholarly material, because they are more focused than a general search engine. Using library databases can also help you avoid paywalls, because access is already included as part of your tuition and fees.

Although scholarly may sound like another way of saying academic or credible when referring to types of sources, it typically refers to a particular type of source. The term "scholarly" usually refers to books or articles that have been through a formal peer review process. Peer-reviewed materials have been evaluated by other scholars in the same field before publication, often after identifying information has been removed, so neither the reviewer nor the author knows the other's identity. Although peer review is often considered an important step in the production of quality academic research, it is not a perfect process, nor does it mean that sources that are not peer reviewed are not useful or credible. However, searching through databases of scholarly sources is often a good strategy to find the types of credible and reputable sources that will bolster your argument.

In addition to **secondary sources** like journal articles, which are written about a text, you may want to look at databases and archives of **primary sources**, which are the texts that you are studying. If you want to see what a text looked like when it was originally published, you could look at databases of primary sources of historical works of literature, like *Nineteenth Century*

Collections Online. Archives are another great place to look for materials. In the case of materials related to Chopin, the Missouri Historical Society Archives contain large numbers of historical documents that have been digitized and are available online.

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Spotlight on Kate Chopin and *The Awakening*

Kimberly Clough and Claire Carly-Miles

Biography: Kate Chopin (1850-1904)

Kate Chopin was born Katherine O’Flaherty in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1850 and spent her childhood and young adulthood there. In 1870 she met and married Oscar Chopin and moved with him to his home in New Orleans, Louisiana. Later, when Oscar failed to succeed in business, the family moved to his old home, a plantation near Cloutierville, Louisiana, where they lived until his death from swamp fever in 1882. During their twelve-year marriage, Chopin gave birth to seven children—five sons and two daughters. Chopin stayed on at the plantation for about a year after Oscar’s death, attempting to keep it running, but in 1883, she and her children returned to her childhood home city of St. Louis. Shortly thereafter, she began writing, publishing two collections of short stories (*Bayou Folk* in 1894 and *A Night in Acadie* in 1897) and numerous stories in children’s magazines.

Between 1889 and 1890, Chopin wrote and published her first novella, *At Fault*.¹⁰ This novella was set in two places: it begins on a plantation named Place du Bois near the Cane River (thus, in the general area that Chopin herself had occupied during her marriage and the first year of her widowhood) and then moves to St. Louis (just as Chopin did, after she was widowed). *At Fault* explores a widow’s struggle between her sexuality and her obligations to others, themes that would emerge again in *The Awakening*, published ten years later in 1899. By this date, she had become well-known and appreciated as an accomplished writer of local color and children’s stories. The widely negative (and often vicious) reception of *The Awakening*, discussed below, was a painful shock and a disappointment to Chopin, and it resulted,

¹⁰ “*At Fault*, Kate Chopin, Characters, Setting, Questions.” *KateChopin.org*, 8 June 2021, www.katechopin.org/at-fault/#composition.

unfortunately, in her writing less and less before her untimely death at the age of 54 from a brain hemorrhage. While *The Awakening* was received poorly (as you'll read below in the next section) and fell out of circulation quickly after its publication, it gained scholarly attention once again in the 1950s and, by the 1980s, had been canonized as a critical contribution to discussions about women, sexuality, and gender roles.¹¹

The Reception of *The Awakening*

When *The Awakening* was first published in 1899, book reviewers had mixed reactions. An unnamed writer, who identifies as a woman in her review, seemed pleasantly surprised at the scandalous content in the novella: "The only thing that surprised me in looking it over was that it could be written by Kate Chopin, who once contented herself with giving us mild yarns and pages clean enough to put in a Sunday-school library. And now she writes things we women used only whisper in our boudoirs. But we women are getting on, aren't we?"¹² The press's consensus, however, was disapproving. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reviewer wrote, "I do not know whether Mrs. Chopin intends that we shall have any sympathy for Mrs. Pontellier or not. To my mind she deserves none.... Her conduct seems to have been that of a wanton."¹³ The negative critiques rarely condemned Chopin's writing skill but censured the novella's theme and its perceived (im)moral lesson; in fact, many unfavorable reviews praised the style of *The Awakening*. The book reviewer for the *San Francisco Call* wrote of Chopin's novella, "The story is vulgar, but the style in which it is handled is refined and graceful."¹⁴ Similarly, Henry A. Wise wrote that *The Awakening* "is a brilliant piece of writing, but unwholesome in its influence. We cannot commend it."¹⁵

In response to the negative reactions to *The Awakening*, Chopin issued a tongue-in-cheek retraction statement in a literary newspaper just months after her novella's publication.

¹¹ Corse, Sarah M., and Sandra Davis Westervelt. "Gender and Literary Valorization: *The Awakening* of a Canonical Novel." *Sociological Perspectives* Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 2002). pp.139-161.

¹² "Book Ways and Worldly Ways." *Delaware Gazette and State Journal*, 13 July 1899, 8.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88053046/1899-07-13/ed-1/seq-8/#date1=1777&index=9&rows=20&words=Awakening+Chopin&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1963&proxtext=%22chopin%22+awakening&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>

¹³ "Novel Leaves a Bad Taste." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 April 1899, 51.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/172875399/pageviewPDF/32967396F21478DPQ/1?accountid=7082>

¹⁴ "Books Reviewed." *San Francisco Call*, 2 July 1899, 30.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1899-07-02/ed-1/seq-30/#date1=1777&index=5&rows=20&words=Awakening+Chopin+Kate&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1963&proxtext=%22kate+chopin%22+awakening&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>

¹⁵ Wise, Henry A. "Literature: Book Reviews." *Congregationalist*, 24 August 1899, 256.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/124199277/pageviewPDF/32967396F21478DPQ/2?accountid=7082>

Kate Chopin's Response to Negative Reviews of *The Awakening*¹⁶

Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was then too late.

Within the context of pejorative press censuring the morality of her work, Chopin received two letters from across the Atlantic, forwarded to her from her publisher. Scholars are still perplexed about the origin of these letters. As of yet, no evidence exists to confirm that the letter writers—Janet Scammon Young and Dunrobin Thomson—ever existed or that they were who they said they were. This has led to multiple speculations about who wrote these letters. Prominent Chopin scholars Per Seyersted and Emily Toth hypothesize Chopin's friends might have composed the letters, meaning to lift her spirits after *The Awakening's* poor reception.¹⁷ Other literary scholars even suggest that Chopin may have written the letters herself.¹⁸ For clarity's sake, the rest of this section will refer to the letter writers by the names provided in their content—Young and Thomson. While we may not be able to confirm the identity of the writers, the letters are intriguing artifacts in the history of *The Awakening's* reception.

In what follows, you can read the transcription of the two handwritten letters Chopin received. If you are interested in seeing the original letters, the digitized copies are available online through the Missouri Historical Society Archives. Of particular interest in the archived copy of Young's letter is the envelope, complete with stamps and postmarks. Because Young's letter refers to phrases that Thomson uses, the Thomson letter appears first. In transcribing the letters, the original punctuation, spelling, ampersands, and underlines were retained with the exception of removing hyphens for words completed on the following line or page. The following letter was dated 5 October 1899 and written on stationery from Langham Hotel, London, England.

¹⁶ Chopin, Kate. "Aims and Autographs of Authors." *Book News*, July 1899, 612.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924091816516&view=1up&seq=760>.

¹⁷ Seyersted, Per. "Kate Chopin's Wound: Two New Letters." *American Literary Realism, 1870–1910*. 20, no. 1 (1987): 73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27746264>; Toth, Emily. *Unveiling Kate Chopin*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 226.

¹⁸ Batten, Wayne. "Illusion and Archetype: The Curious Story of Edna Pontellier." *The Southern Literary Journal* 18, no. 1 (1985): 75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20077784>.

Letter to Lady Janet Scammon Young from Dunrobin Thomson (1899)¹⁹

My dear Lady Janet:

It is commonplace to say that I am indebted to you for a great pleasure in the loan of the remarkable book “The Awakening”. I have read it twice—once at a sitting where I ought to have been asleep, and again more deliberately in my brougham. Doubtless it will be published over here, but I am having my bookseller get his copies of the American edition—one for Crestwood and one for town. It is easily the book of the year. The ending reminds one of “The Open Question”, but how vastly superior in power, ethic and art is this newer book.

You accuse “Kate Chopin” (a pen name I suppose) of an unnecessary tragedy. My dear Lady Janet, the authoress took the world as it is, as all art must—and ‘twas inevitable that poor dear Edna, being noble, and having Pontellier for husband, and Arobin for lover, and average women for friends, should die.

My wrath is not toward “Kate Chopin” at all. That which makes “The Awakening” legitimate is that the author deals with the commonest of human experiences. You fancy Edna’s case exceptional? Trust an old doctor—most common. It is only that Edna was nobler, and took that last clean swim. The others live. Not all meet Arobin or Robert. The essence of the matter lies in the accursed stupidity of men. They marry a girl, she becomes a mother. They imagine she has sounded the heights and depths of womanhood. Poor fools! She is not even awakened. She, on her part is a victim of the abominable prudishness which masquerades as modesty or virtue. Every great and beautiful fact of nature has a vile counterfeit. The counterfeit of goodness is self righteousness—of true modesty, prudishness. The law, spoken or implied, which governs the upbringing of girls is that passion is disgraceful. It is to be assumed that a self respecting female has it not. In so far as normally constituted womanhood must take account of something sexual, it is called “love”. It was inevitable, therefore, that Edna should call her feeling for Robert love. It was simply & purely passion as her feeling for Arobin. “Kate Chopin” would not admit that. Being (I assume) a woman, she too would reserve the word love for Edna’s feeling for Robert.

The especial point of a wife’s danger when her beautiful, God given commandment awakes, is that she will save her self respect by imagining herself in love with the

¹⁹ Letter signed Dunrobin Thomson, Langham Hotel, London, to Lady Janet, 5 October 1899, Kate O’Flaherty Chopin Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Correspondence, 1899, Missouri Historical Society Archives, <http://collections.mohistory.org/resource/173034>. Transcribed by Kimberly Clough. July 2021.

awakener. She should be taught by her husband to distinguish between passion and love. Then she is safe, invulnerable. Even if, at the worst she “falls”—she will rise again.

It is inevitable, natural, and therefore clean and harmless, that a normal, healthfully constituted married woman will be stirred in her passionate being by the men between whom and herself there is that mysterious affinity of the real nature of which we know nothing. If she calls that stirring of her nature “love” she is lost. If she knows perfectly well that it is passion; if she esteems and respects her passionate capacity as she does her capacity to be moved by a song or sunset, or a great poem, or a word nobly said—she is safe. She knows what that thing is. She is no more ashamed of it than of her responsiveness to any other great appeal. She knows that it does not touch her wife-life, her mother-life, her true self-hood. It is not “naughty”.

A wise husband (there are some) is at no point so loving and tenderly wise as at this point. A cad or a cur is (God save the mark) jealous. If his wife is weak she quails, and hides from men, or shelters herself in a pretended indifference. If she is strong she resents the monstrous insult of his suspicion. I am happier over nothing in my professional life than that I have helped many men at this point—many men, many women. I have said to more than one man: Your wife’s nature is stirring: lovingly help her. Let her see that you know it and like it; and that you distinguish perfectly between her heart, her wifely loyalty, and her body—make her distinguish too.

But I weary you. This book has stirred me to the soul. Edna is like a personal friend. She is not impure. The art, the local colour, the distinctness of characterisation of even the minor personages are something wonderful.

Thanking you again, dear Lady Janet,

I am as ever yours faithfully

Dunrobin Thomson

My house is closed—I am here till Oct 15 when Betty comes back with Lucy.

As you will read in the following letter, Young quotes Thomson with phrases such as “passionate being.” Both letter writers praise Chopin not only for her skill as a fiction writer but also as an acute observer of human nature. They confirm the veracity of Edna’s internal conflict with lived experiences by providing examples from their own lives. Thomson compares Edna’s actions to his patients to verify the commonality of her feelings, while Young, as you will read in the following pages, provides a specific example of a young woman and her husband “Phil” to illustrate how Léonce might have treated Edna more compassionately. As a

note, the em dashes in the following transcription represent handwritten lines (as opposed to indicating illegible sections of the document).

Letter from Janet Scammon Young to Kate Chopin²⁰

Kate Chopin;

I feel sure I ought to send you the inclosed letter from the great consulting physician of England, who is also one of the purest and best of men, and who has been said by a great editor to be “the soundest critic since Matthew Arnold.”

Your book has deeply stirred some other noble souls to whom I have lent it. Like Doctor T—— I assume that it is to be republished over here. Maarten Maartens, who was here last week, said “The Awakening” ought to be translated into Dutch, Scandinavian and Russian—so at least he was reported to me.

But great as is my interest in this book I confess to a still deeper interest in one which you ought to write—which you alone among living novelists could write. Evidently like all of us you believe Edna to have been worth saving—believe her to have been too noble to go to her death as she did. I quite bow to Doctor T’s better sense of art. The conventions required her to die. But suppose her husband had been conceived on higher lines? Suppose Dr Mandelet had said other things to him—had said, for example: “Pontellier, like most men you fancy that because you have possessed your wife hundreds of times she necessarily long ago came to entire womanly self knowledge that your embraces have as a matter of course answered whatever of passion she may be endowed with. You are mistaken. She is just becoming conscious of sex—is just finding herself compelled to take account of masculinity as such. You cannot arrest that process whatever you do; you should not wish to do so, assist this birth of your wife’s deeper womanliness. Be tender. Let her know that you see how Robert, Arobin affect her. Laugh with her over the evident influence of her womanhood over them. Tell her how, in itself it is natural that is divinely made & therefore innocent and pure and the very basis of social life—else why is true society absolutely nonexistent without both sexes. There is no society in Turkey. Shew her the nonsense of ascribing all this interinfluence to “the feminine mind acting up on the masculine mind”—a saying that so severe a thinker as Herbert Spencer ridicules. Above all trust her, let her see that you do. Only the inherently base woman betrays a trust. Leave her with Robert, with Arobin. Trusted [underlined twice] she will never fail you—distrusted, ignored, left in ignorance of what her new unrest really means she will fall. Follow my advice and in a year you will have a new wife with whom you will fall in love again; & you will be a new husband, manlier, more virile and impassioned with whom she

²⁰ Letter signed Janet Scammon Young, 8 Newman Street, Oxford St. W., London, to Kate Chopin, 1899, Kate O’Flaherty Chopin Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Correspondence, 1899, Missouri Historical Society Archives, <https://mohistory.org/collections/item/D03581>. Transcribed by Kimberly Clough. July 2021.

will fall in love again." Suppose Dr. Mandelet had thus spoken, and Pontellier had thus acted?

Of course in its brutal literal significance we wholly reject and loathe the French maxim: "The lover completes the wife", and yet if we know the true facts of nature we must confess that there is a profound inner truth in it. No woman comes to her full womanly empire and charm who has not felt in what Dr T—— calls "her passionate nature" the arousing power of more than one man. But Oh how important to her purity, her honor, her inner self-respect that she shall (again quoting Dr T——) "distinguish between passion and love". So that instead of guiltily saying, "I fear I love that man" she shall say within herself with no sense of guilt—"How that man's masculinity stirs me"—say it above all to her husband. Now all this, which I am saying so clumsily needs saying powerfully; needs to be taught by that most potent method of expression open to man—a great novel. You can write it. You alone. You are free from decadence. Your mind and heart are healthful, free, clean, sympathetic. Give us a great hearted manly man—give us a great natured woman for his wife. Give us the awakening of her whole nature, let her go to the utmost short of actual adultery—shew that her danger is in her ignorance of the great distinctions of which Dr T—— speaks. Shew us how such a husband can save such a wife and turn the influence of sex to its intended beneficent end. I trust I need not say that my suggestions that she go very very far is not for the sake of scenes of passion, but that readers may be helped whose self respect is shipwrecked or near it because they have gone far and are saying "I might as well go all the way."

Let me give you this from real life. A wife of three years, mother of one babe found her "passionate nature" (Dr. T——'s word) disturbed, excited, by a certain man of her circle. She at last desperately said to her husband, "Pray dont invite Capt —— any more." He said nothing then, but the light flashed up on him, and he remembered how his beautiful darling had been either unwontedly warm and tender, or irritable and unreasonable, after she had been dancing or dining with Capt —— . Fortunately he was a man and not what my husband calls a "Turk". So he was very loving and tender in those days until one night when she lay lovingly in his arms he said "Sweetheart, dont some men make you passionate? Of course I know it must be so. You would not be the grand little woman you are if it were not so."

"Oh Phil" she said—"aren't we women horrid that it should be so?"

And then he told her what (I agree with Dr T——) all husbands ought to tell their wives—that passion is no sin—that between being made passionate by the presence of a virile man, and feeling passion for him is a distance as wide as space. Then she saw it and Oh such a burden of causeless self reproach rolled away. "Oh Phil" she said, "I never felt a moment's wish to sin with any man. But when I dance with a fine fellow, or sit by one, and I know he is looking down into my bosom, I feel what I have supposed was a very guilty

glow all through—have felt conscious of my sex—have felt pleased and animated and have—oh made it easy for them to look—but I never wished to sin with them.”

And she told him it was Captain —— who most affected her that way. And then, woman like, she was frightened at her avowal, and wondered if in his heart her husband did not despise her.

Not long after that he told her that some of his friends were coming to play at cards, and he said “Now Sweetheart I want you to be simply ravishing when you preside at a little late supper. Have something very nice for us about midnight. You need not come down till then.”

Whereupon he invited Capt —— and two other men whom he knew perfectly well were quite in the Captain’s class in effect upon his dear wife.

About half-past eleven he went to her room, laughingly made her change her gown for the very most dècôlletè one she had; and when later she came to the library where the men were to speak to them before supper—lo! there was her Captain! They had a merry supper, the “glow” came of course, but now she yielded to it unafraid and unashamed. She had never seen her husband happier, and at last he sent her up to the nursery with the Captain to shew him her dimpled two year old baby boy asleep. The other gentlemen begged to go but her husband said No—he was not going to have a mob of noisy men disturbing his baby. Oh how her heart sang the praises of her husband as she went, and she was not afraid of herself nor of the Captain, strong as the “glow” was when she bent over the little bed, and knew that the Captain was looking far less at the little sleeping babe than at her pretty charms.

I have made a long and stupid story of what you would have packed into one of your brief paragraphs—those paragraphs which are like sunlight and like flowers.

Wont you write us a brave book which will really interpret our sister women to themselves. When “Sir George Tressady” was appearing serially a few of us hoped Sir George was going to be a husband indeed to his little wife. How near they were to it that night in the carriage. She was proud of his handsome well set up figure, of his abilities, his character. He (Prig to the last) could only see that her gown was too low!

If I can do anything for you pray command me. I know publishers, translators &c &c.

I shall go to Montreuse in December at latest, but the address at the beginning will always find me.

With every best wish,

Janet Scammon Young

If the above letters were indeed written by Chopin's friends, the writers attempt to create objective personas. Thomson remarks that "Kate Chopin" cannot be the author's real name and that he assumes *The Awakening's* author is a woman, which suggests that he does not know Chopin personally. If these letters were written by someone other than Thomson and Young, details are included to create a sense of lived reality. Thomson's postscript explains where he will be in the near future and mentions names of women who, one could guess, might be his wife and daughter. Young also takes care to tell Chopin how she might be reached and narrates a story about her friends, giving them names and occupations (Phil and the Captain).

The writers' stated ranks, whether fictional or factual, give credence to these two letters' positive reviews, but the two letters need to be read in tandem to fully grasp this. Young does not use her title of "Lady"—we only surmise that she is part of the aristocracy because of Thomson's letter in which he continually uses her title. While Thomson tells Young to trust him because he is "an old doctor," his signature does not include his title. Instead, Young repeatedly refers to Thomson as "Dr. T" to support the points that she is making. Young also compares Thomson to Matthew Arnold, a well-respected cultural critic of the day, to bolster Thomson's review as not only medically sound but also artistically.

Further, note how both letters connect Chopin with women who were publishing concurrently. *Sir George Tressady* (1895–1896), that Young mentions, is a **serial novel** written by Mary Augusta Ward. *The Open Question: A Tale of Two Temperaments* (1896), which Thomson finds lacking compared to *The Awakening*, was written by C. E. Raimond, the pen name of Elizabeth Robins. By comparing these three authors, the letters establish Chopin as a highbrow literary figure since both Robins and Ward had impressive ties to literary circles. Ward's relatives include Aldous Huxley and Arnold (referenced by Young) while Robins was friends with Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, and Henry James. These social connections helped women access publishing options during this time period. Further, Robins and Ward were staunch and vocal suffragettes, so Chopin's novella is put into conversation with their works that also advocate for women's rights.

Finally, Young's letter extends what is established in the Thomson letter. Thomson affirms that *The Awakening* is not immoral; rather, it reflects the authenticity of women's lived experiences in Edna's social class and setting. Young's letter goes beyond affirming the verisimilitude of Edna's conflict by encouraging Chopin to continue writing and taking even greater literary risks. While we may never confirm who wrote these two letters, their purpose lies in supporting Chopin's past and future work. Amidst the negative press that her novella

received, the letters were a source of comfort and support for Chopin who “showed them to friends with pride and pleasure.”²¹

Attribution:

Clough, Kimberly, and Claire Carly-Miles. “Novella: Spotlight on Kate Chopin and *The Awakening*.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

The Awakening

Claire Carly-Miles

Link to text: [The Awakening](#)

Chopin, Kate. “The Awakening.” 1899. In *The Awakening and Selected Short Stories*. Project Gutenberg, August 1994. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/160/160-h/160-h.htm>.

The following study questions and activities divide the novella into units based on setting and pivotal moments. In thinking about these chapter sets and the questions arising from them, you will begin to dive deeply into the novella, identifying important patterns and themes. This will prepare you to engage in lively class discussions and may, in turn, lead you to potential essay topics.

Chapters I–VI: Grand Isle

This first set of chapters introduces the reader to the main character, Edna Pontellier, who is staying with her husband and two children at a seaside resort on Grand Isle, off the coast of Louisiana. Other important characters introduced in this section are Adèle Ratignolle and Robert LeBrun.

²¹ Toth, Emily. *Unveiling Kate Chopin*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 226.

The Awakening *Chapters I–VI Questions and Activities for Further Analysis*

1. What possible symbols do you notice in these first 6 chapters?
2. List and briefly describe each of the characters mentioned in this section. After you've finished all of the descriptions, choose one or two words that you think best represent each character.
3. Write a short paragraph describing the relationship between Edna and Léonce Pontellier. Support your observations with at least two specific quotations from the text.
4. Using a library database like *MLA International Bibliography* or *JSTOR*, research any of the following key words or phrases and write a paragraph or two on your findings. How does this research aid your reading of *The Awakening*?
 - a. Napoleonic Code
 - b. *The Angel in the House* (author: Coventry Patmore)
 - c. Creole AND (femininity OR masculinity)
 - d. Creoles AND sex roles
5. Chapter VI is an especially significant part of this novella. Why do you think this might be the case?

Carly-Miles, Claire. "The Awakening Chapters I–VI Questions and Activities for Further Analysis." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Chapters VII–XVI: Grand Isle

This unit continues on Grand Isle and contains significant events in the process of Edna's "awakening," one of which is Robert and Edna's day trip to the *Chênière Caminada*.

The Awakening *Chapters VII–XVI Questions and Activities for Further Analysis*

1. Does this section contain any new characters, either newly introduced or described in greater detail, than in the first six chapters of the book? Describe them and choose one or two words that best represent each.
2. Identify symbols in this section. What symbols may be repeated from chapters I–VI? How are these developed further? What new symbols do you notice in this section?
3. Compare and contrast Edna and Adèle. Use at least one quotation from the text to illustrate your examination of the two characters.

4. What happens to Edna on her day trip to the *Chênrière Caminada* with Robert? There are many ways to answer this question. Choose one major piece of the trip and examine it closely, listing and beginning to analyze specific details including setting (time and place), symbols, and possible conflict(s). Be sure to include at least one quotation from the text in order to support your discussion.
5. Where does Robert go when he leaves Grand Isle, and what do you suppose motivates him to do this?

Carly-Miles, Claire. "The Awakening Chapters VII–XVI Questions and Activities for Further Analysis." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Chapters XVII–XXIV: New Orleans

This section shifts to New Orleans and the Pontelliers' upper-class home and daily routines there. These chapters introduce several new characters, including Edna's father, Dr. Mandelet, Alcee Arobin, and, briefly, Mrs. Highcamp.

The Awakening Chapters XVII–XXIV Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Consider the Pontellier home and how both Léonce and Edna behave there. What expectations are there in their home, how do those expectations become a source of tension, and what happens when they do? Use at least two specific quotations to support your observations. If you would like to dive deeper, visit your library's databases and, using the *MLA International Bibliography* and/or *JSTOR*, conduct a search with keywords such as *The Awakening* or *nineteenth-century New Orleans*, *gender*, *women*, *social roles*, *sex roles*, and/or *patriarchy* among numerous other possibilities.
2. Look closely at the passages mentioning and/or involving Dr. Mandelet. How would you characterize him? What purpose do you think he might serve in the story (given also that he has only just been introduced to the reader in this particular section of the novella)? Again, include at least two specific quotations in your discussion of this topic.
3. What might be important to note about Edna's father's visit to her? How would you describe her father? How would you describe Edna's behavior during the visit?
4. Discuss Arobin and Mrs. Highcamp. What do you think of them and what passages, both in this section and earlier in the novel, inform your perception of them?

5. What has happened between chapters XXVII and XXVIII? Chapter XXVIII is the shortest chapter in the novella. What purpose might be served by its brevity? Recall also another very short chapter (chapter VI) towards the beginning of the novella. Examine these two chapters together, comparing and contrasting them. What ideas do you find particularly striking about Edna and her life after you've set these two brief chapters side by side?
6. This section of the novel contains much discussion of art and artists. Find and quote one passage in order to examine thoroughly what qualifies as art and who qualifies as an artist. Also consider the purpose art and discussions of art serve in this section.

Carly-Miles, Claire. "The Awakening Chapters XVII–XXIV Questions and Activities for Further Analysis." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Chapters XXV–XXXVI: New Orleans

These chapters continue to chronicle Edna's changing life in New Orleans. Significant moments in these chapters involve not only Edna, of course, but also Mademoiselle Reisz, Adèle Ratignolle, Robert LeBrun, and Dr. Mandelet.

The Awakening Chapters XXIX–XXXVI Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. In this group of chapters, the reader is introduced to a new setting, a house still located in New Orleans and, in fact, just around the corner from the Pontelliers' main house. Discuss this house in detail as well as Edna's decision to move here. With what symbolism does Chopin imbue this new setting and why?
2. Describe at least three details (supported with specific quotations) of Edna's dinner party. Why are these details of particular interest to you and of particular importance to the narrative?
3. How does Léonce respond to Edna's decision to move to the other house? Citing at least two specific quotations, discuss what he does, in detail.
4. Where have Edna's children been during the past chapters and in this section? Why are they there?
5. How would you describe Edna as she appears in these chapters? Draw not only on what Chopin writes about her directly, but also upon what the author has other

characters observe about her. Examine at least two passages from different chapters in this grouping in order to support your thoughts.

Carly-Miles, Claire. "The Awakening Chapters XXV–XXXI Questions and Activities for Further Analysis." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Chapters XXXII–XXXIX: New Orleans and Grand Isle

The final chapters of the novella follow Edna back to Grand Isle.

The Awakening Chapters XXXII–XXXIX Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. These three chapters may be understood to constitute the falling action of the novella's plot. Why might this be an accurate understanding? If you disagree that these do not qualify as falling action but may be perceived as rising action and climax, why so? As always, be sure to use quotations to support your points, whatever position you take.
2. Carefully consider one of these final three chapters individually. For whichever chapter you choose, do the following:
 - summarize what happens
 - identify and discuss significant characters, symbols, and thoughts (either in dialogue or internal monologue),
 - make a list of places in the chapter that may evoke or connect back to earlier events or characters. Identify specific quotations in the current chapter as well as the earlier chapter(s) that forge a connection between these chapters. What is significant to note about these connections?
3. Discuss the ending. What happens and why? This may seem like a simple question, but readers often differ dramatically in their interpretation of the final chapter of *The Awakening*.
4. Using a database like *MLA International Bibliography* or *JSTOR*, do some initial research on one of the topics below. Try searching for each topic in different ways; for instance, you could search for Chopin and biography to find information about her life. Prepare a short PowerPoint presentation on your chosen topic and how it relates to *The Awakening* (be prepared to share your presentation with the class):

- **Künstlerroman**, or novel(la) of an artist’s development
 - Sigmund Freud’s concept of the Oceanic
 - 19th-century pregnancy and childbirth
 - 19th-century maternity and women’s roles
 - 19th-century women writers and/or artists
 - 19th-century New Orleans class system
 - Kate Chopin’s life
 - Additional critical reception at the time of *The Awakening*’s publication
 - Current scholarly trends in writing about *The Awakening*
5. Take a look at different film versions of *The Awakening*; compare and contrast one or two of these with the novella. What is similar, what is different, and what effect might these changes have on one’s understanding of Edna and her choices?
 6. Conduct data analysis using two or three words that you’ve noticed are repeated throughout the novella. For example, how many times does the word “awakening” occur and at what specific points in Edna’s story? Is the word always used the same way, or does it differ depending on the context in which it appears? What other words are often repeated and appear to carry great significance in the narrative? As mentioned above, you might consider using a tool like *Voyant* in your exploration.
 7. Create a diorama depicting one significant scene from *The Awakening*. Be sure to think not only about what to include in your model but also why you are including it. Develop the scene and its significance as fully and creatively as possible while still communicating the scene and your interpretation of it as clearly as possible.
 - You may also choose to make a virtual diorama using shape, color, and line tools, inserting pictures, patterns, etc., using Google Drawings or other design software. As in the preceding diorama instructions, emphasis should be placed not only on what you choose to use but why you choose to use it.

Carly-Miles, Claire. “*The Awakening* Chapters XXXII–XXXIX Questions and Activities for Further Analysis.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

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Spotlight on Nella Larsen and *Passing*

Frances Thielman

Biography: Nella Larsen (1891-1964)

Nella Larsen was born in 1891 in Chicago, the city in which *Passing* takes place. Like the two main characters of the novella, Larsen was of mixed race. Her mother was a Danish immigrant and her father a man of West Indian heritage. After Nella's father's disappearance, her mother married Peter Larsen, another Danish immigrant, and they had a daughter, leaving Nella the only person of color in her family. Nella kept some distance between herself and her white family members and did not have a warm relationship with them. As a young adult, she moved out of her parents' home and enrolled at Fisk University, but was expelled, one biographer speculates, for violating the dress code.²² Later on, she would enroll in nursing school and worked as head nurse at the Tuskegee Institute. She would resign from this position in 1916

After marrying Elmer Imes, a physicist and one of only two African Americans with doctoral degrees in the field, Nella Larsen moved with him to Harlem where the two got to know many of the prominent figures involved with the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance was a period of artistic and literary creativity in the 1920s-1960s amongst Black intellectuals in Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City. Upon moving to Harlem, Larsen took a position at the New York Public Library, and began her career as an author. Larsen was a successful writer and published two novellas and several short stories that were well-received by her peers.

After many years of marital struggles, Larsen and her husband divorced in 1933. Soon after, her literary career came to a halt after she was accused of plagiarizing a short story. Though she successfully defended herself with the aid of her editors, she felt discouraged by the incident, and she never published another story again. Soon after, Larsen became withdrawn from her family and friends, eventually cutting all of them off and completely disappearing. After Elmer died in 1941, Larsen lost the alimony from the divorce, which forced her to go back to working as a nurse, and as far as can be determined, she gave up writing entirely. She died at the age of 72. However, though her long period of silence meant that she faded from the spotlight during her lifetime, her work was recovered in the 1960s, and she is now

²² George, Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (Belknap Press, 2006), 63.

regarded as a major figure of the Harlem Renaissance, providing an insightful perspective on the tensions and contradictions that mixed race women had to inhabit in the 1930s as they tried to reconcile themselves with both sides of their heritage.²³

Passing(1929)

Link to text: [\[Temporary link to *Passing*\]](#)

Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1929. Hathi Trust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=miun.aat2524.0001.001&view=1up&seq=10>.

Part one: Encounter

In Part One, we are introduced to our protagonists, Irene Redfield and Clare Kendry, two women of mixed race who can pass for white. The two meet by chance at an upscale hotel in Chicago after many years apart. After establishing their connection, Clare invites Irene and her friend Gertrude, another woman who passes for white, to come visit her at her home. During the visit, Irene and Gertrude meet Clare's white husband, who teasingly addresses his wife using a racial slur and expresses his dislike for Black people. It becomes clear that Clare's husband is very racist and that he does not realize that Clare and her friends have Black ancestry. Irene and Gertrude, who both identify as Black, feel insulted and upset by the encounter and are both angry at Clare for exposing them to these racist remarks and afraid for her safety. Irene decides she doesn't want to remain Clare's friend, and when Clare sends her a letter thanking her for her visit, Irene tears it up and throws it away.

²³ Emily Bernard, "Introduction," in *Passing* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), vii-xxiv; Thadious M. Davis, "Nella Larsen (13 April 1891-30 March 1964)," in *Afro-American Writers From the Harlem Renaissance to 1940*, eds. Trudier Harris-Lopez and Thadious M. Davis (1987), 182-192, vol. 51, *Gale Dictionary of Literary Biography*, accessed May 5, 2022.

Passing Part One Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Why is Clare so eager to renew her contact with Irene?
2. Conversely, why does Irene feel so strongly that she does not like Clare? And why, given her dislike, does she agree to meet Clare anyway?
3. In 1929, when this book was written, Black people were not welcome at fancy hotels like the Drayton, even though Chicago did not have explicit Jim Crow laws in place. In the scene at the hotel, both Clare and Irene are passing for White. Compare and contrast how Irene feels about passing for white with how Clare appears to feel.
4. Why does Clare put up with her racist husband, and why do you think she invites Black friends to come meet him, knowing his views and what he would be likely to say?
5. Context: The Epigraph. *Passing* (1929) has an epigraph at the beginning, an excerpt from a poem by Countée Cullen entitled “Heritage” that was written in 1925. Read the full text of the poem, linked here: <https://poets.org/poem/heritage-0>. Why do you think Larsen chose this quote to open her novel?

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Part Two: Re-Encounter

In Part Two, Irene reads a second letter from Clare in which Clare states that she misses spending time with Black people and wants to rekindle her friendship with Irene. Irene doesn’t want to see Clare again, and when she tells her husband about their last encounter, he agrees. However, when Irene doesn’t reply to the letter, Clare comes to visit her. During their conversation, Irene mentions that she will be attending a dance for the Negro Welfare League, and Clare convinces Irene to let her attend. Clare makes an impression on everyone at the dance with her charm and good looks, and she soon starts attending events regularly whenever her husband is out of town.

Passing Part Two Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Compare and contrast Clare's and Irene's marriages. Neither of them is perfect. What do these two marriages have in common, and how do Clare's and Irene's mixed race backgrounds factor into the issues in their marriages?
2. Clare says, "I think that being a mother is the cruellest thing in the world." What does she mean and why does Irene agree with her? In the world of the story, is being a mother more cruel for women who can pass as white than it is for women who are clearly one race or another?
3. There's a lot of chemistry between Clare and Irene. Why are they so attracted to each other, and why is that attraction mixed with repulsion for Irene?
4. Context: The Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro. In Part Two, we're introduced to the world of Black high society and a circle of artists and thinkers that resembles the Harlem Renaissance movement, of which Nella Larsen was a part. During the 1920s, African Americans in Harlem were experiencing a degree of freedom and prosperity that had been impossible for them to achieve before because of slavery and other restrictions on their rights. The art and literature of the Harlem Renaissance were characterized by a desire to be taken seriously by mainstream American society while not sacrificing Black identity or conforming to the conventions of White society. Check out this online resource for a look at some of the visual art from this time period: <https://www.nga.gov/learn/teachers/lessons-activities/uncovering-america/harlem-renaissance.html>
Consider how Clare and Irene inhabit this world. Where does Larsen locate her two mixed race protagonists in this movement? How do they fit in, and how do they struggle to find their respective places?

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Part Three: Finale

In Part Three, Irene begins to feel estranged from her husband Brian and starts to suspect that he may be having an affair with Clare. Later, she meets Clare's husband John while walking with a Black friend who does not pass for white. John recognizes Irene and tries to greet her,

but when he connects the dots and realizes that Irene, too, is Black, he frowns, and Irene rejects his greeting. Irene isn't sure whether or not to tell Clare about the meeting; she doesn't want Clare and John to divorce because she fears what will happen to her own marriage if Clare becomes single and Brian prefers Clare. Later, Irene and Clare both go to the same party. John figures out the truth about Clare's race. He comes to the party and starts to cause a scene. In the confusion, Clare falls from the window and dies. Irene isn't sure whether or not she pushed her.

Passing Part Three Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Why does Irene think Brian and Clare are having an affair? Do you think she's correct, or is she an unreliable narrator?
2. Throughout the story, Clare has been portrayed as extremely attractive. How does her attractiveness help her, and how does it hurt her?
3. Often writers will kill characters symbolically in order to resolve the conflict that these characters represent in the story. This novel is entitled *Passing*, and Clare is the character who has made passing as White a central part of her life. How does killing Clare help Larsen to resolve the discussion this novel is having about passing?
4. Is Clare being punished, and if so, what for? Moreover, who is doing the punishing? Irene, Larsen, Society, or something/someone else?
5. Do you think Irene pushed Clare?
 1. If Irene did push Clare, what does it mean for the story's message about passing that the woman who chooses not to pass as White kills the woman who does?
 2. If Irene didn't push Clare, what does it mean for the story's message that she can't be sure whether or not it was her fault?

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Sample Analysis of a Novella

Claire Carly-Miles, Kimberly Clough, and R. Paul Cooper

How to Read this Section

This section contains two parts. First, you will find the prompt. The prompt is a very important element in any writing assignment. Don't be fooled by the fact it is short! Even though it is a short document, it highlights and makes clear every element you will need to complete the given assignment effectively. When writing an essay, the prompt is where you will both begin and end. Seriously. Before you begin, familiarize yourself with the prompt, and before you submit your final draft, give the prompt one final read over, making sure you have not left anything out. When you visit the University Writing Center and Libraries, they can better help if you bring along the prompt. Both the [Writing Center](#)²⁴ and the [Libraries](#)²⁵ provide indispensable tools to aid students, so take advantage of their services.

The second part of this section contains a simulated student essay—the essay is not an actual student essay, but an essay written to demonstrate a strong student essay. The essay in this section is not meant to represent a "perfect" essay; it has its faults. However, this essay is an effective response to the given prompt. The "student" essay will be represented in a wide column on the left, and the grader's commentary will be represented in a smaller column on the right. Use the example and the comments to help you think about how you might organize your own essay, to think about whether you will make similar—or different—choices.

Sample Prompt

Claire Carly-Miles

Assignment Description: Write an essay discussing the importance of setting in *The Awakening*. You might consider the following questions: How does Chopin use setting to develop a theme here? How does the setting (or settings) relate to the title of the

²⁴ "University Writing Center," Texas A&M Writing Center, 2021, <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/>.

²⁵ "Texas A&M University Library," TAMU Libraries, 2021, <https://library.tamu.edu/>.

novella? How does setting relate to the development of Edna’s character? In other words, what specific argument can you make about the significance of setting in this text?

Content: Be sure to support all of your points about the novella with specific quotations.

Research Expectations: Use at least one secondary source to introduce or support your thesis and be sure to include a Works Cited page.

Format: Follow MLA guidelines for formatting and citations.

Scope/Word Count: 900–1200 words not including the Works Cited page or heading information.

| Student Essay | Instructor Annotations |
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| <p>Emerson Jones Dr. Clough ENGL 203 30 June 2021</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Freedom and Confinement in the Settings of Kate Chopin’s <i>The Awakening</i></p> | <p>As stated in the sample prompt, the student has correctly formatted the heading in MLA style. The student’s name is listed first, followed by the instructor’s name, course title, and date. These headings should be aligned flush left. The title, as shown here, should be centered.</p> <p>The essay title does an excellent job recalling keywords from the prompt and (as it should) includes the title of the text to be analyzed. A suggestion for improvement might be to be more specific in the use of the word “settings”—what settings will the essay author analyze?</p> |
| <p>Kate Chopin’s famous novella, <i>The Awakening</i>, opens with the description of two caged birds, a green and yellow parrot and a mockingbird, which hang outside the main door of an upscale beach</p> | |

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| <p>resort for the entertainment of its guests. As if in warning to the spirit of freedom and sensuality which the ocean awakens in that of the caged animal, the parrot is Chopin’s first “character” to speak within the story, shouting, “Allez vous-en!” or “Go away!” Chopin continues to use the symbol of the bird within her story, but she also makes great use of the settings in which the action of her story takes place; mainly Grand Isle and the city of New Orleans. In her novella, <i>The Awakening</i>, Kate Chopin utilizes these settings to develop both the theme of freedom versus confinement as well as the awakening spirit within her main character, Edna Pontellier.</p> | <p>Bravo for translating French to English (“Allez vous-en!” means “Go away!”)!</p> <p>Replace the preceding semicolon between “place” and “mainly” with a colon since the phrase following it is not a complete sentence.</p> <p>The final sentence in the first paragraph is the thesis statement; notice how it contains both a topic– “Chopin utilizes settings”–and the comment on why that topic is significant– “to develop the theme of freedom versus confinement as well as the awakening spirit with her main character, Edna Pontellier.” The writer might consider revising the comment to say something like “to develop the theme of Edna’s awakening to a desire for freedom from her social confinement and where such an awakening may lead.”</p> |
| <p>Set within Chopin’s own time period, the late 19th century, the novella begins at Grand Isle in Louisiana where Edna Pontellier and her family are spending the summer. Her husband, Léonce, is from a well-to-do Creole family and takes good care of Edna and their two boys,</p> | <p>Notice how this whole paragraph provides a summary of the main actions of the novella, as well as some of the main characters. This summary is important to orient the reader and make sure that later references to important</p> |

providing them with the best that money can buy. Though he is kind to her, Edna realizes that her life lacks freedom, passion, and independence. Her summer at Grand Isle and her friendship with Robert Lebrun, the resort owner's son, awakens within her a desire to get to know who she really is inwardly. When the summer is over and they return to their home in New Orleans, she begins to defy the norms of the high society she is a part of by simply doing as she pleases. She chooses to spend more time painting or reading, and in turn neglects both her household and social duties, even going out on Tuesdays when she is routinely expected to remain home to receive social callers. Edna realizes that she was in love with Robert and visits her friends from Grand Isle in an effort to remember Robert as he is away in Mexico. He returns, declares that he went away because he loves her and he cannot have her because she is married and **“not free”** (Chapter XXXVI), then leaves again. Edna is heartbroken, realizing that she is not able to escape the confinement of matrimony and, most especially, motherhood. Instead of living a life that she does not desire and to save her sons from the heartache of their mother living a life of defiance, she returns to Grand Isle and swims into the ocean, never to return.

locations, actions, and characters are easier to follow. This essay author tells us enough about the novella that we understand what is being analyzed, but they don't give us so much detail that the whole paper becomes a chapter-by-chapter summary. In summarizing events that occur over the course of the novella, page or chapter numbers do not need to be provided.

The use of “not free” is an excellent example of bringing in only the words from the text that you need to support your point. You often do not need to bring in an entire sentence from the text. In fact, a longer direct quote introduces more evidence from the text that the essay writer will need to unpack.

Grand Isle is a narrow island along the coast of Louisiana where wealthy Creole families, like Chopin's fictional Pontelliers, could spend their summers to escape cramped city life. It is in this oceanside setting,

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| <p>and alongside “the openness and vitality of the Creoles” (Jones 109), in which the story of Edna’s internal “awakening” begins. Chapter VI explains this as a “certain light [that] was beginning to dawn dimly within her,” as she walked down to the beach with Robert one day. Chopin describes the ocean itself as seductive and “inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation... The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding in its soft, close embrace” (Chapter VI). This relaxed oceanside setting, the seduction of the sea, and Edna’s freedom from her everyday routine in the city combine with the openness of the Creoles she is vacationing amongst to give “her an awareness of the person she is beneath her social mask” (Jones 110). Raised in a strict Presbyterian home in landlocked Kentucky, Edna is at first shocked by the freedom of expression of the Creole culture she married into and fully experiences on Grand Isle. She was not used to, for example, talking openly of pregnancy or allowing a friend, man or woman, to show physical affection. Edna uses this oceanside, Creole freedom to contemplate the present and future state of her life and realizes the ways in which her role as a wife and mother in New Orleans’s high society confines her.</p> | <p>Generally, chapter numbers do not need to be given; however, the copy of the text the student is using here does not have page numbers, so chapter numbers are provided to help the reader find the direct quote.</p> <p>Repetitive; can the phrase “oceanside setting” be revised to avoid repeating the same words used in the second sentence of this paragraph?</p> <p>In referring to the discussion about pregnancy, the essay author summarizes an event in the novella that does not need a direct quote but still counts as evidence from the text because it is a specific example.</p> |
| <p>This setting also influences certain events that occur while she is there; namely, her emotional response to Mademoiselle Reisz’s piano playing, her growing relationship with Robert, and finally learning how</p> | <p>Especially for a topic sentence, reiterate the specific setting to which the essay author is referring because setting is a general term. This will also give the paragraph a distinct focus.</p> |

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| <p>to swim. These events highlight both Edna’s internal awakening and the freedom and independence she is able to taste while staying on Grand Isle. As Chopin uses this setting to develop her theme of freedom versus confinement, she also develops Edna’s character immensely within this first setting. In Chapter XIV, just before Robert abruptly leaves for Mexico and the summer ends, Edna contemplates this development and wonders what it was about that particular summer at Grand Isle that changed everything for her. She realizes that “she herself – her present self – was in some way different from the other self. That she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect” (Chapter XIV). Edna thrives in this setting and is undergoing a form of internal metamorphosis.</p> | <p>Good job reiterating keywords, like “setting,” from the prompt; however, consider how synonyms could be used instead of repeating this word. For example, one could be more specific by stating the location, place, or time period.</p> <p>No spaces are needed around em dashes, so the quote should be formatted as “herself—her present self—was ...”</p> |
| <p>Edna’s return to her everyday life in the city was like walking back into a cage after the freedom she felt at the ocean.</p> <p>New Orleans in the late 19th century was similar in structure as it is today with homes and buildings crammed together, contrasting the vast openness of the ocean and its shores. And, unlike at Grand Isle where she was surrounded solely by elite Creole society, New Orleans included the stricter, more modest “American” high society. Albert Rhodes, in his 1873 article on “The Louisiana Creoles,” refers to these cultural differences “between France and America” and how the more</p> | <p>When discussing actions that happen within the book, use present tense. This is one example of past tense used when present tense is required. Please note: we have not marked all places in this essay where the tense should be changed.</p> <p>Remember that parenthetical</p> |

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| <p>somber-minded “American criticizes his Creole neighbor with severity” for their enthusiasm and things like going to the theater or listening to music on a Sunday (Rhodes 14). From her newly experienced freedom at the seaside, Edna returns to the busy world of New Orleans, characterized by the confinement of a crowded city, her strict routine, and the modest traditions of high society.</p> | <p>citations do not require the name of the author if the source’s name has been introduced earlier in the same sentence, like Rhodes has been in this paragraph.</p> |
| <p>At the beginning of Chapter XVII, Chopin describes the beautiful Pontellier home on Esplanade Street and claims that it was “the envy of many women whose husbands were less generous than Mr. Pontellier.” He is back in his element, ready to play the social games and keep up with “<i>les convenances</i>,” as he walks about his house examining his fine possessions, “chiefly because they were his” (Chapter XVII). Edna, on the other hand, feels no connection to her home when she returns. Chopin describes it as “an alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic” (Chapter XVIII). Surrounded by her husband’s prized possessions, she feels more like one herself. Chopin’s readers did not get to see Edna in her New Orleans home before her enlightening summer in Grand Isle, but the way in which she responds to it when she returns clearly demonstrates that there was no room for independence or freedom here as there was during the summer at the beach.</p> | <p>Specify who “He” is in the second sentence of this paragraph; we understand that you’re referring to Mr. Pontellier but since his name appears in the quotation and this is your own sentence, the use of the pronoun is jarring. Try “Léonce,” instead, for specificity and for variation in diction.</p> <p>Change “did not” to “do not”; use present tense since we are still reading the book.</p> |
| <p>As Edna begins to test the boundaries of her caged life by</p> | |

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| <p>ignoring her social duties and spending time doing “as she liked and to feel as she liked” (Chapter XIX), she can transport herself back to the way she felt on the Isle. One day, as she is painting, she “could hear again the ripple of the water, the flapping sail. She could see the glint of the moon upon the bay, and could feel the soft, gusty beating of the hot south wind. A subtle current of desire passed through her body...” (Chapter XIX). Through the act of painting, an activity she feels passionate about, she feels again how she felt on Grand Isle. For Edna, the ocean represents freedom. New Orleans, however, becomes a confined freedom. Even when she does as she likes, sees whom she likes, and even moves into a small home of her own to claim her independence, with the second leaving of Robert, she realizes that she will never be free and allowed true independence there. What seems at first to Edna to be a further awakening and development of her true self is instead impeded by her city-based setting and the confinement it represents in her life as a married upper-class woman and mother.</p> | <p>The penultimate sentence in this paragraph has a lot of big events—Edna’s move, Robert’s return and departure—that need to be unpacked. Develop this paragraph (perhaps even a paragraph per event) to explain how these moments of resistance by Edna relate to and develop your thesis argument.</p> |
| <p>By focusing on Chopin’s use of setting within her story, one can see how Edna views Grand Isle as a place of freedom and New Orleans as one of confinement. Each setting has a different effect on Edna as she attempts to “find herself” throughout the course of the narrative. Edna realizes the difficulty of trying to break tradition, especially after</p> | <p>Avoid shifting into second person, as seen in the use of “you” in the third sentence of this paragraph. Instead refer either to Edna or “one,” as the essay writer did in the first</p> |

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| <p>you have already immersed yourself within it. Just as the title of the novella suggests, different settings have the ability to “awaken” something within a person, to affect a life’s course of events, and to lead to a change in how one views oneself. As Mademoiselle Reisz reminds Edna, “The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth” (Chapter XXVII). Just as Chopin began her novella with a bird, she ends it with one. The caged bird in the beginning contrasts the free bird that Edna sees back at Grand Isle trying to fly with a broken wing. Both of these birds, the caged and the free, are not at their healthiest, most natural state. And just as the settings of Grand Isle contrasted with New Orleans, Edna realizes that she does not want to belong to either. Instead, she chooses permanently the soft, close embrace of the ocean.</p> | <p>sentence of this paragraph.</p> <p>Avoid introducing new information in the conclusion paragraph. The quote from Mademoiselle Reisz is fantastic and extremely meaningful to Chopin’s representation of Edna and her fate. Discuss this earlier in the essay.</p> <p>The essay author has opted for a bookending essay structure, where an image or story—in this case birds—is brought up in the introduction and revisited in the conclusion. This gives the reader a sense of closure without using the phrase, “in conclusion,” to signal the end of the essay.</p> <p>Again, new information should not be introduced in the final paragraph of an essay; instead, it needs to be developed fully, with discussion and perhaps even a direct quotation from the text, in a body paragraph above.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Works Cited</p> <p>Chopin, Kate. “The Awakening.” <i>The Awakening and Selected Short Stories</i>, 2021. <i>Project Gutenberg</i>, www.gutenberg.org/files/160/160-h/160-h.htm.</p> <p>Jones, Suzanna W. “Place, Perception, and Identity in The Awakening.”</p> | |

The Southern Quarterly, vol. 25, no. 2, 1987, pp. 108–19.

Lieberman, Debra Geller. “Study Guide.” *The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin, 1899, Dover Thrift Study Edition, 2010, pp. 117–223.

Rhodes, Albert. “The Louisiana Creoles.” *Kate Chopin’s The Awakening: A Sourcebook*, edited by Janet Beer and Elizabeth Nolan, Routledge Guides to Literature, Routledge, 2004, pp. 13–16. Originally published in *The Galaxy*, Vol. 16, Aug. 1873.

In the revision process, sometimes you end up not using the sources you thought you would. Before submitting your essay, double check to make sure that your Works Cited list accurately reflects the **in-text citations** and vice versa; otherwise, it looks like you are still using information from a source (in this case, Lieberman) but have not cited it in the text, and that means... **plagiarism**.

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Jones, Emerson [pseud.]. “Novella: Freedom and Confinement in the Settings of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*.” In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Novel

Introduction

Frances Thielman

What is a novel? The question is always harder to answer than you might think. Is it a long book? Is it fiction? Does it have pictures? The most common definition of a novel is that it is a **long work of prose fiction in which the characters have complex inner lives**. In other words, a novel:

- tells an imaginary story that is longer than a novella or short story
- isn't written in verse like a poem or in a script like a play,
- presents characters who have their own thoughts and feelings.

Novels tell larger, more complex stories, delve more deeply into their characters, and develop more detailed and realistic worlds than any other written form. The beauty of the novel is that writers have the space to really see their ideas through to the end.

A Brief History of the Western Novel

As early as first-century Greece, writers were composing long works of prose fiction. These Ancient Greek stories, such as Longus's *Daphnis et Chloe* (~1000 AD), were about grand legendary events like national conquests, epic romances, and slaying monsters. However, those stories, though they were long and fictional (and though they are sometimes called Ancient Greek Novels), aren't really considered to be *true* novels as we use the word today because of how the characters are portrayed. Those heroes and heroines are brave and strong and beautiful, designed to inspire readers to admire and emulate them. Yet their stories aren't considered novels because the authors only tell us what the characters *do*, not what they *think and feel*; remember, one of the defining characteristics of the novel is that the characters have complex inner lives.¹ Instead, most scholars agree that the first true novel was *Don Quixote* (1615) by Miguel de Cervantes because of its interesting, flawed characters, whose personalities and motivations Cervantes explores in depth. Novels are focused on the individuality of their characters, and though they may often tell stories just as wild and fantastical as an Ancient Greek legend, they strive for **verisimilitude** (which means an appearance of reality) in how they represent their characters.²

¹ John Richetti, "The Novel Before the Novel," in *The Cambridge History of the English Novel*, ed. Robert L. Caserio and Clement Hawes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 17.

² Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 22.

A number of factors came together to help the novel take off as a genre in the early eighteenth century. Before this time, most people could not read or write, writing supplies were expensive and hard to find, and it was difficult to produce a large number of copies of the same book. However, with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution, there was a gradual rise in the standard of living and a growing interest in public education. Furthermore, widespread use of the printing press made it easier and cheaper to print multiple copies of books. Consequently, people were learning to read and write in larger numbers than ever before, and it was now possible for a broad section of the public to purchase the kinds of things they wanted to read. Many of these people wanted to read novels. By the early 1700s, the novel was here to stay. Some famous examples of eighteenth-century novels include *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson, and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe.

In the 19th century, the novel became even easier and cheaper for working people to purchase when writers like Charles Dickens began to publish periodicals such as *Household Words*. This magazine not only included news stories, educational nonfiction, advertisements, jokes, and poems, but also individual chapters of whatever novels either Dickens himself or his literary acquaintances were writing. Every week, subscribers would eagerly go to pick up their copy of *Household Words* so they could read the next chapter. Often, families would gather around in the evening and read the chapters aloud together. Novels that were published in this form are called **serial novels**, and some famous examples include Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851–1853), and Krupabai Satthianadhan's *Kamala: a Story of Hindu Life* (1894), which you will read for this chapter.

In the late 1800s, wood pulp paper (much cheaper than paper made of recycled rags) was invented, and in the early 1900s, new innovations in printing made it easy to produce as many copies of books as customers demanded. A wide variety of genres of novel began to proliferate, including the twentieth-century **pulp novel**, named after the pulp paper it was printed on. Pulp novels were often serialized in publications like *All-Story*. If a novel was successful, it could then be reprinted in mass-market paperback form. Early mass-market paperback pulp novels costed ten cents, featured colorful and sensational covers to attract buyers' attention, and were cut to be the exact size that would fit into the compartments of a cigarette rack, so that potential readers who were waiting at the bus stop or shopping at the convenience store could casually pick one up. The pulp genre has often been looked down upon, but some of the most enduring stories of the twentieth century originated in pulp magazines, such as Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912).

By the mid-twentieth century, print novels began to look essentially like they do today. The widespread use of the internet created new opportunities to expand forms novels can take and distribute books cheaply. For example, in 1971, Michael S. Hart founded *Project Gutenberg*, an enormous repository of online books in the public domain. The version of *Jane Eyre* linked to this OER was digitized and made available by this project. Later digital

innovations included the invention of the e-reader. The first ever e-reader, the Rocket eBook, never gained widespread popularity, but Amazon was able to successfully introduce their Kindle in 2007. The novel has survived for a long time, and it will undoubtedly continue to change to fit the needs of its readers.

How to Read a Novel for a Class

Though the prose of a novel is often easier for a reader to follow than the verse of a poem or the script of a play, the length of these works can make them challenging to read, particularly in the context of an English class where there are set deadlines. In fact, when the class begins reading a novel, it is not uncommon for the reading assignments to be much longer than they have been for other parts of the course, so be aware that you may have to take more time than you're used to to get the homework done for your class. However, that doesn't mean you can't do it! The key is to plan ahead. Since you know the novel will take longer to read than other works, set aside time in your day to do it. Learn what your personal reading pace is, and don't sweat it if it's slower than you would like. A faster reading pace comes with practice.

In addition to the length, another thing that can pose some difficulty to reading a novel for a class is that there are generally a lot more characters than there are in a poem, play, or short story, and you may need to remember them to be able to participate in class discussion or to answer questions on a quiz. If you're reading a print copy of a book that you purchased, turn to the back blank page (called a **flyleaf**), and write down the name of each new character and a word or two that remind you of who they are. If you're reading an eBook or an online resource, jot them down in a notebook or in a document on your device.

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Writing About Novels

Frances Thielman

Remember, a novel is long, so literary scholars can't write about the whole thing in one essay. Therefore, generally, when we write about novels, we select one aspect of it that we think is important and focus on that. Keeping a realistic scope is essential when it comes to writing

about novels. An essay with an overly broad scope will be far too long and won't say anything very helpful. However, an essay that zeroes in on one specific and well-defined topic provides a focused analysis about a single part that can give readers insight into the whole. For example, a literary analysis that tries to answer a question like, "What is this novel saying about women?" will be too broad, but a smaller topic like, "Why are so many of the women characters in this novel teachers?" has a more realistic scope. Furthermore, in the process of answering this smaller question, you may well find an important part of the answer to the larger one.

A great place to start in your literary analysis is to take a closer look at something about the novel that puzzles you and ask "Why did the author write it that way?" Assume the writer knew what they were doing. So, for example, if you read *Jane Eyre* and notice that Jane does a lot of painting, ask yourself, "Why did Charlotte Brontë portray Jane as a painter?" Perhaps Brontë wanted to show that Jane has a big imagination and deep feelings, even though the circumstances she's found herself in have always been rather limited. Alternatively, maybe she wanted to connect the images Jane draws and paints to things she dreams or books she has read as a way to **foreshadow** events that may come later. As you analyze the passages in the novel that talk about painting, you might try to figure out if the story refers to any famous pictures, if the things Jane paints seem to have some relationship to the events of the story, or if they might have symbolic meanings. As you explore, you'll gather evidence from which you can then draw a larger conclusion.

Additionally, whatever you choose to write about should have implications for some larger statement you think the author is trying to make. Novels are so long and multifaceted that there are virtually always multiple statements and main messages, so you get to pick which one is the most interesting to you. A key term literary critics use when discussing this is the word **theme**. In a novel, a theme is a topic the author is examining or a recurring pattern that runs throughout. In *Kamala*, some themes could include, "dysfunctional families," "nature" or "the demands of tradition," and we can tell these are themes because there are a lot of different examples of characters, language, and scenes centered on them. The book could be interpreted as making a statement about these ideas: for example, you could say that *Kamala* is telling readers something about what causes Indian families to be dysfunctional, or about how nature serves as a mental stimulant and escape for intelligent women who are being denied education, or about what people's moral and ethical duties are to either challenge or uphold their culture's traditions.

When you've settled on a theme you'd like to explore, the next step is to hunt for evidence to help you make a larger claim about that theme. There are many different avenues for you to explore, and a good place to start is the basic questions: What is the author's name and who are they? Who is the intended audience? When was the book written? If the novel was written a long time ago, you may need to know some **historical context**, or information about the time

period, to get the most out of this story. Prepare to look up words that you aren't familiar with in the dictionary or to Google people and events the story refers to that you haven't heard of before. *Jane Eyre* and *Kamala* were both written more than a hundred years ago, so the discussion questions and activities included in this chapter offer some helpful historical context to guide you.

Since complex characters are one of the defining qualities of a novel, you will likely find answers to your questions by analyzing the characters. You might begin with first impressions. Do you like them? Do you want them to succeed? From there, look deeper. Often the characters who make the strongest impact on us are those with realistic personalities that we can relate to. These are called **round characters** because they seem three dimensional, like they could stand up off the page and talk to you. The protagonists of most novels are round characters because one thing that makes a novel a novel is the complex inner lives of its characters. By contrast, a **flat character** is more like a caricature than a real person. Their motivations are simplistic, exaggerated, or based on stereotypes. Sometimes, readers criticize novels that feature flat characters, but before you write them off too quickly, consider that flat characters can serve important purposes. They can be used to provide comic relief or to paint an unflattering portrait of a type of person or a set of views that the author disapproves of. Alternatively, a story with flat characters may be trying to communicate that the most important thing about the story is not the characters at all, but something else, such as the larger events that take place around them, the setting, or someone who is not present. A good example of some flat characters would be Mr. Buffy, Mr. Cuffy, and Mr. Duffy from Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*. As their names suggest, these characters are intended to be so shallow and insubstantial as people that they're virtually interchangeable, which is Dickens's way of making fun of them and using them for comic relief. However, they also serve as a recurring background reminder of the prosperous and apathetic people who see the problems of poverty Dickens writes about but do nothing to help.

Another way to analyze a character is to examine how much they change. A **dynamic character** is a character who changes substantially over the course of the story. An example of a dynamic character would be Kathy from Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. Over the course of the novel, Kathy learns to have stable relationships: at first, she is too absorbed in trying to win the approval of a manipulative friend. Then, she overcompensates by angrily cutting that friend off. Finally, she learns how to accept and value her relationships for what they are without internalizing others' opinions of her or having unrealistic expectations. Meanwhile, a **static character** is basically the same at the end as they were at the beginning. Mr. Collins from *Pride and Prejudice* is a static character because he learns nothing from his failed proposals to Elizabeth Bennet. Novels have a lot more space to explore the ways characters change over time than other types of fiction. In fact, there's a whole genre of novel devoted to

this, called the **bildungsroman** (German for a “novel of education”) that explores how a person grows from a child into an adult. *Jane Eyre* and *Kamala* are both examples of bildungsromane.

Here are some additional questions to help you come up with ideas for how to analyze your chosen topic:

- What kind of **diction** or language does the author use to tell their story? Is it intentionally beautiful or poetic language? Is it utilitarian get-the-point-across language? Is it chatty, as if the speaker were talking casually with you? Is it funny? Do you need to look up words in the dictionary to understand it?
- Does the author use literary **allusions** or references to an outside book or story that you might have heard of before?
- Can you identify some objects, images, or events in the story that might be **symbolic** or that could be **metaphors** for other things in the story?
- What’s the **pacing** like? Is this a fast-paced novel that keeps you on the edge of your seat, or does the author halt the story so they can take time to describe scenery, what people and things look like, or the inner thoughts of its protagonists? Most novels are fast-paced sometimes and slow-paced other times, so try to figure out why.
- Does the author use “special effects” like **flashbacks**, **dream sequences**, **footnotes**, or other types of text that stick out from the normal paragraph structure?³

In your essay, try to put the things you’ve noticed together to make your claim.

Note that you don’t have to agree with the author. In fact, you may find some of the things they say objectionable. One important type of literary analysis is the **critique**, in which you can explore the things about the book that you think are wrong. For example, many literary scholars have critiqued the way Brontë portrays Bertha Mason because Bertha is described as a Creole from Jamaica, and Brontë withholds compassion from her, makes her seem like a monster, and draws on racist stereotypes. Similarly, one could critique Satthianadhan for advocating so strongly for women’s education, but then portraying Sai, the only truly independent female character, as an amoral person. However, you don’t have to critique if you don’t want to. You can also focus on trying to understand the things about the text that interest you, unpacking messages the novel sends that you think are important, or discussing how the novel interacts with the historical context provided for you in the discussion questions or in your own research. Most importantly, have fun with it, and prepare to learn something interesting.

Finally, try to come to the text with an open mind, and be prepared to change your view if your initial assumptions don’t prove to be correct. Literary analysis isn’t the same as scientific

³ For additional discussion of these literary terms, please see chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7.

inquiry, but like a scientist, you should still plan to gather data before you decide what your argument is. There aren't firm right or wrong answers to the questions literary analyses ask. Instead, the best literary analyses are not the "right" ones, but the most persuasive ones, the ones that do the best job of convincing you that their point of view is correct by referencing quotes from the text as evidence and drawing logical conclusions from that evidence in a way that readers can follow.

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Sample Readings: *Jane Eyre* and *Kamala: A Tale of Hindu Life*

Frances Thielman

Guide to Reading Works from the 19th Century

The two novels you will read for this chapter were both written in the 1800s. It's not always easy to read works written a long time ago because the authors' lives were so much different from ours. Not only did they do different things every day from what we do, but they also spoke differently and thought differently. Authors who lived in the 1800s may use:

archaic words: words that we no longer use today or that had a different meaning then than they do now. For example, the word "intercourse" in Victorian parlance means "conversation" or "relationship," and has nothing to do with sex. Victorians are particularly known for using words that have a lot of syllables.

euphemisms: words or phrases that refer obliquely to something that the writer finds distasteful. For example, Adèle is known as Mr. Rochester's "ward" because it would be impolite to say outright that she is his illegitimate child.

sympathetic style: Victorian readers enjoyed reading in detail about characters' feelings, and they wanted to sympathize with their characters and share the emotional sensations the characters experience. They particularly admired characters who suffered in silence for the good of others. Kamala's meekness, tears, and selflessness may not appeal to modern readers as much as it appealed to Victorians.

lyrical prose: prose that describes things poetically in elaborate language. In *Kamala*, Sathianadhan writes, “On a little hillock, not far away, are a few trees, which appear to catch and retain the halo of departing light in their branches, and through them glimmers the suffused redness of the sunset sky.” It’s a beautiful passage, and the reader is meant to enjoy Sathianadhan’s poetic turn of phrase. However, a reader accustomed to a more direct writing style might feel frustrated that Sathianadhan doesn’t just say, “The setting sun was visible through the trees.”

Sometimes readers who are unfamiliar with writing in the 19th century and find reading it difficult may feel that writers back then were simply less skilled, and that we know how to do it better now. But Victorian readers enjoyed the way Victorian writers wrote, and the things that modern readers may find irritating now were things that they really liked and valued then. Try to get into the Victorian mindset as you read these novels. Assume the writers know what they’re doing and are writing the way they do on purpose. Reading older novels is a skill that anyone can develop. Like all skills, it just takes a little practice.

19th-Century Reading Warm Exercises

1. In the novel you are currently reading, find 10 words that you don’t know and look them up in the dictionary.
2. Find a passage that you found hard to understand. Now paraphrase it in your own words. Exchange your paper with a friend and ask them to read the same passage and confirm whether or not your paraphrase matches what they think the passage says.
3. Is there a character in the story that you find difficult to relate to? Reflect for a moment on why they don’t appeal to you, and then imagine why they might (or might not) have appealed to a Victorian audience.

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Jane Eyre (1847)

Spotlight on the Gothic Novel

Frances Thielman

You know the Gothic when you see it. Gothic stories share some very recognizable traits, such as frightening undead (or seemingly-undead) beings, enormous creaky mansions, violent or shocking events, sexy femmes fatales, and brooding villains that tend to steal the show from the more virtuous characters. They often take place long ago, in strange foreign lands, or in gloomy wildernesses or deep forests. Some Gothic novels you may have heard of include Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Anne Rice's *Interview with a Vampire* (1976), and Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1909). Since all of these novels also have film adaptations, you can get a good feel for what the Gothic aesthetic is by thinking about how the filmmakers portray these stories visually. There are a lot of period costumes, dark colors, gnarled trees, skulls and lace and red roses, and various other combinations of morbid, creepy, and romantic things.

These stories depict scenes of horror in their imaginary worlds, but they are also designed to reveal troubling secrets about the readers and their real-life society. When these stories dramatically draw back the curtain to showcase something surprising and sensational, we experience fear and thrill, not only because the terrible truth is so strange, but even more so, because we actually recognize it as an elongated shadow of something real.⁴ Furthermore, after Gothic novels expose all those secrets through dramatic revelations and bring their creepy stories to a close, they leave the reader with a sense of lingering unease, either by overtly refusing to resolve the conflicts when the story ends, or by concluding with a “happy ending” that still disturbs us.

Jane Eyre is often considered to be an emblematic example of a Gothic novel, a genre that was particularly popular during the 18th and 19th centuries. This novel has all those quintessential Gothic elements: sprawling Thornfield Hall is located out on the gloomy moor, haunted by a violent specter from the past, and the romantic chemistry between our heroine Jane and her sinister boss Mr. Rochester will keep the pages turning (or the scroll bar scrolling) as you read this novel. However, as with other Gothic stories, there's more to *Jane Eyre* than just its compelling weirdness. *Jane Eyre* uses its Gothic elements to expose the horrifying things that lurked at the heart of the traditional Victorian family.

Many of Charlotte Brontë's first readers found *Jane Eyre* disturbing and accused her of being “unfeminine” for writing it. Nevertheless, the novel was a bestseller. However shocking

⁴Jerold Hogle, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerold Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 16–17.

Victorian readers may have found it, they couldn't put it down, perhaps because they saw the outlines of their own reflections in the shadowy mirror that this Gothic novel turned towards them.

Biography: Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855)

Charlotte Brontë was born on April 21, 1816 to a curate, the Reverend Patrick Brontë and his wife Maria (whose maiden name was Branwell). They had seven children: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Branwell, Emily, and Ann. They were a very creative family, and as children, the young Brontës created vivid imaginary worlds that they wrote about, and some of those manuscripts survive today (the works that writers create when they are children are called **juvenilia**). If you'd like to take a look at some of it, you can at [this online resource](#) provided by the British Library.⁵

There are many aspects of *Jane Eyre* that mirror Charlotte Brontë's life. For example, Charlotte's mother Maria died when Charlotte was only five years old, and her aunt Elizabeth Branwell moved to the Brontë home in Haworth (a small English town on the moors in west Yorkshire) to help take care of them. Furthermore, when Charlotte was eight years old, she was sent to school, and in this school, there was an outbreak of typhoid fever that killed many of the children, including Charlotte's two older sisters. Then, after her schooling, Charlotte, like Jane, found work as a governess, working for several families to make ends meet. Young Jane also spent some time in Brussels, where she fell in love with her drawing master. Unfortunately, he did not return her affections, and when she returned to England, he never responded to her letters.

All three of the surviving Brontë sisters were novelists and poets, and they had successful publishing careers, in part because they chose to write under male pseudonyms (Charlotte wrote under the name of Currer Bell), though all of their identities would eventually be revealed. Charlotte published *Jane Eyre* in 1847. Later, she would publish *Villette* and *The Professor*. Her sister Ann published *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Agnes Grey*, and Emily published *Wuthering Heights*. Their brother Branwell was a talented painter, but he was a troubled person who suffered from alcoholism and addiction to opium, and he never achieved success in his career.

Between the years of 1848 and 1849, tragedy struck the Brontë family. Charlotte's brother died from complications of his addictions, and he was quickly followed to the grave by Charlotte's remaining two sisters, who each died of tuberculosis. Charlotte, left with only her father, was very lonely after the loss of her other family members. However, her literary success gave her access to a circle of like-minded friends who provided her with some comfort

⁵ Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë, Anne Brontë, and Branwell Brontë. *The History of Angria*, Unpublished. 1836-1837, The British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/bront-juvenilia-the-history-of-angria/>.

and companionship, and she was friends with famous literary women like Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell.⁶ Gaskell even wrote a famous biography of Brontë entitled *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857). Charlotte had wanted to be married for her whole life; as a young adult, she turned down two proposals from men whom she didn't love, only to be disappointed when the man she did love didn't return her affections. However, in 1854, Charlotte happily married Arthur Bell Nichols. Sadly, after less than a year of marriage, she died at the age of 38, also from tuberculosis.

Charlotte and her siblings had difficult lives, haunted by illness and tragedy, and all ended prematurely, but they and their creative works were well-loved during their lifetimes and for long afterwards. Charlotte Brontë is still recognized as one of Britain's greatest novelists.

Jane Eyre (1847)

Link to text: [Jane Eyre](#)

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*. London: Service & Paton, 1897. Project Gutenberg, March 1998. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1260/1260-h/1260-h.htm>.

The Prologues

In the prologues, Brontë dedicates her work to William Thackeray, an author she admires, offers justification for the more controversial parts of her book, and tries to clear up some confusion about its authorship without relinquishing her pseudonym.

Jane Eyre The Prologues Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Take a look at the signature at the very end of the preface. You'll notice that it's signed "Currer Bell." Charlotte Brontë and her sisters all wrote under male

⁶ Christine Alexander, "Brontë [married name Nicholls], Charlotte [pseud. Currer Bell]," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed July 4, 2021, last modified 23 Sep. 2004. <https://www-oxforddnb-com.srv-proxy1.library.tamu.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3523>.

pseudonyms. Why do you think that might be, and how might you read *Jane Eyre* differently if you thought it was written by a man?

2. **Context: Publication History.** The second preface was a response to her publishers, who tried to make it sound like all the books by the Brontë sisters were written by the same person, a trick they were able to pull in part because the sisters wrote under pseudonyms.

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Chapters 1-4: Gateshead Hall

In these chapters, we read about Jane's unhappy childhood living with her Aunt Reed and cousins. Jane is bullied by her cousin John, but when she fights back, she is punished by being locked in the red bedroom where her uncle died.

Jane Eyre Chapters 1-4 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. How does the scene with the red room help this novel fit into the Gothic genre?
2. This novel has often been considered noteworthy for how it captures the intensity of children's feelings. What might Charlotte Brontë have intended to convey about what children need and what is the best way to raise a child? According to her, what are the similarities and differences between children and adults?
3. **Context: Literary Allusions.** Jane seems to derive the most consolation from reading. Let's take a look at some of the books she refers to. Page (or scroll) through these online resources to get a glimpse of the stories and illustrations that inspired her and kept her imagination going:
Thomas Bewick's [A History of British Birds](#)⁷
Jonathan Swift's [Gulliver's Travels](#)⁸

⁷ Thomas Bewick, *A History of British Birds*, vol. 1 (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1885), Google Books, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Memorial_Edition_of_Thomas_Bewick_s_Work/iWMGAAAAQAAJ?hl.

⁸ Jonathan Swift, *The Adventures of Captain Gulliver in a Voyage to Lilliput* (Glasgow: J. Lumsden & Sons, 1815), Google Books, https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Adventures_of_Captain_Gulliver_in_a_/erSoKv8VHCMC?hl.

Oliver Goldsmith's [Roman History](#)⁹

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Chapters 5-10: Lowood School

In these chapters, Jane's aunt sends her away to attend a boarding school for orphans. Jane makes friends with a girl named Helen Burns and has to defend herself against her aunt's lies about her character. An outbreak of typhus draws attention to the impoverished conditions that the school's benefactor, Mr. Brocklehurst, has enforced.

Jane Eyre Chapters 5-10 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. This part of the novel is a classic example of a British school story. Can you think of any other British school stories, either written in the present day or in the past? What are some of the hallmarks of this genre, and how is *Jane Eyre* similar and different to the stories you thought of?
2. What does Jane learn from Helen Burns, and why do you think she admires her so much?
3. **Context: Consumption.** Helen dies from "consumption," which was another name for the disease we now call tuberculosis. Some forms of tuberculosis caused the sick person to become gradually weaker and to have a pale face, very clear skin with flushed cheeks, and a thin, delicate figure. Furthermore, this disease was sometimes associated with romantic, beautiful, and artistic people, too sensitive and attuned to higher things to stay for long in this world. (John Keats was a real-life poet who had tuberculosis and was often described in this way.) A good example from art is Elizabeth Siddal, a painter and poet most widely known as the wife of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and a frequent model in his paintings. To see what Victorians saw when they

⁹ Oliver Goldsmith and William Grimshaw, *Goldsmith's Roman History, for the Use of Schools* (Philadelphia: John Grigg, 1835), Google Books, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Goldsmith_s_Roman_History/Efc_AQAAMAAJ?hl.

were thinking about people in this way, take a look at [this painting](#)¹⁰ of her called *Beata Beatrix* that her husband did of her shortly after she died of consumption.

- a. This may seem strange to us now, but why might Victorians have held these views about consumption? Can you think of a way that this manner of thinking might have been comforting to someone in Jane's position?
- b. Further Reading: See Katherine Byrne's *Tuberculosis and the Victorian Literary Imagination*.

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Chapters 11-15: Thornfield Hall

In these chapters, Jane takes on a position as a governess at Thornfield Hall and meets the owner of the estate, Mr. Rochester. All seems well until Mr. Rochester's bed is suddenly set on fire in the middle of the night, and Jane saves his life. Jane didn't see who did it, but she suspects one of the servants, Grace Poole, whom she has been told is responsible for the strange and unsettling laughter that sometimes echoes through the halls.

Jane Eyre Chapters 11-15 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Mr. Rochester is pretty rude to Jane, but his rudeness actually puts her at ease. Why might this be?
2. Jane compares Mr. Rochester's horse and dog to the Gytrash from old English mythology, and Mr. Rochester calls her an elf and jokes that she must have bewitched his horse. Does this fairy tale language fit in with the rest of the book so far? Why or why not?
3. **Context: The English Country House.** Thornfield Hall is an imaginary example of an English country house, or a large mansion owned by an old and wealthy family that is out in the rural countryside of Britain. These houses had many rooms and beautiful gardens. Check the links below to see what English country houses looked like, and try to put yourself in Jane's shoes as she moves from her tiny Lowood School to this

¹⁰ Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Beata Beatrix*, oil on canvas, 1864, Tate Britain, London, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti_-_Beata_Beatrice,_1864-1870.jpg.

new, beautiful, and mysterious place:

[Ham House](#)¹¹

[Blenheim Palace](#)¹²

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Chapters 16-22: Thornfield and Gateshead

In these chapters, Mr. Rochester invites some friends to stay at Thornfield, including Blanche Ingram, whom he says he plans to marry. While the guests are at Thornfield, Jane receives word that her aunt is dying and goes to visit her.

Jane Eyre Chapters 16-22 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Mr. Rochester disguises himself as a fortune teller. Why do you think he does that, and what was he trying to achieve? Is he successful? Why or why not? What does this incident say about him as a character that we might not have known about him until now?
2. When Jane goes back to Gateshead to visit her family, she finds that many things have changed. How has Jane herself changed? What things have stayed the same? Can you figure out from this what might be some of her core personality traits?
3. **Context: Fashion.** Various context clues reveal that the events of *Jane Eyre* take place in the 1830s. Bronte takes a lot of time describing the evening wear and hairstyles of Mr. Rochester's guests. Take a look at [this fashion plate](#)¹³ from the 1830s to see what some of these outfits might have looked like.

¹¹ Maxwell Hamilton, *Ham House*, digital photograph, 2012, Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ham_House_\(7776599228\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ham_House_(7776599228).jpg).

¹² Blenheim Palace. *Blenheim Palace 2014*, digital photograph, 2014, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blenheim_Palace_2014.jpg.

¹³ *Evening Dresses, 1836*, hand-colored engraving, 1836, Fashion Plate Collection COS067, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/costumehist/id/59/rec/35>.

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Chapters 23-27: Thornfield

In these chapters, Mr. Rochester proposes to Jane. They prepare for the wedding, but at the altar, some unexpected guests halt the ceremony by revealing that Mr. Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason. Mr. Rochester tries to insist that Jane live with him anyway, but rather than compromise her conscience, she flees Thornfield in the middle of the night.

Jane Eyre Chapters 23-27 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Why does Jane feel annoyed and insulted by all of Mr. Rochester's expensive gifts?
2. In this section, we hear Bertha's backstory. Bertha is certainly frightening, but do you have any sympathy for her? Do you think Brontë wants us to empathize with her at all? Why or why not?
3. **Context: The Church of England.** In Britain, towns and counties were divided up into parishes, and each parish had its own church. These churches were all part of a denomination called The Church of England (still the national religion of Britain today). All Church of England parishes use the same worship services, which can be found in *The Book of Common Prayer*, a book that has remained essentially the same since 1662. If you'd like to read the wedding vows Mr. Rochester and Jane were saying to each other (and if you'd like to see where in the service the dramatic halt takes place), navigate to page 211 in [this PDF of the 1662 edition](#) of *The Book of Common Prayer*,¹⁴ to which Charlotte Bronte was referring.

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¹⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer* (London, 1775), <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1662/BCP1775.pdf>.

Chapters 28-30: Marsh End

In these chapters, Jane, who has accidentally left her few belongings in the coach, finds herself alone and penniless on the moor. Just when she thinks she's about to starve, she is taken in by St. John Rivers, a curate, and his sisters Diana and Mary. She doesn't reveal her identity.

Jane Eyre Chapters 28-30 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Though most of the people Jane meets won't help her, the natural world does seem to offer her help by allowing her to find guiding lights, feeding her with berries, and providing places to sleep. Why do you think Brontë draws that contrast between human beings and Nature?
2. For the first time since Lowood School, Jane finally has some close women friends. How are Diana and Mary similar to and different from Helen Burns?
3. **Context: The Workhouse.** Jane says, "And far better that crows and ravens—if any ravens there be in these regions—should pick my flesh from my bones, than that they should be prisoned in a workhouse coffin and moulder in a pauper's grave" (Ch. 28). This sentence tells us a lot about what period the novel is supposed to take place in. In 1834, the British Parliament passed the New Poor Law, a law that was designed to reduce the costs of poor relief. This law introduced one of the most notorious institutions in British history, the workhouse. Workhouses were places where poor people who could not support themselves were sent when they asked their parishes for help. In the workhouse, inmates were separated by gender (meaning that families could not live together) and were required to pay for their lodging by working long hours doing difficult unpleasant jobs. Conditions were crowded and the inmates were fed very little and required to wear uniforms like prisoners. Illnesses spread easily in these conditions. The workhouses were designed to be miserable places because the makers of the law thought that making poor relief a misery would encourage poor people to find work rather than looking to their governments to provide for them. However, the result was that many of Britain's most vulnerable people chose to starve rather than to ask for help. This [satirical cartoon](#)¹⁵ from *Punch*, a popular and widely-read magazine, criticizes the way workhouses separated families.

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¹⁵ *Punch Cartoon from 1843 Criticizing the New Poor Law*, printed cartoon, 1843, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Punch_Poor_Law.jpg.

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Chapter 31-35: Morton and Marsh End

In these chapters, Jane recovers her health, and when Diana and Mary have to leave, she becomes a school mistress for St. John’s parish. St. John gets a letter from a solicitor who is searching for Jane. He discovers that the Jane who teaches at his school house is the same Jane from the letter. The solicitor reveals that Jane has received a large amount of money from her uncle, and that St. John and his sisters are in fact her cousins. St. John wants to go to India, and decides that he needs a wife to support him. Though he does not love Jane, he proposes to her anyway.

Jane Eyre Chapter 31-35 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Why do you think Jane is so eager to encourage St. John to pursue his relationship with Rosamond? Why does she ultimately decide that Rosamond and St. John aren’t a good match after all?
2. Jane says, “I was almost as hard beset by him now as I had been once before, in a different way, by another” (Ch. 35). By this she means that it was almost as hard for her to turn down St. John’s proposal, even though she doesn’t love him, as it was for her to turn down Mr. Rochester’s, whom she very much wanted to marry. Why do you think it’s so hard for her to resist St. John’s advances even though she obviously isn’t attracted to him and doesn’t want to be his wife?
3. **Context: The Indian Climate.** One of the main reasons Jane doesn’t want to go to India is that she fears she will die, and Diana and Mary are certain that St. John too will be going to his death when he decides to become a missionary. British Victorians believed that the Indian climate could either a) make them ill, or b) cause them to “go native,” by which they meant turn them into Indian people themselves. Though we know today that air and weather don’t have these effects on people, the Victorians were not wholly wrong. In fact, British people who went to India often did become sick and die because they were exposed to diseases they weren’t used to (such as malaria). Furthermore, the longer an English person stayed in India, the more they adjusted to and grew to appreciate the culture they were living near, and being in the hot, sunny weather sunburned and tanned them more than the cool, cloudy weather of England. Therefore, when they returned to England with unfamiliar habits, different clothing, and tanner skin, they really seemed to have “gone native” to their

friends and family back at home.

- a. Further Reading: See Allen Bewell's *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* and Jessica Howell's *Malaria and Victorian Fictions of Empire*.

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Chapters 36-End: Ferndean

In these chapters, Jane turns down St. John and goes to look for Mr. Rochester, whom she believes is in trouble. She finds that Thornfield has been burned to the ground by Bertha Mason, and Mr. Rochester is living in his other estate, Ferndean.

Jane Eyre Chapters 36-end Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. When Jane leaves, she fears that Mr. Rochester will return to the immoral lifestyle he had been leading before he met her, but when she finally sees him again, she finds something very different. If Mr. Rochester truly has learned his lesson, what lesson did he learn and how? What does Mr. Rochester believe that his biggest mistake was, and do you agree?
2. Gothic novels, when they have "happy endings," often still leave the reader feeling a little uneasy. Does the ending of *Jane Eyre* leave you feeling uneasy? What would need to change for it to be truly happy? And why do you think Brontë didn't give us a perfect happy ending?
3. **Literary vocabulary: *Deus ex Machina*.** "Deus ex machina" means "God from the machine" in Latin, and it refers to a moment in fiction where some kind of all powerful force comes out of nowhere and resolves the conflicts of the story. Jane returns to Mr. Rochester because she heard his voice calling her from miles and miles away. What do you think caused this: was it magic, God, Nature, Jane's imagination, or something else? What message is Brontë sending by reuniting the two lovers in this way?

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***Jane Eyre* Adaptations**

If you liked *Jane Eyre* and want to read more, consider some of the modern-day prequels, sequels, and spin-offs written by other authors. The most famous is Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which tells Bertha’s side of the story, but there are many more. The novel also has many film adaptations (though none seems to have included the part where Mr. Rochester dresses up as an old woman to trick his party guests) and has inspired similarly-themed novels like Daphne DuMaurier’s *Rebecca*.

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***Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) by Krupabai Satthianadhan**

Biography: Krupabai Satthianadhan (1862-1894)

Krupabai Satthianadhan was born in India in 1862 into a large family. Her parents were adult converts to Christianity from Hinduism, and her father, who died when Krupabai was young, worked as a missionary. Krupabai was very close to her brother Bhasker, who died when she was thirteen, and this loss affected her deeply.

Krupabai was a gifted scholar, and fortunately for her, her family supported her desire to learn. By means of at-home tutoring with Bhasker’s help, traveling with European missionaries, and attending a missionary boarding school in Bombay, Krupabai acquired a thorough education. In her late teens, she became interested in medicine, and in 1878, she became the first woman to enroll at the Madras Medical College. She excelled in school, placing first in her class in all subjects except chemistry, but her health prevented her from finishing her degree, and she had to drop out of medical school and move in with her sister to recover.

Krupabai met Samuel Saththianadhan in 1881 while she was still trying to heal from her illness. Like her, he was an Indian Christian, and like her, he was passionate about education. He had just graduated from Cambridge when the two met, and they fell in love and were soon married. After their marriage, they moved to Ootacamund where Samuel became the Headmaster of Breeks Memorial School. Krupabai, meanwhile, founded a school for Muslim girls and taught and served as superintendent at the Hobart School for Indian girls. In Ootacamund, she began her literary career, publishing essays and travel writing. Over the next few years, Samuel's work would require the couple to move frequently, and Krupabai continued to write. In 1886, she began her first novel, *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life*, an autobiographical story that would be serialized in *Madras Christian College Magazine* over the years 1887-1888. The novel, which was written in English, was very well received in India and in England. Queen Victoria expressed her approval of *Saguna* and requested that anything else the author wrote be sent to her.

During this time, Krupabai gave birth to her first child, but the child only lived for a few months. Krupabai again grew severely ill after the baby's death. She wrote *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* while she was dying, soldiering through the final chapters of the novel despite being confined to bed with a high fever. She lived to see it serialized in *Madras Christian College Magazine* in 1894 and died on August 8 of that year. She was 32 years old.

Though she was limited by her physical frailty, Krupabai Saththianadhan worked passionately to improve women's rights in India, using both her skill with writing and her skill as a teacher to do so. She was the first Indian woman to write a novel in English.

Link to text: [Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life](#)

Saththianadhan, Krupabai. *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*. Madras: Srinivasa, Varadachari & Co., 1894. HathiTrust, 2020. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044088736988>.

Optional Reading: Memoir of Krupabai Saththianadhan

This opening nonfiction essay is an extended "about the author" written by the wife of a prominent Victorian British civil servant. In addition to giving a brief biography of Saththianadhan, the author provides an overview of the history of women's education in India, compares it to women's education in Britain, and gives some historical and cultural context to frame the story in the light in which she thinks it should be framed. She also compares *Kamala* to Saththianadhan's autobiographical novel *Saguna: a Story of Native Christian Life* and also to

the works of Toru Dutt, another Indian woman writer. Even though this essay comes at the beginning of the book, I recommend reading it after finishing *Kamala*.

Memoir Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. After reading this essay, who would you say is its intended audience? Is it the same as the novel's intended audience?
2. *Kamala* was printed serially, but when the novel proved successful, it was reprinted as a book after Saththianadhan's death. This essay appears at the beginning of every copy, but since Saththianadhan was dead when it was added to her book, she had no say in what Mrs. Grigg wrote. On pg. XXXV, Grigg writes, "[Saththianadhan] will ever be a standing reproach to those who deny the effect of Western teaching and who would meet out grudgingly to Indian women the benefits of Western education." Since this essay introduces the story, it would seem Grigg wants us to have these thoughts in mind as we read the novel. Do you think the above quote represents the true message of *Kamala*? Why or why not?
3. **Context: Who was Mrs. H.B Grigg?** During the Victorian period, India was a British colony. Ever since the British East India Company moved into India in the 1600s, the British gained increasing control over Indian government and trade, administering their rule through relationships with sympathetic Indian rulers and through British civil servants who lived in India and made sure that the country was serving British interests. Eventually, Queen Victoria took control of the British East India Company and declared herself the Empress of India, instituting what is known as the British Raj. This meant that the people who controlled India's fate were not Indians trying to do what was best for Indian people, but Britons trying to do what was best for Britain and treating the Indian people and their needs as secondary. However, most British people didn't think of themselves as oppressors. Many took a philanthropic interest in the welfare of Indians (particularly Indian women), but they usually did so in a tone-deaf way that was rooted in a belief that Britain was superior to India. Unfortunately, this means that women's rights advocacy in India was and continues to be tangled up with questions of nationalism and Western influence.

This introductory essay was written by the wife of Henry Bidewell Grigg after Saththianadhan's death. H. B. Grigg was a British civil servant in the district of Madras, where he oversaw public education, and he was instrumental in founding Madras Law College, known today as Dr. Ambedkar Government Law College. He knew a lot about education in India, and he was well-versed in the very real injustices faced by Indian women. But, like all British civil servants, his job was to see to it that India served the interests of Britain, and his interventions in public education in India

were all colored by this overarching purpose. His wife, the author of this essay, clearly shares a lot of her husband’s detailed knowledge, as well as the British nationalism that was common among people of her class and race. As you read this section, keep in mind the forces at play: the desire to help Indian women, and also the desire to enforce British superiority.

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Chapters 14

In these chapters, we are introduced to the little girl Kamala and her upbringing as a motherless child in a high caste religious family. Her doting father Narayen educates her, setting her apart from other girls. Kamala attends a festival and meets some other girls who take a liking to her, and soon after is betrothed to and marries Ganesh, after which she moves in with his family, leaving her father behind. Her mother- and sisters-in-law turn the rest of the family against her because they feel she is too poor and that Ganesh should leave her for someone of higher status. Soon after marrying, Ganesh leaves his family home to finish his studies, leaving Kamala alone with her hostile in-laws.

Chapters 14 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. *Kamala* was written in English, but the author uses a lot of Hindi words, some of which she translates in the footnotes. Satthianadhan could have used only English words, or she could have written only in Hindi, but instead she chose this middle path. What does this tell you about the intended audience or audiences for this novel?
2. How is Kamala similar to and different from the other girls her age? Do you think Satthianadhan wants us to think of her as their superior? Why or why not?
3. **Context: The Scenery.** This story is set in Nassick (Now Nashik or Nasik), which was also Satthianadhan’s hometown. Throughout the novel, the author writes eloquently about the beauty of the scenery and how this beauty touches Kamala and gives her comfort during times of trouble. Take a look at this image of the [beautiful](#)

[countryside](#)¹⁶ near this town to get a sense of why Kamala resonates so strongly with nature near her home.

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Chapters 58

In these chapters, Ganesh returns home from school and is pleased by his new wife's beauty and sweetness, but he doesn't do much to help protect her from the other family members. Instead, we find that Kamala has found solace with a group of girls her own age. We learn about their stories and how they support each other through hard times. Eventually, Kamala's in-laws mistreat her to the point that she becomes very ill and almost dies. A kind, handsome doctor named Ramchander comes to take care of her, and the two form a bond. After her recovery, Kamala leaves town to go on a pilgrimage with her family. Outside the home, she and Ganesh can finally get to know each other better, and when they return home, he decides to share his learning with her by continuing her education where her father left off. Kamala's mother-in-law is furious. She completely ostracizes Kamala and manipulates Ganesh into distancing himself from her.

Chapters 58 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. In Chapter 6, Saththianadhan depicts two drastically different types of female communities: the hostile female community of the mothers- and sisters-in-law who persecute the son's wives, and also the community of wives who support each other through thick and thin. Based on this chapter, what does Saththianadhan think it would take to improve the lot of the Hindu wife of her time period?
2. In Chapter 8, Kamala has a mysterious dejavu experience while surrounded by worshippers at a Hindu festival. Do you think this is a divine spiritual experience brought about by Kamala's religious devotion? Why or why not?
3. **Context: Hindu Pilgrimages.** Hindu pilgrimages were one of the only times that 19th-century Indian women would have been allowed to travel to a new place and to

¹⁶ Savitr1915, *Nashik Weather*, digital photograph, 2017, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nashik_Clouds.jpg

mingle freely with people outside their normal social circle, including men. Kamala and her family and friends visit a waterfall and then a temple and participate in traditional ceremonies. As noted in the bio, Satthianadhan was a convert from Hinduism to Christianity. Do you think her portrayal of Hinduism is fair? Why or why not? It's difficult to say if Satthianadhan had a real temple in mind when she wrote this scene, but take a look a couple of images of Hindu temples in the Nashik area that may have inspired the events of this chapter to help you imagine what Kamala was seeing:

[Trimbakeshwar Shiva Temple](#)¹⁷

[Kalaram Temple](#)¹⁸

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Chapters 9-12

In these chapters, we are introduced to Sai, a glamorous, powerful, and dangerous woman who takes a malicious interest in Kamala. Meanwhile, Kamala's friend Bhagirathi considers having an affair to escape from her miserable marriage, but Kamala helps her to stay strong and resist temptation. Ganesh's brother-in-law sets Ganesh up with Sai, and the two begin having an affair.

Chapters 9-12 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. We are repeatedly told how badly Kamala wishes she could continue her education, and Satthianadhan seems very sympathetic with this desire. In Sai, we see an educated, independent woman with all the freedoms Kamala lacks and none of the burdens she has to bear. How is she portrayed in the story? Is she a sympathetic

¹⁷ Savitr1915, *Trimbakeshwar Shiva Temple, Nashik*, digital photograph, 2020, Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tryambakeshvara1.jpg>

¹⁸ Pradeep717, *Kalaram Temple, Nashik*, digital photograph, 2018, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kalaram_Temple_Nashik_Corner_View.jpg

character or not? What does this character tell us about Sathianadhan's feelings about women's rights and women's role in society?

2. Many Victorian writers wrote very emotionally in English about how Indian women were mistreated by their society, but one of the things that makes *Kamala* unique is its portrayal of how the young wives all help each other. Why do you think Sathianadhan felt this was such an important part of the story to include?
3. **Context: Missionaries in India.** Sathianadhan's Christian faith was very important to her, so a reader has to wonder why she chose to write *Kamala: The Story of Hindu Life*, a religiously themed book about a religion that wasn't hers. India is a very religiously diverse nation. Though Hinduism and Islam are the largest religions there by far, there have been established Christian communities in India since the 6th century. However, Sathianadhan was a convert to Western Christianity, not the ancient Christianity of Southern India, and Western Christianity did not arrive in India until European colonists and missionaries visited this part of the world. At the end of Chapter 12, the story talks about how Kamala experiences God. For Sathianadhan, who is God, and how does someone like Kamala find him? Is it necessary for a missionary to convert a person, or can anyone find God on their own?

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Chapters 1316

Ganesh continues his liaison with Sai, and Kamala's father becomes very ill. Ramchander brings word to Kamala that her father's last wish is to see her, and Kamala hurries to his bedside. Narayen then tells Kamala the story of his marriage to her mother, whom Kamala has never known. We learn that Ramchander and Sai were once betrothed and that Sai is jealous of Kamala because Ramchander loves her. A cholera outbreak passes through the town, and Kamala's friend narrowly escapes widowhood. Kamala gives birth to a daughter and moves out of her in-laws' household and in with her husband in his home in the city.

Chapters 1316 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. In Chapter 13, Saththianadhan gives us an inside look at the conversations the mothers-in-law have that cause so much trouble for the young wives of the town. “This is the way they destroy our happiness,” says Bhagirathi, Kamala’s friend. What is the difference between the generations in this novel? Do you think that Kamala’s friends will grow up to do the same things to their own daughters-in-law? Why or why not?
2. Kamala’s father tells her about his marriage for love and his issues with his own in-laws. Did his romance turn out better than Kamala’s? Return to Question 2 in the Chapters 5-8 block. What is the connection between Kamala’s mother, Kamala’s faith, and this supernatural experience?
3. **Context: Indian Widowhood.** Life was hard for Indian widows in the 19th century, and Saththianadhan clearly wishes to critique this aspect of Hindu culture. Though sati, the practice of widows burning themselves (or being forced to do so by others) on the funeral pyres of their husbands, had been banned by the British when this book was written (a ban that unfortunately resulted in an increase in the practice by people who felt like their Hindu heritage was being effaced by colonizers), widows still faced severe social stigma after their husbands’ deaths. They were not allowed to remarry, had to shave their heads, and were considered bringers of bad luck. Though widow burning was often described as an act of love for husbands, many women who committed sati stated that they wished to die rather than to experience the life of a widow. By critiquing how her society treated widows, rather than focusing on the sensationalized practice of sati, Saththianadhan provides a more nuanced critique of her culture’s treatment of women and leaves the door open for a way forward.
 - a. See Lata Mani’s *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* for more.¹⁹
4. Saththianadhan was literally on her death bed while she wrote *Kamala* and wrote these last chapters under the influence of a high fever. Knowing she would die soon, she put aside other writing projects to be able to finish the novel. The story was clearly very important to her. As a final concluding question, what do you think the most important message of *Kamala* is?

Attribution:

¹⁹ Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

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Chapters 1720

Sai continues to see Ganesh and shows Kamala flagrant disrespect. However, when she tries to order Kamala around in her own home, Kamala throws her out. Ganesh is furious, and Kamala leaves the home to go move in with her in-laws. Kamala's father dies, leaving her a lot of money. When her in-laws learn that she is wealthy, they completely change how they treat her. Another bout of cholera passes through the town, and both Ganesh and Kamala's baby both die. Kamala, now a childless widow, has to live in disgrace according to Hindu tradition, but her friends comfort her, one of them even giving her her own child to raise. Ramchander proposes, but Kamala refuses him. She lives a life of charity and asceticism and is revered by the people of the town.

Chapters 1720 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. The moment when Kamala throws Sai out of her house is one of the only moments we see her show something other than meekness and humility to those who mistreat her. Why is this indignity the last straw? Why doesn't Kamala ever show the same resistance to her in-laws?
2. Sathianadhan critiques her society's treatment of widows, but in this story, she also offers Kamala multiple ways out of the miserable life widows typically had to live: an offer of marriage, a friend's child to replace her own, a community of loving friends, and the reverence of her town in return for her acts of philanthropy. However, Kamala turns away many of these options because she has been taught she doesn't deserve them. Should Sathianadhan have let Kamala have a happier ending? Why do you think she chose to end the story this way?
3. **Context: Cholera.** Cholera is a water-borne disease that originated in India and traveled to Britain, where it caused deadly epidemics. When cholera was in Britain, British doctors blamed the dirty habits of the poor and recommended sanitation. However, when cholera was in India, British doctors blamed Indian religious practices for spreading the disease. In fact, the disease was caused by the same thing in both nations: sewage leaking into the water supply. Do you think Sathianadhan agrees with the British perspective that there is a connection between Indian

religious habits and cholera? She was the first woman ever to enroll in medical school at Madras Medical College, so she writes with more authority than most. What might be the symbolism of this disease for the story?

- a. See Pamela Gilbert's *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* for more information.²⁰

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Jane Eyre and *Kamala* Together

These two books have a lot in common. They are both bildungsromane, or coming of age stories. They both feature heroines who are avid readers in a world that doesn't value their education. They both critique their society's treatment of women and assert that women have inner lives that deserve to be cultivated through education. They both feature unfaithful husbands. Let's think about these two as complementary pieces and see what they can show us about each other.

Jane Eyre and *Kamala* Together Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Name as many similarities between the two novels as you can think of. Write them down in a list.
2. *Jane Eyre* often makes reference to what she thinks of as the "Eastern" treatment of women: 1) When she objects to something Mr. Rochester is doing, she accuses him of behaving the way she believes "Eastern" men behave. For example, she accuses Mr. Rochester of acting like a "Sultan" and treating her like a member of his "seraglio," and when Mr. Rochester sings a song about his wife dying with him, Jane says she will not commit "suttee" (an alternate spelling of sati) for him. Similarly, she depicts St. John as a missionary and Jane's role in his plan for her is to educate Indian women.
 - a. Compare Brontë's imaginary version of the "East" to Satthianadhan's depiction of India derived from her real-life experience.
 - b. Brontë generally refers to Indian practices when she's critiquing the way

²⁰ Pamela Gilbert, *Mapping the Victorian Social Body* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

British men are treating British women. What are some of the things that both authors wish their cultures would improve?

3. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, argue that when Victorian novelists write about monstrous unhinged female characters such as Bertha, they are fantasizing about taking women's liberation to the next level, but villainizing the characters who do so to avoid transgressing too far outside their culture's norms.²¹ These evil characters do what the good characters can't do, but perhaps wish they could (See the Spotlight on the Gothic Novel). In the introduction to her edition of *Kamala*, Chandani Lokugé argues that Sai may be the "madwoman" of *Kamala*.²² Do you agree with this thesis? Why or why not?
4. Both *Kamala* and *Jane* experience a voice or a vision coming into contact with them across time or space. What purpose do these experiences serve, and what do they help us understand about the stories?
5. What is the role of Nature in these two stories?
6. **Context: Make Your Own.** Find an event in each of these two stories that you need additional context to understand. Using your library's website to find sources, write your own context paragraph to explain it.

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²¹ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

²² Chandani Lokugé, "Introduction," in *Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Child-Wife*, by Krupabai Saththianadhan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Sample Analysis of a Novel

Frances Thielman and R. Paul Cooper

How to Read this Section

This section contains two parts. First, you will find the prompt. The prompt is a very important element in any writing assignment. Don't be fooled by the fact it is short! Even though it is a short document, it highlights and makes clear every element you will need to complete the given assignment effectively. When writing an essay, the prompt is where you will both begin and end. Seriously. Before you begin, familiarize yourself with the prompt, and before you submit your final draft, give the prompt one final read over, making sure you have not left anything out. *When* you visit the University Writing Center and Libraries, they can better help if you bring along the prompt. Both the [Writing Center](#)²³ and the [Libraries](#)²⁴ provide indispensable tools to aid students, so take advantage of their services.

The second part of this section contains a simulated student essay—the essay is not an actual student essay, but an essay written to demonstrate a strong student essay. The essay in this section is not meant to represent a “perfect” essay; it has its faults. However, this essay is an effective response to the given prompt. The “student” essay will be represented in a wide column on the left, and the grader’s commentary will be represented in a smaller column on the right. Use the example and the comments to help you think about how you might organize your own essay, to think about whether you will make similar—or different—choices.

Sample Prompt

Assignment Description. Choose a symbol that you think is important to one of the book’s main themes. Find that symbol somewhere in the novel, and write a close reading of the paragraph in which it appears.

Content. To do a close reading, treat each word as if it were important and assume that the author thought carefully about where to put each one. Then, explain why you think they wrote it in this way. Treat this paragraph like a microcosm of the book. Tell us how the symbol conveys the theme you think the author was trying to convey.

Format: MLA

²³ University Writing Center, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/>.

²⁴ Texas A&M University Libraries, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://library.tamu.edu/>.

Scope: 1000–1200 words

| Student Essay | Instructor Annotations |
|--|--|
| <p>Nicole Watson</p> <p>Prof. Smith</p> <p>ENGL 203.XXX: Writing about Literature</p> <p>10 October 2021</p> <p>“For I was then his vision”: Seeing-eye Jane Eyre</p> | |
| <p>In the concluding chapter of Charlotte Brontë’s <i>Jane Eyre: An Autobiography</i> (1847), Jane Eyre marries Edward Rochester, opening the chapter with the iconic line “Reader, I married him” (Vol. III, Ch. XII). However, marrying Rochester at the end of the novel positions Jane on very different footing with her new husband. By the end of the novel, Rochester has lost his sight in a fire that killed his first wife, who actually set the fire and was mentally ill. Jane, upon seeing Rochester again after a year away, agrees to marry him even though he is now effectively blind. Eyes are mentioned across the novel, with special focus on the eyes of others, so it is interesting that Brontë blinds the love interest at the end of the novel. Jane Eyre seeing for Rochester at the end of <i>Jane Eyre</i> suggests that Charlotte Brontë challenged the focus on appearances, particularly when it comes to marriage and the success of a marriage. Jane Eyre and Rochester are only able to have a good marriage</p> | <p>This initial quote is a little confusing because it makes me think the paper will be discussing the paragraph in which Jane says “Reader, I married him,” when in fact it is a later paragraph.</p> <p>This quick summary helps me know which part of the novel Nicole’s paper will be analyzing.</p> |

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| <p>because of the loss of Rochester’s sight; the loss of sight prevents the mistake he made with his first wife of choosing a wife on appearance alone.</p> | |
| <p>Rochester’s lack of sight gives Jane more agency in the relationship, but this change also brought the couple closer together in a way that was not possible for Rochester in his first marriage with Bertha, or even in his first attempt to marry Jane. She tells the reader: “perhaps it was that circumstance [the loss of Rochester’s eyesight] that drew us so very near—that knit us so very close; for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand” (Vol. III, Ch. XII). Jane repeats herself when she says “that drew us so very near—that knit us so very close”; the repetition tells the reader that the closeness is the change in their relationship. In fact, she uses the word “knit” in her second iteration of the closeness of her relationship to Rochester. “Knit” suggests more than just being drawn closer together, which is what Jane suggests in her first statement. Knitting implies an interconnectedness that cannot be easily separated. In other words, the pair is so connected because of the loss of Rochester’s sight that they are bound to each other in a way that they were not earlier in the novel. The “circumstance” in question is the loss of Rochester’s sight, so the closeness and knitting together is a direct result of Rochester’s loss of sight. Jane follows it up by saying, “for I was then his vision, as I am still his right hand” (Vol. III, Ch. XII). Jane</p> | <p>In literary analyses, events of the novel are referred to in the present tense, even if the novel is narrated in the past tense. So, this should say “this change also brings the couple closer together.”</p> <p>Here, Nicole does a great job of explaining the reasoning behind her close reading. I’m persuaded by her assertion that Brontë chose the word “knit” to enhance the level of closeness initially indicated by the word “drew.”</p> |

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| <p>uses the word “then” which tells the reader that Rochester’s vision returns, which does happen further down the page. Telling the reader that she is “still his right hand” suggests that the closeness of their relationship, caused by the loss of sight, continues thanks to the loss of sight. Though, interestingly, she is now his right hand rather than Rochester’s eyes. Brontë possibly was suggesting to readers that it was possible for men and women to have a close marriage and rely on each other, but for Rochester, this was only possible by losing his sight.</p> | <p>Hm, I wonder if Nicole realized that Rochester lost his right hand in the accident too?</p> |
| <p>Jane tells the reader the level of control she had over his vision, and this level of control was not enjoyed by Jane in the sense that she enjoyed having power over him; rather, she helped Rochester see the world the way that she sees it. Jane writes, “He saw nature—he saw books through me” (Vol. III, Ch. XII). Use of the preposition “through” reinforces to the reader that Jane was literally acting as his eyes. He did not see anything Jane did not want him to see; Jane was the one who decided what was worth telling Rochester about his surroundings or parts of whatever she was reading to him. In one of the earlier meetings between Rochester and Jane, he examines the watercolor paintings Jane did (Vol. I, Ch. XIII). In that case, Rochester was deciding what works of art or parts of the paintings were valuable or interesting. In that moment, Rochester had the control because he was the master, and Jane was his hired help. Now, post-blindness,</p> | <p>This is a great explanation of how Rochester’s loss of sight has brought about greater equality in their marriage. Nicole uses a comparison with earlier events of the novel as support for the statements she makes about the paragraph she chose to analyze.</p> |

| | |
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| <p>Rochester must rely on Jane to tell him what is of value in the world.</p> <p>This change balances their relationship and equalizes them. This equalizing is necessary in changing the dynamic from a master-servant relationship to a spousal relationship. Brontë seems interested in the relationships between men and women, as Jane has opportunities to marry either Rochester or her cousin, St. John Rivers. Jane is on unequal footing with both of these men because of her gender, but in the case of Rochester, Jane is not his equal because of her class as well. Taking away Rochester’s sight allows Jane to actually have an equal partnership with her husband that is not possible without this loss of sight.</p> | <p>Good concluding sentences like these help the reader understand how each paragraph connects back to the thesis. Nicole does a good job with topic sentences too.</p> |
| <p>Rochester values Jane for who she is rather than appearance or money, which were his initial interests in Bertha. Jane observes that “he loves me so truly that he knew no reluctance in profiting by my attendance” (Vol. III, Ch. XII). Instead of his loathing of Bertha when he finds out she is not the beauty that he thought her to be, Rochester is able to love Jane in his own disability because he is able to rely on her and she is who she says she is for the entire novel. Jane says that Rochester “profits” from her care. Rochester partially married Bertha for her money (Vol. III, Ch. I), so he was also “profiting” from that marriage. However, this profit from his marriage to Jane is about “attendance” rather than actual wealth. Rochester sees the world and the beauty of the world</p> | <p>In this paragraph, Nicole never mentions Rochester’s blindness, which makes it a little hard for me to figure out how it connects to the thesis. The concluding sentence almost tells me the connection, but it could be improved by</p> |

| | |
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| <p>through Jane, which is the real profit in his second marriage, in stark contrast to his first marriage.</p> | <p>making the connection a little clearer.</p> |
| <p>Jane seeing for Rochester at the end of <i>Jane Eyre</i> enables the couple to have a successful marriage because it puts the couple on equal footing, and it enables Rochester to value Jane for something other than her appearance or her money. Jane gets to decide what parts of the world Rochester sees, in contrast to Rochester examining Jane’s paintings and deciding what about them was good or original. Jane becomes both narrator and storyteller when she says “he saw books through me” (Brontë vol. III, ch. XII). She does not say “he read books through me”; use of the word “saw” instead highlights the imaginative aspects of reading and what happens when readers are reading. Readers see the pictures in their heads of the characters or the actions. Brontë includes this moment at the end of the novel between Rochester and Jane to show that Jane is curating the story for us as well. We see <i>Jane Eyre</i> through Jane like Rochester sees the world through Jane.</p> | <p>This is a really interesting and insightful point, but it shouldn’t be in the concluding paragraph. Concluding paragraphs should wrap up the essay rather than then introducing new ideas. Nicole could fix this just by adding another earlier paragraph that introduces this very interesting point.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Work Cited</p> <p>Brontë, Charlotte. <i>Jane Eyre: An Autobiography</i>. London: Service & Paton, 1897. Project Gutenberg, March 1998. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1260/1260-h/1260-h.htm.</p> | |

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Watson, Nicole [pseud.]. "'For I was then his vision': Seeing-eye Jane Eyre." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Drama

Introduction

Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt

Operating at the intersection of other literary forms, drama is a bit of an anomaly in literary study because it is of interest not just to literary scholars and teachers, but also to performance and theater scholars and professionals. Plays and other types of performances such as dances and musicals share several elements of other literary forms covered in this textbook.

In this chapter, we will examine drama from both a literary and performance studies standpoint. We will consider the origins of drama, some of its major genres and characteristics, and how to read a dramatic text. Then, we'll spotlight two plays from two different periods of popular drama: ancient Greece and sixteenth-century England.

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History of Drama

Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt

Drama is an ancient form of communal creative fiction and expression that emerged across global cultures. Most scholars associate early forms of drama with religious events and expression. In pre-colonial Africa, for example, communities participated in rituals that combined performative elements such as "mask, dance, and incantation" as part of the

communication between humans and the divine.¹ Similar community rituals and performance also occurred in other cultures, including Ancient Egypt, China, Japan, and Greece.²

Performance also finds its origins within oral traditions of various cultures. While the stories and their structures may differ, human cultures then and now use storytelling to make sense of the world they live in and teach members of a community values, beliefs, and general knowledge important to that community.

Canonical drama in English locates its origins in 500–400 BCE Greece, with the most influential performances occurring in Athens during religious festivals honoring Dionysus, the Greek god of wine. The largest of these festivals, the City Dionysia, “was structured around a series of contests between individual citizens and between major Athenian social groups—the ten (later twelve to fifteen) ‘tribes’ that formed the city’s basic political and military units.”³ Judged by prominent citizens, the most popular contest was among the tragedians, who presented a trilogy of tragic plays across three days. The surviving Greek tragedies from this era from Euripedes, Aeschylus, and Sophocles received prizes from this festival. Interestingly, *Oedipus Rex* (or *Oedipus the King*) did not win first prize the year it was staged in 427 BCE; he came in second to Philocles, Aeschylus’s nephew.

Form and Genre

Dramatic literature encompasses several forms and genres. The most familiar will likely be plays, spoken performances that occur on a stage in front of an audience by one or more actors. Perhaps you might know about particularly famous playwrights such as William Shakespeare, Anton Chekov, or Loraine Hansberry. As you’ll likely be working with plays initially (if not exclusively), we’ll discuss some of the common formal elements and genres of plays first.

Form

Plays are almost always written in dialogue, meaning that with some minor exceptions such as stage directions, the text consists of one or more characters speaking to themselves, each other, or the audience. This means that, at least when reading a play, your only indication of the plot, setting, and character comes from what individual characters actually say. When

¹ Ousmane Diakhaté and Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh, “The Roots of African Theatre Ritual and Orality in the Pre-Colonial Period,” *Critical Stages/Scènes critiques*, no. 15 (June 2017). <https://www.critical-stages.org/15/the-roots-of-african-theatre-ritual-and-orality-in-the-pre-colonial-period/>. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

² Eric Csapo and Margaret C. Miller, eds., *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). See especially Part 3, including R.J. Leprohon, “Ritual Drama in Ancient Egypt,” 259–92; and G. Zobel, “Ritual and Performance, Dance and Drama in Ancient Japan,” 293–328.

³ W.B. Worthen. *The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*, Brief 6th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2011), 13.

reading, this means that you will have to both use your imagination and pay attention to what a character says and how they might be saying it.

In addition to being in dialogue, plays may also be in either prose or verse. Prose is the style of writing that you see in novels, novellas, and short stories. Verse, on the other hand, is the style of writing seen in poetry, with an emphasis on rhythm and sound. For ease, editors format verse and prose differently. Below are two examples of drama, one in verse and one in prose, both from *Othello* which contains passages in both forms:

Verse:

OTHELLO. Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago,
I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;
And on the proof, there is no more but this:
Away at once with love or jealousy. (3.3.218–223)⁴

Prose:

IAGO. As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound. There is more sense in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser. What, man, there are ways to recover the General again! You are but now cast in his mood—a punishment more in policy than in malice, even so as one would beat his offenseless dog to affright an imperious lion. Sue to him again and he's yours. (2.3.285–295)

Although both examples occur from the same play, they are formatted differently based on how they are written. Othello's verse lines to Iago are shorter and determined by poetic considerations (in this case, the rules of iambic pentameter), whereas Iago's prose lines to Cassio are limited by the space allotted on the page.

Knowing whether you're dealing with verse or prose opens up interpretative possibilities and techniques.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, eds. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.). All subsequent references to *Othello* refer to this edition and will be made parenthetically.

Structure and Genre

Western plays are commonly divided into two types: **comedy** and **tragedy**. When pressed, most of us would identify comedy as something that makes us laugh whereas tragedy makes us cry. Comedies are the less serious, more approachable form whereas tragedies are more serious and lend themselves to critical acclaim. However, while these descriptions may hold true some of the time, “comedy” and “tragedy” may be more usefully defined as a set of **narrative structures** intended to evoke an audience response rather than a **tone**.

In his *Poetics*, a treatise on the structures of imaginative literature, Aristotle lays out several ground rules for what constitutes tragedy, and to a lesser extent comedy. Famously, he defines tragedy as

a process of imitating an action which has serious implications, is complete, and possesses magnitude; by means of language which has been made sensuously attractive, with each of its varieties found separately in the parts; enacted by the persons themselves and not presented through narrative; through a course of pity and fear completing the purification of tragic acts which have those emotional characteristics.⁵

To summarize, Aristotle contends that a play is a play (as opposed to another form) because it possesses a closed narrative with a beginning, middle, and end; language that is pleasing and entertaining to its listeners; and actors actually performing the lines. Furthermore, Aristotle distinguishes tragedy from comedy with the emotions the audience feels while engaging with the play. Throughout a tragedy, the audience is meant to feel horror and sympathy for the tragic hero, but at the end, the audience purges these negative emotions and, ironically, feels better. For Aristotle, tragedy works because it follows an exceptional person who faces and accepts the repercussions of their actions, actions that are errors brought on by their personas as opposed to inadvertent mistakes. It is also worth noting that tragic protagonists are not exclusively male even for the ancient Greeks—Sophocles’ *Antigone* and *Medea* are two Greek examples of tragic heroines; other later plays include genderqueer, nonbinary, trans, and nongender protagonists. The close connection to a protagonist who starts in a superior position, regardless of whether that protagonist is a good or bad person, lets the audience live through the protagonist, feel their pain, and even hope and believe that things will work out for them.

The other major feature of tragedy is its inevitability. Good tragedy works not because the bad stuff was avoidable—it works because there was no way for that particular protagonist to

⁵ Aristotle, “*Poetics: Comedy and Epic and Tragedy*,” trans. Gerald F. Else in *The Bedford Introduction to Drama* by Lee A. Jacobus (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005), 95.

avoid it. In the moment that a protagonist makes their tragic error, they could not have done otherwise without fundamentally altering their character. In some cultures, this inevitability is tied directly to fate or the divine (and sometimes both). In the Oedipus myth, several characters (including Oedipus himself) actively seek to avoid fulfilling the prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother. His birth parents abandon him, but he is rescued and raised by another couple. Once Oedipus learns of his prophecy, he immediately leaves his adopted parents (whom he believes are his birth parents) only to kill his birth father, save Thebes from a monster, and marry the recently widowed queen. Ironically, in seeking to avoid his fate, Oedipus ends up completely fulfilling it. Of course, fate does not always have to be divinely ordained or ordered by a prophecy. In the 2013 *Twisted*, a musical retelling of Disney's animated film *Aladdin* from the perspective of Jafar in the vein of *Wicked*, the characters still complete the same story beats as the film.⁶ However, the perspective change from *Aladdin* as the point-of-view character to Jafar highlights the tragedy of a man attempting to do right but never really succeeding. Fate is just as unchangeable, but what makes it interesting is both where the fate comes from and how the character reacts to it.

Comedies, on the other hand, feature the protagonist (or ensemble) starting from a low point and needing to work upward. Moreover, rather than being a person worth admiring (and, in Aristotle's case, of a higher social status), comedies focus on the common person. Let's take, for example, the plot of the Shakespearean comedy *Twelfth Night*. In this play, the central characters start out in dire straits. Orsino is in love with a woman who refuses to return his ardor; Olivia is in mourning for her beloved brother; and Viola has just been shipwrecked in an unfamiliar location. By the end of the play, all three find love (Viola and Orsino plan to marry; Olivia and Viola's identical twin brother Sebastian are already married by the time the play concludes) and find fulfillment in their lives.

In both comedy and tragedy, the audience should end up being surprised, even if they know that the ending is a comic or a tragic one. In many modern dramas, this surprise takes the form of a twist—a surprise that subverts the viewer's expectations while still making sense within the rules of a story's plot and universe. As *Twelfth Night* progresses, a major conflict that emerges is a love triangle among Orsino, Olivia, and Viola. Orsino is obsessed with Olivia; Olivia is enthralled by Viola (in disguise as the boy Cesario); and Viola (still in disguise) is in love with Orsino. To "solve" the conflict, Shakespeare includes a fourth character who just happens to look exactly like Viola and be the accepted gender for heteronormative coupling. While on the outside the resolution may seem forced, the play gets around this by laying the groundwork for Sebastian's appearance before he even appears and gives him a close friendship (or one-sided romantic relationship) with another male character before he even meets Olivia.

⁶ Matt Lang, Nick Lang, and Eric Kahn Gale, *Twisted: The Untold Story of a Royal Vizier*, dir. Brian Holden, Team StarKid, 27 November 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-77cUxba-aA>.

Ultimately, the major takeaways from comedy and tragedy are that these are descriptive narrative categories that playwrights use to create stories. A play (at least the memorable ones) are rarely all tragic or all comedic.

Authorship

Authorship for drama is, for want of a better term, complicated. Traditionally, a play is attributed to the writer (or writers) of the script. For example, if you were to look up *Othello* on Google or in a library catalog, you would see that the author is William Shakespeare. Likewise, if you were to look up *Harlem Duet*, an adaptation of *Othello*, you would see that the author of that particular play is Djanet Sears. But the reality of creating a play is far more collaborative than single-author attribution implies.

Certain dramatic forms, such as musicals or opera, will provide authorship credit to both the writer of the music (the composer) and the writer of the lyrics (the librettist), though the composer usually is listed first. Other dramatic forms easily lent themselves to collaboration.

But what really complicates a play's authorship is that, for the most part, plays are meant to be performed. **Directors, actors, conductors, choreographers, set designers, costume designers, sound engineers**, and others all have parts to play in creating a performance. It may be useful to think of a play's authorship as akin to authorship in film (see Chapter 7: Film). In both film and drama—two performance-driven types of literature—authorship is a collaborative process with several individuals having a hand in decision-making.

When reading and writing about drama, authorship will first be determined whether you are primarily analyzing the playtext or a performance of the playtext. If you are analyzing the script, authorship will default to the recorded writer or writers of the script. In this sense, authorship goes to the individuals who wrote the words themselves, regardless of whether they're drawing from another source like a myth or story. If you are analyzing a performance, you will likely attribute the script to the writer but the performance to either a particular company or director who made major decisions as to how the play would be performed.

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Key Components of a Dramatic Text

Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt

In order to analyze a play, most readers turn to a copy of the script as opposed to an actual performance. This strategy is partially due to ease—a performance, after all, is a unique moment in time, whereas a script may be reviewed recursively at the reader’s leisure.

The *Dramatis Personae* Character List

At the onset of many plays is a list of the characters that appear in the play. Historically called a *dramatis personae* (Latin for “masks of the drama”), this list assists a reader in identifying who’s who in the play. Especially if you do not have access to visual or verbal cues that an actor exhibits while on stage, it can be difficult to discern who a character is, let alone their individual wants, motivations, or impact. The *dramatis personae* is an easy place to turn back to to remind yourself of a particular character and their relationship to a central character.

Acts and Scenes

Similar to how a long novel is broken up into books and chapters, long plays are divided into **acts** and **scenes**. Scenes represent shorter divisions. While modern playwrights will insert their own scene breaks (usually corresponding to a change in location or time), older playwrights often did not provide scene breaks. When you read an earlier play, like Shakespeare’s *Othello* or Sophocles’ *Antigone*, you will see scene breaks determined by an editor. These editorial breaks do not always correspond to a literal scene change or even a thematic change; rather, they may correspond to the entrance of a new character.

Acts, the longer division, typically inform the larger structure of the play. There are three common act structures that you are likely to encounter: one-act, three-act, and five-act plays. The aptly named one-act plays are shorter texts (usually 20–30 minute performance length) that consist only of one act. While one-act plays have ancient origins, this form is particularly popular for experimental theater and modern playwrights writing for competitions. In her early edited anthology of one-act plays, Helen Louise Cohen compares the structure and function of the one-act play to short stories: the one-act’s “plot must from beginning to end be dominated by a single theme; its crises may be crises of character as well as conflicts of will or physical conflicts; it must by a method of foreshadowing sustain the interest of the audience unflinching, but ultimately relieve their tension; it must achieve swift characterization by means of pantomime and dialogue; and its dialogue must achieve its effects by the same methods as the dialogue of longer plays, but by even greater economy of means.”⁷ If you

⁷ Helen Louise Cohen, ed., *One-Act Plays by Modern Authors* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921), xix, Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/33907/33907-h/33907-h.htm>.

encounter a one-act play, you may find that strategies for reading short stories, especially strategies that focus on character and theme, are especially useful.

Two-act and three-act plays are the most common modern structure in English literature. Two-act structures, as their name implies, contain two acts and are usually split by an intermission where the audience breaks from watching the play. Often, playwrights will use the intermission to signal a jump in time. When used to structure the story (as opposed to following time conventions), playwrights may use the second act to comment on the first and to switch the tone from more comic to serious.

The three-act structure is extremely popular in both classical Greek plays and modern film. At its most basic, the first act covers the play's exposition and inciting incident. Act two contains the rising action, which includes both the midpoint (usually a twist or subversion of expectations) and the major climax. The play then concludes with the falling action and resolution as part of the third act.

While two- and three-act plays may be the most ubiquitous, the five-act play may very well be the form you're most familiar with. Early English drama, particularly the drama of Shakespeare and many of his contemporaries, is separated into five acts. This structure, codified by German writer Gustav Freytag in 1863, is markedly similar to the three-act structure, with the major difference being that the second and third acts in the three-act structure are further separated into two acts in the five-act structure. In Freytag's view, the structure is thus:

Act One: Introduction (or Exposition). The story, setting, major characters, and expectations for the play are set.

Act Two: Rising Action. A key event or force triggers the beginning of the actual plot.

Act Three: Climax. Also called the "turn" or "turning point," the climax is where the drama is at the highest tension and where the protagonist faces a reversal of fortune. In comedy, the reversal is usually good; in tragedy, the reversal is usually bad for the protagonist.

Act Four: Falling Action. More events, often deescalating from the tension of the climax, occur, and lead to the final resolution of the plot.

Act Five: Conclusion (Catastrophe, Denouement, or Resolution). At this point, all loose ends are wrapped up, and characters face logical (loosely defined based on context) conclusions or consequences for their actions.

While many plays will fall into one of these categories, the important thing to remember is that these structures are meant to represent common narrative beats, or elements that audiences expect to see. Playwrights and performers alike often experiment with structure,

sometimes subverting or removing it altogether for a larger effect on an audience. Non-western drama also follows its own narrative structures and will resist these forms since these plays were not designed with those structures in mind.

So why study structure? Structure ultimately provides a reader and watcher with a set of familiar expectations. These expectations simultaneously make the experience more enjoyable and accessible to the intended audience. Moreover, understanding a play on its metatextual level allows someone engaging with the play to better understand its themes and what was important contextually to the playwright and their intended audience.

Table 6.1. Common dramatic act structures and examples.

| Structure | Popular Examples |
|-----------|---|
| One-Act | Sophocles' <i>Oedipus Rex</i> ; Aristophanes' <i>Lysistrata</i> , Jean-Paul Sartre's <i>No Exit</i> ; Susan Glaspell's <i>Trifles</i> ; Marsha Norman's <i>Night Mother</i> |
| Two-Act | August Wilson's <i>Fences</i> ; Andrew Lloyd Webber's <i>Cats</i> (and by extension, most musicals) |
| Three-Act | Oscar Wilde's <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> ; Henrik Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i> ; David Henry Hwang's <i>M. Butterfly</i> |
| Five-Act | Shakespeare, Aphra Behn's <i>The Rover</i> |

When reading, act and scene breaks can be useful places to pause and reflect on the current action of the play.

Stage Directions

When reading a play, you will predominantly be looking at dialogue. However, you may occasionally find other text interspersed among characters waxing poetic, reflecting on their personal circumstances, plotting regicide, falling in love, or telling naughty jokes. These paratextual elements, called **stage directions**, are usually set off from the rest of the script by italics or some other visual cue that indicates that these lines are not meant to be read but to be performed or to be used in the staging of a play.

The number and types of stage directions vary from play to play and playwright to playwright. Earlier playwrights, for example, do not tend to offer many stage directions as these were not considered of importance in their textual transmittal and early publishing. In the example below from Act 2, scene 2 of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the play contains two short stage directions for the character of Malvolio:

VIOLA. She took the ring of me. I'll none of it.

MALVOLIO. Come, sir, you peevishly threw it to her, and

Her will is it should be so returned. [*He throws
down the ring.*] If it be worth stooping for, there it
Lies in your eye; if not, be it his that finds it.

He exits. (2.2.13–16)

In the Folger edition quoted here, editors Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine choose to represent stage directions in italics. They also insert the stage directions interlinearly (meaning within the dialogue lines themselves), as opposed to in the margins or separately from the dialogue line. If we view the page as a whole, we can see that both of these stage directions do not “count” as line numbers.

These two stage directions, while formatted similarly, differ significantly in their purpose and creation. The second stage direction, “*He exits,*” is a common stage direction marking the exit of a character. While exceptions occur, the entrances and exits of characters are usually noted in modern editions. You may also see the Latin word *Exeunt*, meaning “they all exit” at the end of a scene to indicate that all characters are leaving the stage. The purpose is utilitarian and, in this instance, found in the copy text (a primary text that textual editors use to base major editorial decisions on) that Mowat and Werstine used for their edition.

The first stage direction, “*He throws down the ring,*” differs from the more neutral “he exits” by offering an editorial comment on how Malvolio gives the ring he is carrying to the disguised Viola. As readers, we can tell that this is a decision made by the editors and not found in their prior text because of the use of brackets. In this moment (and in Viola’s following comments on the ring), readers know that Malvolio has somehow given Viola the ring, but the manner is left up to our imagination without the stage direction. Perhaps Malvolio stiffly hands the ring to Viola, and perhaps even realizes in the moment that Viola is in disguise. Other options include simply dropping the ring with no force other than gravity or tossing it to Viola. Regardless of where our imaginations go, the takeaway is thus: stage directions, especially those that comment on how the play is to be performed, shape our intended reading and understanding of key lines. Use these directions to inform your own readings, but also consider ways you can resist or think of performance possibilities beyond a given stage direction.

Themes

Unsurprisingly, plays comment (sometimes inadvertently) on the societies they are written and performed in. The particular topics that a play discusses and offers comment on are called **themes**. In order for a topic or idea to be a theme, it should occur throughout the play and

usually in different guises with different characters. This level of repetition is beneficial for both an audience who does not have the advantage of re-reading a particular passage and for a director who wants to emphasize certain ideas when adapting the script to the stage.

Frequently, comments on a given theme take the form of a clear moral or “lesson,” but that is not always the case. Indeed, many plays are performed regularly because what they have to say about a particular theme is so adaptable. Moreover, since plays are remade every time they are performed, themes and their significance change.

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Key Components of a Performance

Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt

With some exceptions, the majority of plays you will read in a literature class were designed to be performed. This means that in addition to considering the actual words in the script, you also should consider elements of performance.

The Audience

Arguably, what makes a play a play is the specific interaction between performers and an audience that observes their actions. Even when an audience sits quietly in seats separate from a stage, their collective response still influences the performance. If you have seen a live performance, you’ve likely seen what happens when an actor delivers a particularly funny line. The audience laughs, and the actors pause for that reaction before continuing.

An audience also allows for one of the most common dramatic elements that you’ve likely seen elsewhere in literature: irony. **Dramatic irony** is a specific form of irony common to the theater wherein the audience knows something that the characters do not. Dramatic irony can take several forms, including audience foreknowledge of the ending (the tragic hero dies at the end) or something more immediate, such as when a villain like Iago or Richard III says something that has an innocuous meaning to the characters on stage but a sinister meaning to the audience who knows that they’re up to no good.

The Space

The dramatic space further shapes the play and how it can be performed. Classical Greek theater, for instance, was performed in large semi-circular amphitheaters. The space design had phenomenal acoustics, meaning that performers speaking in normal volumes on stage could be heard at the topmost levels. The large space also meant that things we often associate with modern performance (such as subtle facial expressions or movements) could not be viewed by the majority of the audience. The Greeks therefore utilized more gross body movement and masks to convey meaning.

When we think of plays today, we typically think of an indoor stage that has one section open to a normally quiet (unless they're laughing or gasping) seated audience. This style of stage is called a **proscenium** stage, which has one side open to the audience; the other three sides are only available to the actors and set crew and are not intended to be viewed. In this format, the actors are viewed as performing in a "box" or walled-off space. Therefore, when they directly address the audience or acknowledge the meta-theatrical space outside of the stage, this act is called **breaking the fourth wall**.

In other theatrical spaces, the lines between performers and audiences are further blurred. Certain performance spaces will have **thrust stages** (stages that extend into the audience space and are surrounded by the audience on three sides—Shakespeare's Globe is an example of such a stage), be outdoors (warm-weather performances like Shakespeare in the Park are popular examples of these; large amphitheaters or arenas also fall into this category, albeit on a much larger scale), or be in small interior spaces like **black box theaters**. All of these spaces offer their own challenges and advantages, and certain plays are better suited to some spaces than others. For instance, a play meant to enhance a feeling of claustrophobia and tension such as Marsha Norman's *Night Mother* is more effective in a small, intimate space where the audience is in close proximity to the actors than it would be in a large arena or performance hall.

The script often offers useful cues as to how the playwright originally expected the play to be performed. In addition to stage directions or other paratextual cues, playwrights will often include dialogue that addresses the performance space and its limitations. Famously, in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the Chorus apologizes for the sudden shifts in location, asking them to imagine that they are now on a battlefield in France.

The Performer(s)

Performers make meaning. Earlier, we mentioned that part of what can make reading a play difficult is that the content is almost entirely dialogue. However, as many a play reader knows, watching a play being performed often makes what was obscure much clearer as the language is suddenly accompanied by other elements that help us contextually understand what is

going on. Beyond simply reading the words, performers (usually in consultation with each other, a director, or other individuals producing a performed version of a play) also act as interpreters. As a reader, you will also fall into this role.

How may a performer affect the meaning and reception of a play? Even if they are not granted a large amount of autonomy by a director, actors are responsible for doing more than just reading lines. A performer will use their body and their voice to direct the audience's attention; beyond that, they will cue the audience in on what the intended reaction should be through their interactions with other performers or the audience's own expectations for human behavior. A talented actor can even convey the direct opposite meaning of the written text. In her final speech in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Kate, who has been abused and gaslit by her husband Petruchio, talks about the importance of women being subservient to their husbands. In this speech, a performer could present Kate as psychologically broken by her husband's abuse; a performer could also wink and speak sarcastically, showing that they are still very much in control; the performer could also offer some interaction with Petruchio, signaling that they are both in on the joke. All of these options and many more have been done with this scene and thus speak to the importance of the performer in letting the audience know what the preferred interpretation of events should be.

In terms of movement, an actor may use conventional or stock gestures as shorthand to convey meaning, especially in instances where an audience may not be able to clearly see more subtle body language. This approach differs from film, in which techniques such as close up shots draw deliberate attention to an actor's smaller movements.

Finally, performers may also use improvisation to further enhance a given performance. Most common in theater where a cast puts on the same show for long periods at a time, **improvisation** is the practice of performers deliberately going off script, usually either to adjust for an error or to make the audience (or a fellow performer) laugh. These often-unintentional additions to the play become an integral part of that particular performance, further allowing it to be a truly unique instance of the text.

Time

Even when a play follows a set script with no deviations or changes made by a director or performer, a performance is nevertheless a unique event unto itself that cannot be exactly repeated. Therefore, plays are particularly apt at being read in two modes: the literary mode that we've been covering throughout this textbook and the performance mode. When thinking in terms of "literature," it may help to envision performances as distinct texts unto themselves and adaptations of a script. These adaptations are no more or less important than the original script and often take on different resonances and meaning by simple virtue of being presented in a certain time or place that may not have been considered by their original author.

Another facet of plays is that they (unless they are extremely experimental) are bound by human time. This amount may be short (such as Tom Stoppard’s *The Fifteen Minute Hamlet*, to the “two hours traffic of our stage,”⁸ to day- or even days-long performances. The two-part *Angels in America* (first performed 1991) by Tony Kushner clocks in at approximately seven and half hours, and classical Japanese “Kabuki performances originally began about three o’clock in the morning and did not conclude until dusk.”⁹

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Writing About Drama

Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt

Drama holds a unique position among literary genres as it exists both as a written text and performed texts. It is similar to film in this regard, but unlike film, the written script itself (as opposed to any performance) is what is analyzed. This is not to say that individual performances cannot be analyzed, but that this approach is far less common in English and literature classes. Theater and performance classes, however, will privilege the individual performance.

If you are to analyze a specific performance for an essay, that performance will likely be available as a filmed version or have primary accounts or images that you can draw from. In essays that focus on a particular performance, you’ll be thinking about the dramatic elements—how an actor portrays their character, how different characters interact, how lightning and sound affect a particular scene, and how the camera or staging frames a character. All performances are adaptations of a script, and as adaptations, you may wish to judge them accordingly. The criteria for an adaptation will vary; however, the strongest analysis will be less concerned with fidelity to a particular script (unless that was an aim of the

⁸ William Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet*, Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Nile, eds. (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), Prologue 12, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/romeo-and-juliet/prologue/>.

⁹ W. B. Worthen. *The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*, Brief Sixth Edition (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011), 111.

performance) and more judging the performance on its own merits as a piece of art, entertainment, or criticism.

When writing about a script (as opposed to a specific performance), you may use all of the traditional literary tools associated with close reading, both prose and poetry. The challenge of drama is that the majority of information on setting, character, and theme will be conveyed in dialogue. As a reader, you will need to pay attention to clues (some obvious, some less so, and many open to interpretation) in what characters are saying. Moreover, as plays are meant to be spoken, you can pay attention to the individual sounds characters make. A character may have their own distinct speech patterns as a way for a listener to distinguish them more readily from other characters, or the playwright may choose to write in verse following a particular poetic structure.

Writing about drama often entails writing about the culture in which the play was created and performed. For most cultures, drama serves as a way to think through popular ideas, whether those be humanity's relationship with the divine, power structures, and the multiple facets of human identity. As you read and write, what sorts of ideas seem to be underlying the worldview espoused in the play? How do those ideas compare with the worldviews that would have been popular at the time or are popular today? How does the playwright present those views? Are they to be accepted? Are they critiqued or modified? Once again, look to the dialogue and the relationships among the various characters. A character's actions (or inaction) and the other characters' reactions to them will often indicate a playwright's intended meaning.

The final note on writing about drama for you to consider is that most drama is designed to be flexible in meaning. What you are looking for in an analysis is not necessarily the "correct" interpretation, but one that is supported by the script and the reasonable ways it may be performed. Multiple meanings exist in drama by design as the final form of a performed text only occurs after analysis and play by readers, directors, actors, and the many contributors it takes to put on a performance. Ultimately, you will need to be attuned not only to words in the script but also the many ways those words can be delivered.

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Spotlight on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama

Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt

Biography of William Shakespeare

Despite his legacy as one of the most influential (if not the most influential) writers in English, we know little about William Shakespeare as a person. Nevertheless, the key events of Shakespeare's life, including his baptism, marriage, his positions as playwright, actor, and shareholder for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and death are well documented. Born in April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon (the record at Holy Trinity Church in that same town indicates his baptism on April 26, 1564), William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare and Mary (Arden) Shakespeare. The Shakespeares were an established middle-class family at Stratford who were later elevated to the gentry in 1601. As a boy, Shakespeare received a rigorous humanist education at a local grammar school. Renaissance humanism (different from modern secular humanism) emphasized engaging with personal learning and the preparation not for religious life but for civil life in government. In grammar school, Shakespeare and his male contemporaries read and wrote in Latin from a series of curated examples that were meant to be the best of different genres. In their own compositions and rhetorical competitions, students were encouraged to draw from these prior models and remix them into their own creations.

In 1582, 18-year-old William married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. The couple had three children—Susanna in 1583 and twins, Hamnet and Judith in 1585. Given the closeness of dates between their wedding and the birth of their first child, many speculate that Anne had been pregnant at the time of their marriage. Anne and their children remained in Stratford while Shakespeare moved to London for his career in acting. He would split his time between both locations throughout his life.

As a member of the Lord Chamberlain's men, Shakespeare held several roles, including actor, playwright, and—by far the most lucrative—shareholder. Though sponsored by the Lord Chamberlain, the company itself was owned by eight different actors who not only performed in the plays themselves but also shared the profits and debts. The success of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (who later became the King's Men once King James himself took over patronage) led to Shakespeare buying a coat of arms for his father, thus literally purchasing a noble title for his family.

Shakespeare died at age 52 on April 23, 1616, with some speculating that he died on his birthday. After his death, two members of Shakespeare's company, John Heminges and Henry Condell, produced a large collection of several of Shakespeare's plays, many of which had not been in print prior to that time. This collection was first printed in 1623 and would appear in three more editions through the century, each time adding more and more plays (many of

which not actually written by Shakespeare). The first edition, or the First Folio, remains a key source for performers and scholars.

Historical Context

Shakespeare, along with several other writers, comprise what is commonly referred to as “the English Renaissance.” This period, ranging roughly the mid 1500s to mid 1600s, occurred as part of a larger European Renaissance that originated in Italy. “Renaissance,” literally meaning “rebirth,” was intended as a revival of classical learning from classical Greek and Roman periods. Medievalists understandably take some umbrage with this term as it implies that the periods immediately preceding this one were somehow dead or in need of being revived. You may also frequently see this period labeled as “early modern” or even Elizabethan or Jacobean (adjectival terms for Elizabeth and James, two of the dominant monarchs from this period). In terms of literary history, this period comprises the entire reign of the Tudor monarchs through the execution of Charles I, or 1485 to 1623.

During this century and a half, England and its monarchs were seeking legitimacy as a continental power. The ascension of the first Tudor monarch Henry VII (Henry VIII’s father and Elizabeth I’s grandfather) was fraught with turmoil as his claim to the throne was more tenuous than other contenders. The shadow of whether the Tudors were “legitimate” monarchs plagued the rest of the family, with Henry VIII’s desperation in producing a male heir famously leading to multiple divorces and executions of his wives and Parliament insisting upon Elizabeth I marrying. As part of a push for legitimacy as a European power was the establishment of military power, a national identity through the arts and education, and exploration and conquering of non-European locales.

Elizabethan Dramatic Conventions

As with any major dramatic genre, there are several conventions that Renaissance playwrights accommodate for in their works. In this section, we will address specifically commercial or popular theater as opposed to other performances such as courtly masques, royal entertainments, and scholastic performances at Oxford or the Inns of Court. “Commercial” theater refers to performances designed for public consumption and with the economic aim of generating revenue.

Performance Spaces

The commercial plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were performed in one of two spaces. The first space was a circular or octagonal outdoor theater that featured a thrust stage with a trapdoor, a two-story backstage with a roof and spaces for entering and exiting, and standing audience space on the ground in front of the thrust stage and seated space around the perimeter of the entire structure. Theaters that utilized this format include

(famously) the Globe, though that was a later iteration of this structure. The Globe and theaters like it were popular spaces, located outside London proper, and close to other spaces that were popular for sex work and other entertainments such as bear baiting. As these theaters were outdoor, performances occurred during the afternoon under natural light and various kinds of weather. Audiences themselves ranged across social strata from laborers to nobility. Less expensive admission to the space in front of the stage could cost as little as “a penny, probably the equivalent of five to ten dollars in today’s money.”¹⁰ As they stood on the ground, these audience members were (affectionately or otherwise) called groundlings. The groundlings were a particularly interactive audience, who interacted with the performers in ways that modern audiences would find shocking.

When reading a play designed for an outdoor stage and potentially rambunctious audience, you may notice dialogue that is intended to more clearly establish the mood and location of a particular scene. Shakespeare’s *Henry V* famously opens with a Chorus fully acknowledging that the stage is not equivalent to the “real thing” and that certain artistic liberties need to be taken for the audience’s enjoyment. They then ask the audience to use their imaginations to create the scenery, clothe the characters in their proper attire, and accept that the performance will be playing fast and loose with when historical events happened:

Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
Into a thousand parts divide one man,
And make imaginary puissance.
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i’ th’ receiving earth,
For ’tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there, jumping o’er times,
Turning th’ accomplishment of many years

¹⁰ Lee A. Jacobus, *The Bedford Introduction to Drama*, Fifth Edition (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2005), 267.

Into an hourglass.¹¹

The other space where commercial early modern English theater was performed was in indoor theaters, many of which were former monasteries. These spaces were especially popular for performances by companies that featured all-child actors. Unlike the open-air theaters, indoor theaters were illuminated by candlelight (with wax sometimes dripping on attendees!) and featured performances during evening hours. Depending on how much they paid, attendees could sit on benches in front of the stage or even on the sides of the stage itself. Several authors took advantage of this particular setting. Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (first performed at the Blackfriars Theater in 1607), offers an almost postmodern twist where a husband and wife sitting on stage in the audience join the play and shape it from a "serious" romance to a comedy that stars their apprentice as the hero.

Acting Companies

By the early 1580s, professional acting companies sponsored by a noble or royal patron were the dominant play actors in commercial theater. Acting companies were primarily composed of either adult men (with a handful of boy actors to play women's roles) or entirely boys and young men. The name of an acting company indicates both the patron and the makeup of the group. Shakespeare's acting company, originally the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later, upon the ascension of Elizabeth's successor James I, the King's Men) was an adult male company first under the patronage of two Lord Chamberlains (Henry Carey and later his son, George Carey), and then under the patronage of King James himself. Likewise, names of children's companies (The Children of the Revels or Pauls Boys) indicate that those companies consisted of child actors associated with the Master of the Revels and Saint Paul's Cathedral, respectively.

Different from community theaters or college productions, early modern English theatrical companies performed what is known as **repertory theater**. Repertory means that companies (rather than authors) owned several plays in their repertoire that could be performed at nearly any given time. Plays that were well received were performed several times whereas less popular plays were quickly dropped. Because of the nature of the repertory theater during this time period, rehearsals themselves were comparatively minimal. This stands in contrast to court performances that were only intended to be produced once. (Ben Jonson's *The Gypsies Metamorphos'd* (1623), an exception to this rule, was performed three times at different locations.)

Acting Conventions

One of the major effects of acting companies was that playwrights ended up writing with particular actors and their strengths in mind. Different actors were often "typecast" for

¹¹ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), Prologue 20–33.

different types of roles. This is especially apparent in Shakespeare's drama if we look at both the women and comic fool (or clown) roles. As women actors were not permitted on the commercial London stages, female roles were assigned to younger male actors. The number of concurrent female roles therefore was limited to who was associated with the company. In the case of comic actors, Shakespeare's company had two standouts: Will Kemp (who left the company in 1599) and Robert Armin (who joined after Kemp's departure.) Kemp was known for his physical comedy and lively performances whereas Armin's comedy was more wit-driven and often more melancholy. The shift from one performance style to another can readily be seen how Shakespeare writes his fools once the actors changed. Feste, the jester in *Twelfth Night*, is assumed to be written for Armin's particular comedic talents, whereas Falstaff from the *Henry IV* plays and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was a vehicle for Kemp.

Actors themselves did not possess full copies of scripts like actors do today. Instead, they had **sides**, or papers that contained their lines and cues. This is due to the expense of paper and the lengthy process of manually copying multiple documents for actors. You can use this knowledge as a reader to help inform what possible choices could be made in a scene. Rather than looking at italicized stage directions, you can look at the dialogue itself for cues as to how another actor should be reacting.

Other common conventions of the early modern stage include how actors interacted with the audience. These conventions include the use of two similar techniques: dramatic monologues and soliloquies. Common to other dramatic genres (and even featured as individual poems in their own right), a **dramatic monologue** is an extended passage where a character gives a speech without interruption from other characters on stage. In contrast, a **soliloquy** is an extended dramatic passage where a character gives a speech *alone on stage*. The difference between the two therefore is not their length nor even their content or form; rather, the difference is in who is listening. When a character delivers a dramatic monologue on stage, they are presenting themselves in-universe to other characters. However, when they are giving a soliloquy, the audience is meant to interpret that speech as an expression of a character's inner thoughts and feelings. While many plays will make it obvious whether a passage is meant to be a soliloquy or dramatic monologue, there are plenty of counterexamples (such as Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech—is he being overheard by Polonius and Claudius who may or may not have exited?) that complicate this distinction and invite the interpreter to consider what is "true," insofar as a character is concerned.

Costumes and Props

Clothing was a particularly fraught item during the English Renaissance due to a few major social factors: a rising middle class, the attempts of a ruling class to control access to certain spaces, and the fraught nature of succession wherein the English throne was not always neatly passed from father to son. In *The Book of the Courtier*, a popular Italian text by Baldassare Castiglione (translated into English by Thomas Hoby and published in 1561),

Castiglione explains how the successful member of court should act. Offering advice to both men and women, one of the major facets that Castiglione emphasizes is the idea of *sprezzatura*, a paradoxical elegance that implies that everything the courtier does is natural, rather than the result of careful planning, spending, and study. Part of cultivating *sprezzatura* is paying attention to one's clothing and outward appearance. If one looks the part, Castiglione asserts, one gains further and further access into the privacy of a noble or royal household, and thus can gain personal power and influence.

This *sprezzatura* and emphasis on dress as a type of performance in and of itself carries into both the drama of the period and a series of laws meant to govern what kinds of clothing could be worn by whom. Laws that governed clothing, or sumptuary laws, during Elizabeth I's reign limited what colors and clothing types could be worn. Purple, for example, was limited only to royalty, and other fabrics were allotted to differing levels of nobility.

As it was handmade, clothing during this period was constantly remade and in larger circulation, taking on several lives as different items owned by different people. Individuals with access to more finery would gift clothing to subordinates and clothing in turn could be pawned or sold for other money or goods. These passing around of clothing enabled early modern acting companies to acquire costumes for use (and reuse) across several performances.

Similar to costumes, props (often articles of clothing themselves like Desdemona's handkerchief from *Othello* or Hieronimo's cloak from Thomas Kid's *The Spanish Tragedy*) reappear in other plays. These reappearances are largely due to economic reasons rather than intentionally symbolic ones. However, a recognizable item from one play may readily carry prior meanings, especially to an acting company or a particularly frequent audience.

Verse and Scansion

Similar to his predecessors and contemporaries, Shakespeare's plays are predominantly written in verse. Most lines follow a particular poetic meter that roughly mimics early modern English speech patterns. In this case, Shakespeare uses **blank verse** or unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter that are used to imitate English speech, with an occasional rhyming couplet at the end of a scene or monologue to illustrate closure.

But what exactly is "iambic pentameter" for that matter? And why should we care?

In English poetics, each poetic line is made up of patterns of syllables called **feet** (singular: **foot**). Typically, these patterns are disyllabic (or two-syllable) combinations of either stressed or unstressed sounds; however, other languages may have different rules for what counts as a foot. (Classical Latin, for example, relies on long and short vowel sounds to determine feet as opposed to stress patterns. Their stress patterns can be disyllabic or trisyllabic, depending on the poetry.) When determining the meter of a poem, readers will examine both the total

number of feet, the dominant stress pattern, and any variations to the dominant stress pattern.

By far the most common stress pattern in early modern English poetry is the two-syllable **iamb**. An iamb consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. In the example below from Shakespeare’s *Othello*, the stressed syllables are in bold. Slashes indicate the separation of each foot.

I’ll **see** / **before** / I **doubt**; / when I /doubt, **prove**;

And **on** / the **proof**, / there **is** / no **more** / but **this**:

Away / at **once** / with **love** / or **jea** / lousy. (3.3.221–223)

As the example above shows, poetic feet are measures of sound rather than measures of meaning. Notice in the final line, “jealousy,” a three-syllable word, appears in the fourth and fifth foot in the line.

Other common stress patterns in English poetry include the **trochee** and the **spondee**. A **trochee** (adjective trochaic) is the opposite of an iamb, consisting of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. A **spondee** (adjective spondaic) consists of two stressed syllables. In drama that uses blank verse, you will most commonly see these two stress patterns at the beginning of a speech or scene.

Table 6.2. Common stress patterns in early modern English drama.

| Name | Stress Pattern | Examples |
|---------|----------------------------|---|
| iamb | Unstressed stressed | “Make me / a wil /low cab /in at / your gate And call / upon / my soul / within / the house .” ¹² |
| trochee | Stressed unstressed | “ Double , / double / toil and / trouble , Fire / burn , and / cauldron / bubble .” ¹³ |

¹² William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), 1.5.271–272, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/twelfth-night/act-1-scene-5/>.

¹³ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), 4.1.10–11, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/macbeth/act-4-scene-1/>.

| | | |
|---------|--------------------------|---|
| spondee | Stressed stressed | From jea/lousy! / Why, why/ is this? ¹⁴ |
|---------|--------------------------|---|

Knowing how to scan a poetic line will open up additional options for literary analysis, including clues as to how the lines were intended to be performed.

Scansion is more of an art than science, meaning that there will be places where the correct stress pattern may not be immediately clear. In some instances, the emphasis will not matter much; in others, the emphasis may be incredibly significant. Let's take a look at the four opening lines of *Richard III*, where the soon-to-be King Richard reflects on the events on the usurpation of the previous King Henry VI by Richard's brother:

Now is the winter of our discontent

Made glorious summer by this son of York,

And all the clouds that loured upon our house

In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.¹⁵

The majority of the lines easily fall into the iambic stress pattern; indeed, the stresses in lines 2 and 3 correspond to internal assonance (glor/lour; cloud/house), further suggesting that this pattern is intentional. However, the very first foot containing the words "Now is" is less obvious. If following the normal Shakespearean pattern, the emphasis would fall on "is," making the actor state, "Now IS the winter of our discontent." However, if you try saying the lines yourself, your emphasis is likely to fall on the "now" as it contains a stronger vowel sound. This choice would make this first foot a trochee.

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Hagstrom-Schmidt, Nicole. "Drama: Spotlight on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt

¹⁴ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), 3.3.206, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/othello/act-3-scene-3/>.

¹⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Richard III*, eds. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), 1.1.1-4, <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/richard-iii/act-1-scene-1/>.

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Selected Reading and Study Questions

Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt

Aristophanes (c. 446c. 386 BCE)

Lysistrata (411 BCE)

[Link to Text](#)

Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*. Translated by Edward Einhorn. Theater 61 Press, 2015.
<http://www.lysistratascript.com/script/>

Scene 1 & Chorus 1 Summary

After a wild night of partying, the Athenian Lysistrata gathers several women from the warring Athens and its allies (Thebes and Corinth) and Sparta to discuss the ongoing war between their nations. She proposes that the women withhold sexual relations from their husbands until they agree to stop the war. Begrudgingly, the women swear an oath on a shared cup of wine.

The Men's Chorus approaches the Acropolis where the women have set up camp with the plan to burn or smoke them out. The Women's Chorus responds that they are prepared to fight back. The two leaders of each Chorus engage in a battle of wits that concludes with the Women's Leader throwing cold water on the Men's Leader's testicles.

Lysistrata Scene 1 & Chorus 1 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. *Lysistrata* often shocks modern audiences with its blunt references to sex and sexuality. This bluntness is apparent in both its original Greek and in many subsequent translations. What are some of the effects that sex has on the audience?
2. *Lysistrata* is noted as a classic "battle of the sexes." What stereotypes of men and women do we see thus far? Are any of these surprising?
3. In most translations, Lampito the Spartan woman speaks differently from her peers.

How does Einhorn represent her language? How does this compare with other translations? (See links to the following for freely available online translations: [Perseus Edition](#);). What do these choices suggest about the differences between Lampito and the other women?

4. The Chorus is a common feature in Greek plays. Traditionally, they operate by singing (or speak-singing) about larger thematic ideas. In *Lysistrata*, the two Choruses (a Men's Chorus and a Women's Chorus) interact as part of the plot and even have their own development between the two leaders. How do these two Choruses intersect with the major plot of *Lysistrata*?
5. What is the significance of the women holding the Acropolis as opposed to setting up a base in a local home or other location?

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Scene 2 & Chorus 2 Summary

The local Magistrate attempts to deal with Lysistrata and her companions at the Acropolis. When he orders an attack, the women defend themselves with foodstuffs and household items.

The male and female choruses continue to sing and argue against each other. The Men's Leader worries that the women will form their own battle units and defeat them. The Women's Leader complains that because of war, she was unable to celebrate a feast where she invited guests who suddenly became war enemies.

Lysistrata Scene 2 & Chorus 2 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Throughout the scene we hear several examples of women speaking and being silenced. The Magistrate, for instance, commands the men to "grab [Calonice] first, she talks too much," and Lysistrata reports that her husband insists that she "hold [her] tongue" when she asks him about his day. What does this suggest about speaking and power? How do both genders use language in this scene and throughout the play?

2. Midway through the scene, Lysistrata identifies the different ranks of women who have joined the cause, including “barmaids,” “baker women,” and “egg sellers.” All of these women, she further clarifies, are “freeborn.” Who is noticeably absent from these freeborn women? What does their absence suggest?
3. This scene concludes with the women joking about different Greek funeral traditions. What are these traditions, and what do they suggest about Greek culture? If this play were to be adapted to a modern-day context, what traditions might be more familiar to the audience?
4. How reasonable are the concerns and complaints of each Chorus here?
5. In addition to singing, Choruses often performed some form of dance or choreography. Imagine you are a director or choreographer for this play: what kind of dancing or movement would work in the Choruses’ exchanges?
6. In her final lines in this interlude, the Women’s Chorus Leader remarks that she was planning to “celebrate the feast of Hecate.” Who is Hecate? What effect, if any, does having a religious feast canceled have on the complaint? How does this god worship tie in with other references to Greek gods we have seen throughout the play thus far?

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Scene 3 & Chorus 3 Summary

After a few days without sex, many of the women grow restless and try to flee the Acropolis to return home to their husbands. Lysistrata stops them and invokes an impromptu prophecy from Zeus to persuade them to stick with the plan.

The two Choruses continue to sing at each other, though this time they talk about pubic hair and Timon of Athens while making more puns about sex organs.

Lysistrata Scene 3 & Chorus 3 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. The women in *Lysistrata* are just as horny as the men. What do their actions suggest about the relationship among genders and their feelings about sex? Why might have

Aristophanes included this scene showing the women are getting desperate for sexual relations?

2. A continued theme throughout the play is the invocation of different gods and goddesses. How does Lysistrata's appeal to Zeus compare with the other invocations we've seen so far? Does it support, contradict, or challenge how religious invocation has been used prior?
3. Though this play is clearly about sex and gender, acting roles in classical Greek theater were all played by men wearing masks. How might having roles played by an all-male (or all-female or all-queer cast) affect the interpretative options and humor of the play?
4. The "Timon" that the Women's Chorus mentions is part of another famous Athenian story that even Shakespeare adapted several centuries later. Who was Timon of Athens? What is his story, and how does it fit in this scene?

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Scene 4 & Chorus 4 Summary

Myrrhina's husband, Cinesias, and his servant who pretends to be carrying Myrrhina and Cinesias's child, arrives with a large erection. Myrrhina torments him by agreeing to sneak off to copulate with him, but continually leaves their rendezvous point to retrieve different items.

The Spartan Herald (also with a noticeable erection) later finds the suffering Cinesias. They agree to return to their own countries to negotiate a peace treaty.

The Leaders of the Men's and Women's Choruses reconcile.

Lysistrata Scene 4 & Chorus 4 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. How would you characterize the relationship between Myrrhina and Cinesias? How might their relationship compare with some of the other pairings that have been emerging in the play?
2. This scene is historically bawdy and often uses comically large phalloi as props. What

is the effect of having visible erections on stage? Who might this play have entertained or entertain? How does the humor change if a penis (or a shape of one) is not visible to the audience?

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Scene 5 & Chorus 5 Summary

The Spartans (led by the Herald) and the Athenian (led by Cinesias) arrive to peace talks headed by Lysistrata, who appears to great cheers and praise. Lysistrata brings a walking statue in the form of a naked woman whom she calls "Peace." Both the Herald and Cinesias note their mutual attraction to Peace and settle their differences, thus ending the war between their countries.

The play concludes with a large party, complete with singing, dancing, and alcohol.

Lysistrata Scene 5 & Chorus 5 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Despite being the titular character, Lysistrata does not speak in this final Chorus. Who ends up speaking the final lines of the play?
2. What is the final message that Cinesias offers to the audience? How does this message compare with the themes and messages throughout the play?

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William Shakespeare (1565-1616)

Othello (1602-1603)

Link to text: [Othello](#).

Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstein. Simon & Schuster, 2017. Folger Shakespeare Library. <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/othello/>.

Act I Summary

Renowned military general Othello has recently promoted Cassio to his second-in-command over Iago, an ensign who is certainly not over it. As part of his long con to revenge himself on Othello, Iago uses Roderigo to inform the Venetian Brabantio that Othello has eloped with his daughter, Desdemona. Furious, Brabantio seeks out Othello. Meanwhile, Othello and Desdemona's wedding night is interrupted by news from Cassio, summoning Othello to the Venetian Senate in order to address a military threat in Cyprus. Brabantio accompanies Othello to the Senate, and they both argue their case for Desdemona in front of the Duke. Desdemona also offers her perspective.

Othello Act 1 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Although *Othello* is the title of the play, the character with the most lines is actually the villain, Iago. What do we learn about Iago and his motivations in Act 1? How does Iago's speech compare to his actions when with Othello?
2. How is Othello referred to by other characters? How do these epithets serve to distinguish Othello both positively and negatively from the rest of the characters?
3. Reread Othello's dramatic monologue where he explains to the Senate how he and Desdemona fell in love (1.3.149-195).
4. Why does Othello promote Cassio over Iago?

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Act 2 Summary

Desdemona, Iago, and Emilia (Iago's wife) arrive in Cyprus in time to see the pirates defeated. Iago persuades Roderigo (who loves Desdemona) that Cassio loves Desdemona, and enlists his aid to get Cassio demoted. During a citywide celebration ordered by Othello, Iago convinces Cassio to become drunk enough to fight Roderigo. Othello stops the fight and dismisses Cassio immediately. Iago then comforts Cassio, telling him to seek Desdemona's help in getting back into Othello's good graces.

Othello Act 2 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Early in the act, Desdemona and Iago have a debate about women. What attitudes and arguments do they present? What does what they have to say about women suggest about their own attitudes and motivations?
2. What is the significance of reputation in this play? How do different characters attempt to manage their reputations or how others perceive them?
3. Why is Iago so convincing to Roderigo, Cassio, and Othello?

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Act 3 Summary

Per Iago's suggestion, Cassio talks with Emilia in order to gain access to Desdemona. Emilia assures him that Othello and Desdemona have already been talking about him. Cassio and Desdemona later meet and begin talking, but he leaves once he sees Othello. Othello is not pleased. Taking advantage of the situation, Iago remarks that the pair are acting suspicious, which upsets Othello and gives him a headache. Desdemona attempts to soothe Othello with her handkerchief, which he brushes away and is dropped onstage. Emilia finds the

handkerchief and gives it to Iago. Iago continues to imply that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair and suggests setting up a trap to catch them. Iago gets promoted.

Later, Desdemona is upset that she cannot find her handkerchief.

Othello Act 3 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. How does Iago convince Othello that Desdemona is cheating on him with Cassio? What evidence (or “proof”) and rhetorical techniques does he use?
2. Jealousy is a particularly noteworthy theme in Act 3. What are some things that Shakespeare is suggesting about jealousy?
3. What is the significance of Desdemona’s handkerchief, an item that Iago initially describes as a “trifl[e]” (3.3.370)? What does the item mean to each character that interacts with it? How does meaning and significance change throughout the act?

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Act 4 Summary

Iago continues to torment Othello by innocuously describing Othello being cuckolded. He then sets up Othello to overhear a conversation about Desdemona’s handkerchief between Cassio and Bianca, a courtesan who is in love with Cassio. Desdemona and Lodovico arrive with a letter calling Othello back to Venice and to leave Cassio in charge. Already believing that Desdemona has cheated on him, Othello hits Desdemona for her response.

Othello then interrogates Emilia and Desdemona regarding Desdemona’s fidelity. Both women assert that Desdemona has been honest. Desdemona, understandably upset at being called a “whore” (4.2.83) and “strumpet” (4.2.98), laments to Emilia and Iago. Iago assures her that Othello will likely change his mind. Roderigo then accuses Iago of not dealing fairly with him; Iago continues to manipulate Roderigo by proposing that they murder Cassio. Finally, in a separate location, Desdemona and Emilia debate over whether a woman would cheat on her husband.

Othello Act 4 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. How has Othello changed from the first half of the play?
2. How do conversations that characters have with each other privately (say, for example, Othello and Iago, Cassio and Bianca, and Emilia and Desdemona) differ from conversations that happen in public view or hearing? What happens when a private conversation is overheard?
3. Review the arguments that Desdemona and Emilia give in their debate on the nature of women. What does each woman suggest? How do their viewpoints reflect their characters?

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Act 5 Summary

In good tragic fashion, nearly everyone dies. Roderigo and Iago attempt to kill Cassio. Iago kills a wounded Roderigo. Othello murders Desdemona by strangling her in their bed and kills himself once he realizes that Desdemona was innocent. Emilia bursts into the final scene to reveal that Iago was behind everything all along. Iago is arrested and taken away to be tortured.

Othello Act 5 Questions and Activities for Further Analysis

1. Why does Othello murder Desdemona? More specifically, what is the significance of the method (strangulation) and the location (their shared bed)?
2. What eventually convinces Othello that he had been duped and that Desdemona had never actually cheated on him?
3. Examine Othello's final speech. How does Othello frame himself here? How does this speech compare with other speeches he has given throughout the play?
4. In his final line, Iago remarks that "From this time forth [he] never will speak word" (5.2.356). What is the rationale for Iago's silence? How is his refusal to speak significant, whether in reference to his character throughout the play or to the

amount of references to speaking in Act 5, Scene 2?

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Sample Analysis of a Play

Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt and R. Paul Cooper

How to Read this Section

This section contains two parts. First, you will find the prompt. The prompt is a very important element in any writing assignment. Don't be fooled by the fact it is short! Even though it is a short document, it highlights and makes clear every element you will need to complete the given assignment effectively. When writing an essay, the prompt is where you will both begin and end. Seriously. Before you begin, familiarize yourself with the prompt, and before you submit your final draft, give the prompt one final read over, making sure you have not left anything out. When you visit the University Writing Center and Libraries, they can better help if you bring along the prompt. Both the [Writing Center](#)¹⁶ and the [Libraries](#)¹⁷ provide indispensable tools to aid students, so take advantage of their services.

¹⁶ University Writing Center, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/>.

¹⁷ Texas A&M University Libraries, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://library.tamu.edu/>.

The second part of this section contains a simulated student essay—the essay is not an actual student essay, but an essay written to demonstrate a strong student essay. The essay in this section is not meant to represent a “perfect” essay; it has its faults. However, this essay is an effective response to the given prompt. The “student” essay will be represented in a wide column on the left, and the grader’s commentary will be represented in a smaller column on the right. Use the example and the comments to help you think about how you might organize your own essay, to think about whether you will make similar—or different—choices.

Sample Prompt

Assignment Description: Compose an essay that uses textual evidence from at least one play we have read to support an argumentative thesis statement. Your essay must be in paragraph format with an introduction, multiple body paragraphs supporting your argument, and a conclusion.

Content: Strong essays will utilize close reading techniques, including attention to dramatic elements, meter, rhyming, double meanings of words, and other rhetorical/poetic features. Furthermore, they will put forth a clear, interesting, and unique interpretation of the text in question. Weak essays will not utilize or discuss the text; rather, they may quote but only to summarize. Weak essays also tend to simply summarize the plot or give surface readings of a passage, character, or theme.

Research Expectations: You are not expected to use secondary sources for this assignment. Supplemental sources, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* or a reference to another text we have read, are encouraged but not required.

Format: Follow MLA guidelines for research papers, including the following:

- 1 inch margins on all sides
- Size 10–12 readable and professional font like Times New Roman or Arial
- Double-spacing
- Header on every page including your last name and page number on the right-hand side.

Scope: 900–1200 words, or 3–4 double spaced pages. This word count does not include the Works Cited page.

| Student Essay | Instructor Annotations |
|---|------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;">“Cry shame against me, yet I’ll speak”: The Silent and Speaking Desdemona of <i>Othello</i></p> | |

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|---|---|
| <p>Hannah-Elizabeth Bowling</p> <p>For much of <i>Othello</i>, Emilia functions as Desdemona’s silent shadow. She does not appear on stage until Act 2, Scene 7; she only has 3 lines for the duration of said scene. Indeed, in a play of 3,681 lines, she has only approximately 249 speaking lines, barely 7% of the lines in the play. Shakespeare seems to indicate to his audience through such a small speaking role the sheer un-importance of this character. Yet it is her unassuming nature that makes her the perfect pivot by which the play turns. Of Emilia’s speaking time, almost 40% of it occurs within the last act of the play, indicative of the pivotal role that she plays in this act and by extension her fundamental significance to the play overall.</p> | <p>Hannah-Elizabeth begins with a strong opening that immediately identifies the topic of the essay (Emilia in <i>Othello</i>) and uses alliteration (“silent shadow”) to rhetorically engage the reader.</p> <p>Hannah-Elizabeth cleverly sets up her intervention by first stating how many lines Emilia has and then using a “yet” statement to identify her intervention.</p> |
| <p>In Act 5, the “silent shadow” Emilia proves the most powerful character in the entire play both in word and deed. Towards the end of scene 1, Iago tells Emilia “run you to the citadel and tell my lord and lady what hath happed” (5.1.148–9). She is the messenger sent to Othello and Desdemona to apprise them of Cassio’s near-death experience and of the death of Rodrigo (5.1.148–150). Her message of Cassio’s brush with death serves to alert Othello of the suspicious nature of the murder-pact he has made with Iago previously, sowing the first seeds of doubt in Iago (5.2.142–3). When she arrives later in the scene at Othello and Desdemona’s bedchamber door, she</p> | <p>Note the effective callback to “silent shadow” in the introduction.</p> <p>Hannah-Elizabeth uses several examples of direct textual evidence in this paragraph. She also varies how she uses her textual evidence, sometimes using quotations, other times using paraphrase or summary.</p> |

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| <p>interrupts Othello in the act of smothering Desdemona. However, it is not until she enters that Desdemona, miraculously and temporarily revived, delivers her parting lines of “o falsely, falsely murdered... a guiltless death I die” (5.2.144, 150). Her physical presence at the death of Desdemona moves her both metaphorically and literally from the periphery of much of the action and plot of the play to the forefront (5.2.144–153).</p> | <p>The writer separates two separate quoted lines with an ellipsis (...) and separates the two lines in her citation with a comma.</p> |
| <p>However, the best example of her power can be found towards the end of Act 5, Scene 2. Emilia’s physical presence in the bedchamber with Othello and Desdemona allows for her to serve as testimony on three different occasions: as the aforementioned messenger of Rodrigo’s death, of Iago’s deception, and of Desdemona’s fidelity. “You told a lie, an odious, damnèd lie! Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie!” she cries upon confronting Iago for his deception (5.2.216–7). “I am bound to speak... your reports have set the murder on,” she continues, positioning herself as a truth-bringer compared to Iago’s falsehoods. She then proclaims to her audience, emphasizing Iago’s prominent role in contributing to Desdemona’s death, that “I found [the handkerchief], and I did give’t my husband” (5.2.274–5). Despite Iago’s constant bombardment of curses like “villainous whore!” and “filth, thou liest,” she persists in making explicit what the play’s audience is already aware of: that Iago</p> | <p>“However” serves as a great transitional word that signals that this paragraph differs from the previous one.</p> <p>Hannah-Elizabeth expertly weaves quotation with her own wording and argument. This approach both breaks up a longer block quotation and guides the reader to seeing her interpretation.</p> <p>The writer uses brackets ([]) around “the handkerchief” to show where she replaced a word in the original quotation. This addition provides clarity for the reader.</p> |

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| <p>requested Desdemona’s handkerchief from Emilia in order to frame her as involved in an extramarital affair with Cassio to Othello.</p> | |
| <p>Emilia’s position as Desdemona’s attendant and closest confidant combined with her witness of Desdemona’s death allows her to serve as an effective witness of Emilia’s virtuous character. “She was too fond of her most filthy bargain,” Emilia says to Othello, simultaneously defending Desdemona’s love for Othello in combination with an angry, racist condemnation of Othello himself (5.2.192). “Though has killed the sweetest innocent that e’er did lift up eye” she continues, maintaining Desdemona’s fidelity despite Iago and Othello’s combined efforts to discredit her virtue (5.2.237–8). Ultimately it is not her words that prove the most effective in persuading the men present but the bodily harm she endures at the hands of her husband that sways their opinion. After Emilia lays out the entirety of Iago’s deception, Iago kills her in a fit of rage before exiting the stage. With her final breath, she requests to be laid beside her mistress and tells Othello that “Moor, she was chaste. She loved thee, cruel Moor. So come my soul to bliss, as I speak true. So speaking as I think, alas, I die” (5.2.299–301). Even to the point of death, Emilia is adamant of Desdemona’s chastity, and it is her death that ultimately persuades Othello.</p> | <p>“Ultimately” is an excellent word for signaling both the conclusion of an idea and for highlighting the writer’s argument.</p> |
| <p>Thus, Shakespeare utilizes Emilia as one of the most silent</p> | <p>Hannah-Elizabeth provides an effective callback to the</p> |

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| <p>characters in the play to reveal the surprising, hidden elements known by the audience to the rest of the characters, thereby making her one of the most pivotal characters. With well over a third of her spoken lines occurring in the last act of <i>Othello</i> and devoted to exposing both her husband’s mistreatment of the newly married Othello and Desdemona due to his jealousy of Othello and Desdemona’s marital fidelity to her husband, Emilia is the character upon which the climax of the plot hinges. Her presence, both living and dead, serves as a weighty testimony to the truth in the wake of her husband’s lies; while fundamental to the action of Act 5, her significance extends beyond this finite space to the totality of the play.</p> | <p>introduction by reminding the reader of when Emilia speaks.</p> <p>The final sentence is a strong conclusion that reiterates the significance of the essay’s thesis and points to future work where the thesis could be developed further.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Works Cited</p> <p>Shakespeare, William. <i>Othello</i> from The Folger Shakespeare. Ed. Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles. Folger Shakespeare Library, https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/othello/. Accessed 29 June 2022.</p> | |

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Bowling, Hannah-Elizabeth. "Cry shame against me, yet I'll speak': The Silent and Speaking Desdemona of *Othello*." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Film

*No good film is too long and no bad film is short enough.*¹

—Roger Ebert, “Reviews: *Joe’s Apartment*”

Introduction

James Francis, Jr.

Film, or as we commonly call it—the movies—or as grandma and grandpa call it—the picture show—is a visual medium for storytelling. When we use terms like “movie” and “picture show” they indicate the fact that a film is a series of pictures put to motion and made visible for a viewing audience. In the way that we turn pages in a book, swipe one way or another on a Kindle, or fast-forward on Audible, film—as a visual text—is its own mode and form of narrative, one that tells a story and makes a persuasive argument through its form and content without a leading or major focus on the written word. Watching movies can be a cathartic engagement a viewer tackles alone, or it can be a social activity, as so many of us get together in darkened theatres (post-pandemic) to experience a story play out on the big screen. We access movies through streaming platforms, gaming consoles, and theatre houses, and we watch them on televisions, tech-comm devices, and big screens. A critical study of cinema might point out that a term such as “film” refers to the material creators use to capture images. However, most contemporary movies are shot digitally and our discussion does not focus on techniques of filmmaking. In this chapter, words to describe this form of literature (film, movie, production, text) will be used interchangeably, and terms in bold should be considered specific to the study of cinema.

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¹ Roger Ebert, “Reviews: *Joe’s Apartment*,” RogerEbert.com, Ebert Digital LLC, August 2, 1996, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/joes-apartment-1996>.

History of Film

James Francis, Jr.

The history of film is vast, so our discussion here is brief and encapsulated. Although scholars continue to debate when the first film was created and what constitutes the first film versus the first moving pictures (for history buffs, see *The Horse in Motion* [1878], *Roundhay Garden Scene* [1888], *Arrival of a Train* [1895], the **zoopraxiscope**, and the **Kinetoscope**), the earliest motion pictures began in the late 19th century. During this time, movies were all **black-and-white**, without sound, and extremely short in duration. The use of multiple/specialized **cameras, camera angles, and special effects**, as we know them today, were not known to early filmmakers, but they had their own early equipment, techniques, and processes to make movies. Over time, film grew as a source for entertainment instead of a niche novelty; **sound** was introduced to the productions; **color** became an option (contemporary filmmakers continue use of the classic monochrome in works like Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* [2003], Lili Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* [2014], and Robert Eggers' *The Lighthouse* [2019]); and an industry boomed, filled with a multitude of roles: writers, **directors**, cinematographers, **actors, casting directors, producers**, and the major **production companies** that oversaw the development of Hollywood ("The Big Five" included MGM, Paramount Pictures, RKO Radio Pictures, 20th Century Fox, and Warner Bros.). In America, strict **film ratings** based on social-morality codes of the 1930s–1960s transitioned into the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) with its current system: G, PG, PG-13, R, NC-17, X (very rare). *Fun Film Fact about Ratings*: During the latter part of the system's rigid guidelines (era of the Hays Code), Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), given an R-rating, shocked audiences—not because of murder, implied nudity, or early misunderstandings regarding gender and identity—because it was the first American film to show a toilet on the big screen; on the other hand, the John Hughes teen rom-com *Sixteen Candles* (1984) was rated PG with female nudity and derogatory language directed toward groups based on their cultural background and sexual identification. The ratings system has changed over time, and movies continue to adjust with it even during production and post-production (ex: *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) was rated X before it was edited into an R-rated movie). In countries outside the U.S., ratings systems vary in their development and current classifications, such as Japan's use of G, PG-12, R15+, and R18+ or Argentina's ATP, +13, +16, +18, and C. Outside of ratings, one element that united filmmakers across the globe was the cost of moviemaking using **film stock**; using **celluloid** involves chemical emulsifications, physically cutting **negatives**, and concern over storage and degradation of the material—a costly and time-consuming process. Technological innovations pushed filmmaking toward more digital enterprises in the 1990s to remove **analog** challenges, resulting in the contemporary film industry we know today. Digital filmmaking has also opened the space for more creatives to access and participate in the industry. However, many movies are still shot using film stock, typically for **editing** and/or aesthetic reasons.

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Key Components of Film

James Francis, Jr.

With regard to genre, as cinema developed, so did the need to categorize the films, using cues from literary categorization. Modern descriptors for film break down into **short-form** vs. **full-length/feature-length**; **fiction** vs. **nonfiction** (documentary and/or biography); **live-action** vs. **animated**; and **genre**. In ENGL 203, the focus will typically lean toward the fiction film, which can be short, full-length, live-action, animated, and any genre. Within this space, genre categories include: drama, comedy, horror, science fiction, Western, fantasy, suspense/thriller, and action/adventure. Because genre is a fluid system of categorization full of hybrids and subgenre blends, the aforementioned labels are subject to debate (ex: romance is often considered its own genre and sometimes it is placed within drama and/or comedy). For each genre system, representative films exemplify the narrative expectations within their content and toward viewer responses, and each genre contains its own set of distinctions among its canon of films. A comedy is often, but not always, filled with lighthearted moments designed to make an audience laugh (*Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* [1948], a slapstick comedy) while some comedies offer situational stories that make audiences laugh through feelings of discomfort (*The House of Yes* [1997], a dark comedy). A science fiction film typically addresses concepts of time (past, present, and/or future), technology, and humanity's relationship with its surrounding space (*Her* [2013]), a hard science fiction film vs. *Time Bandits* [1981], a steampunk, speculative, fantasy-adventure science fiction film). As we can see from taking a brief look at comedy and science fiction, film genres—like most literary divisions—are quite flexible in their narrative elements.

Authorship

The author of a film is another point of subjective perspective. We have to consider the partnership that a director makes with their writer(s), **cinematographer**(s), co-directors, and **editor**(s) instead of the staple single author for written works. The actors and crew members also take part in the collaborative process of moviemaking, and quite often a director performs multiple roles in production. We usually associate the director as the author of a film

because they are at the helm to ensure all the working parts come together to create the final product, their name is typically showcased last in the opening credits before the story begins, and they are who we have collectively assigned the role over the years; however, not all film productions function the same and therefore authorship is not such a simple concept. Consider these scenarios: If a movie, such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), is unscripted and the actors guide the story through their **dialogue** and movements, are they not mostly responsible for the direction of the film? If a director has to leave a production (85% completed) and have another take over, does the new director take on full authorship of the film, including what the previous director accomplished? If a production company is unhappy with a completed film and has the editor change the content by restructuring its **scenes, shots, and cuts**, is the editor the true author of the story? Traditionally, we can associate a film's director as the author, but the complex nature of authorship that exists for individual movies is specific to film as a literary medium. In this manner, the authorship of a film can be decided on a case-by-case basis. An instructor might also inform their students how authorship will be treated during the duration of a course.

The movie we watch on screen has its own origin story, and putting all of its parts together involves a few processes. Most often, a film evolves from an **original screenplay**, the written version of the visual presentation. A **spec script** (standard screenplay) is created by a writer who hopes to have their work **optioned** (selected for possible purchase and eventual filming), and once that process happens, a **shooting script** is then created specifically for movie production that typically serves to help the director and cinematographer decide what order to film scenes, what changes need to be made, and so forth. The script sometimes develops from a previous text—a short story, novella, novel, play, poem, and even a series of these texts (think *The Hunger Games* book series that later became a film franchise)—that we label the **adapted screenplay**.

Casting for the movie is a process that involves auditioning actors for particular roles. Usually, actors read lines from the script to **audition**; they may get a **callback** to do a second audition or more, read with another actor already hired for the film, and/or complete an interview. Money has to be discussed, contracts have to be signed, and a host of other behind-the-scenes business deals settled before filming can begin. When viewing a film, **star power** can alter the way in which we receive and interpret the story. If the actors are not well known, we might connect more with the story, but if the actors are household names in popular culture, that recognition might pull focus from the story and/or influence how we react to the content and performance. Although movies are visual texts, the screenplay is read by the hired actors to learn their lines (similar to the stage play/drama) and during **table reads** when they come together to test how the story will flow and create chemistry between the characters they hope to bring to life.

As filmmakers plan the action of the screenplay, they often **storyboard**, which means they create a graphic illustration like a comic book with **panels**, action, and dialogue to envision and

organize the story content. And even after filming concludes, **post-production** elements — editing, special effects creations, **music** and **sound mixing**, etc.—continue the process to finalize the story we see in the theatre. Sometimes situations occur that necessitate extreme post-production changes to the existing film. In one such example, an actor was cut from *Army of the Dead* (2021) for legal reasons. This action led to the role being **recast**, scenes reshot, and the new actor superimposed into previously shot scenes **frame** by frame—a painstaking process. In the way that we may discuss different editions of a written work in which materials is cut, added, or revised in some other manner, a movie typically exists as a **theatrical cut** (what we see in theatres that has been agreed upon by all parties responsible for the filmmaking, most notably the production company) and a **director's cut** (the final version of the film that represents the director's vision for the project before it undergoes any changes resulting from the ratings board and production company directives). Unlike written works of literature that go through different editions, and more like cover songs, original movies often transform into **remakes** and/or **reboots** like *Psycho* (1960) and *Psycho* (1998) or the *Charlie's Angels* franchise that started in 2000 then rebooted in 2019.

We, as the viewing audience, play an integral part in the film process, as our responses to the form and content inform how we interpret a movie. Although we may all watch the same film, our perspectives on its form and content are often determined by our backgrounds (academic, geographic, gender, ethnicity, age, politics, etc.). This is an implicit bias we should all disclose—to ourselves first—in order to clear away predispositions that may cloud making an informed argument. But before we can fully explore film as literature in the ENGL 203 classroom, we must remember that the written works we typically explore in school came before the visual texts (although the written word is a visual text, especially early-form pictographs that represented writing through symbols, but let's not get too historical and instead stick with contemporary classroom standards).

First, we can review some important considerations for written literature and then move into how those elements transition into visual spaces.

Reading a Written Text

We all have some experience with literature, from storybooks as children to young adult novels in middle and high school, to fiction and nonfiction writings in college and in our personal lives. Some of us write to create our own literature. What we take away from these readings and/or writings can typically be either **didactic** (instructional), **non-didactic** (entertainment), or a blend of the two. The same can be said for film in the way that we have all seen a documentary, short film, and/or **feature-length** movie, or perhaps made our own content (from independent cinema at festivals or in theatres to the work being created on YouTube). What I want to discuss in this section is how we arrive at those lessons learned from the content and form—the way in which we interpret the information.

Written literature is something we are typically more exposed to in and out of school. We read for comprehension to get a sense of the author's purpose in creating the work and how we—as readers—respond to our interpretations and perspectives. There is no single answer to understanding form and content in literature; however, simple questions can be used to direct analysis. Some of those inquiries about form include (in no particular order):

1. How is the narrative arranged (chapters, titles, subheadings, etc.)?
2. Does the front matter indicate anything (judge a book by its cover)?
3. Are graphics/visuals included, and if so, how do they contribute to surface analysis?
4. Who is the author? How does this influence preconceived notions about the work?
5. What type of literature is the work (novel, novella, short story ... sci-fi, romance, mystery, etc.)?
6. How does the type (structure, length, and category) affect the storytelling?

The content of a literary work encourages us to consider a much longer list of questions than those that can be applied to the form. These questions help unpack the narrative and break down the story into multiple levels of evaluation for a more in-depth discovery of its meaning. Here are a few questions regarding content:

1. What perspective is being used (first-person, second-person, third-person, etc.)?
2. What time techniques are employed (flashback, flashforward, time markers, etc.)?
3. How is figurative language utilized (simile, metaphor, allusion, etc.)?
4. Who are the main characters in the story?
5. What types of characters are presented (dynamic/round versus flat/static)?
6. What is difficult to understand in the narrative?
7. What theme and/or recurring motifs does the story offer to its audience?
8. Who is the audience for the narrative? (Is the writing directed toward a targeted group?)

This may seem like a basic review of elements presented long ago from the high school years, but these are fundamental aspects of understanding literature that can be used for almost any narrative. In television and film, the written forms of the teleplay and screenplay, respectively, may be examined using similar questions listed above. Using these tools helps literary analysis, but how do we “read” a film? In many ways, the process is the same; however, the language (terminology) is a bit different. Before we can discuss film specifically, we will focus on its major building block – the visual image – and how to decipher meaning from it.

What is visual analysis (VA)? In the simplest understanding, VA is the action of analyzing visual images to comprehend the messages they communicate to various audiences. However, a more complex investigation of the process involves a breakdown into visual rhetoric and visual literacy – the act of communicating through visuals and the ability to “read” them, respectively. In other words, visuals are composed of elements like color, shape, space,

texture, shading, and positioning that convey specific messages and meaning based on the arrangement of the elements working together and their individual impact. How we “read” (interpret) them depends on subjective perspectives that we back up by using the text itself to support our analysis. Here is one example:



Figure 7.1 Screenshot from Shaka King’s *Judas and the Black Messiah* (2021) biopic about Fred Hampton.²

By reading the elements of this photograph – without any other context provided – we might come to the following conclusions:

- The single frame represents a protest.
- The people pictured are angry/upset about an issue.
- The people are united in their objective.
- This is a public demonstration.
- The situation is immediate.

How can we make these interpretations?

- The image depicts a gathering of people, some with fists raised in a symbolic protest gesture.
- People’s mouths are open, indicating voices yelling for recognition.
- Signs carried indicate social movements regarding freedom and justice; people are applauding.
- People hold signs written in large print for observers to read from a distance.
- An **overhead shot** is used to showcase the compact crowd which provides an urgent mood/tone.

² *Judas and the Black Messiah*, directed by Shaka King (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2021).

This type of reading is something we do every day as we interpret traffic lights while driving, say hello to a stranger on the sidewalk based on their facial expression, and binge-watch a favorite TV series into the wee hours of the morning, following visual cues provided in each episode. Discuss the following image with your peers to compare similar and different ways in which you interpret its visual elements:



Figure 7.2 Screenshot from Park Chan-wook's *The Handmaiden* (2016) psychological thriller.³

Consider what elements are present within the frame and their arrangement, the use of color and patterns, **focal points**, and camera positioning. We can tell a lot about a story from one single frame in a movie. But if we read visuals all the time, you might not immediately consider their importance as forms of literature to study.

Why is VA important? Because we read visuals all the time is the exact reason why visual analysis is important. We need to know how to understand visuals because they represent such large components of life: human communication, learning how to do something, and entertainment; and within the classroom, they function as aids to help us develop critical reading, writing, and comprehension skills that can be applied to various modes of writing.

Beyond the singular visual image lies the combination of more than one in motion to create a film. With all that we have discussed, we can now move into the specific focus of understanding film through its form and content.

³ *The Handmaiden*, directed by Park Chan-wook (Seoul, South Korea: CJ Entertainment, 2016).

Reading a Visual Text

Film is a visual medium in presentation; moreover, in the 21st Century, we access film in the theatre on the big screen, at home on the small screen (television and computer), and on-the-go via laptop, phone, and other devices. We watch films all the time, and they make us laugh, cry, think, evaluate how we would handle a situation, and so forth. But these are most often just reactions that help us decide if we like the film or not. In “reading” a film, we can still have these reactions, but they can be used for a deeper understanding of its form and content. In a similar manner for analyzing literature, here are a few questions about the form of a film:

1. How are the opening credits presented?
2. What type of music/song opens the film with the **credits**?
3. What kind of camera work is noticeable (**quick cuts, fades, wipes, angles, etc.**)?
4. What colors are dominant in the frame?
5. Are there textual elements (**subtitles, title sequence, etc.**)? How do they affect surface analysis?
6. What genre is the film classified? How does this correlate to form and content expectations?

After “reading” some of these surface elements of a film, they can assist a viewer in analyzing subtext (what lies within the narrative beneath the surface). If a film (its creators and participants) is trying to convey a message to its audience, here are a few aspects to question in order to decipher the content:

1. Who is the director? How does this influence form/content expectations before the viewing?
2. Who are the actors? How does this influence acting expectations before the viewing?
3. What repeating story elements are recognized in the narrative? How do they develop themes?
4. How does the film connect to others in its genre (or beyond its genre)?
5. What defines the film (particular scene, visuals, dialogue, etc.)?
6. How does the film provoke emotions? Which ones?
7. What seems out of place with the established tone of the film?
8. How does the ending resolve conflict?

These are just a few questions that can be taken into consideration when analyzing film. How a reader or viewer responds to a work will influence their own set of inquiries to investigate. Perspectives can shape how we evaluate film; however, we should focus on objectivity in order to understand that there is no one way to receive and/or interpret a narrative. While a consensus may be reached (i.e., *Blade Runner* (1982) is a science-fiction film), there can and will always be other perspectives (i.e., *Blade Runner* is film noir). It is in our best interests to

support our arguments (informed opinions) but remain open to understand the viewpoints of others and address them.

Terminology

Most literary terms for written works—characters, dialogue, flashback, etc.—apply directly to film; however, there are film-specific terms that are utilized to describe the inner and outer workings of a movie. Review Table 7.1 to identify terminology you currently know, and take time to look up definitions of terms for which you are unfamiliar. Getting to know these terms will help you communicate ideas regarding film in peer discussions and in your writing.

Table 7.1. Film Terminology

| Film | | |
|--------------------|--|--------------------|
| aerial-view shot | angle | animation |
| auteur / auteurism | blockbuster | cameo |
| camera oscura | casting | CGI |
| character POV | cinematic time | cinematography |
| cinéma vérité | close-up | continuity editing |
| costumes | cut | depth of field |
| diegesis | direct narration (breaking the 4th wall) | director |
| dissolve | documentary | dolly shot |
| editing | establishing shot | experimental films |
| extra | fade-in/fade-out | film noir |
| Foley sound | graphic match cut | improvisation |
| long take | method acting | mise-en-scène |
| montage | production value | rule of thirds |
| score | shot | slow motion |
| special effects | split screen | starpower |

| | | |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| tracking shot | two-shot | typecasting |
| voice-over narration | diegetic sound | non-diegetic sound |

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Writing About Film: Theory & Criticism

James Francis, Jr.

When it comes to writing about film, there are quite a few paths to take with regard to evaluation, analysis, response, and research. A work may be explored via genre studies, psychoanalytic criticism, gender & sexuality, historical perspective, and other forms of critique. Each of these provides a way to explore how film functions for a particular argument created by the writer. We have to think about how we would like to approach analysis of the texts, and typically a good way to do such is to base it upon what a reader/viewer finds most interesting about the narrative form and/or content.

Depending on the writing prompt your instructor provides, the work you create will most often concentrate on a close reading of a film to examine elements that can be critically analyzed, evaluated, and/or argued about in formal writing. For example, a comparative analysis of George Langelaan's "The Fly" (1957) and David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) might examine how the brief format of the short story and the extension of the feature-length film affects character development. The short story and film could also be investigated on the basis of genre to analyze how the written form exemplifies science fiction while the film adaptation conveys **body horror** to its audience. These are just two paths that can be taken

for such a set of texts. Take a look at this short/non-exhaustive list of literary/film analysis criticism that can be used to help decide how to focus your writing:

Table 7.2. Critical Theories

| Literature | Film |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Postcolonialism | Auteur Theory |
| New Historicism | Feminist Film Theory |
| Queer Theory | Genre Studies |
| Aestheticism | Psychoanalytic Film Theory |
| Marxism | Structuralist Film Theory |
| Postmodernism | Formalist Film Theory |
| Structuralism | Critical Race Theory |
| Reader-response Criticism | |

One way to examine a film is through a lens of critical theory. Like most literary criticism, the volume of theoretical perspectives focused on cinema is vast, often investigated by way of **Marxist criticism, auteur theory, feminist criticism, genre studies**, and an array of other academic frameworks. Our purpose here serves to inform about a few standard lenses of criticism to demonstrate how the texts may be approached through argumentation and research. In **horror studies**--keeping in line with our genre focus this chapter--familiar names for scholars and critics of the genre include Carol Clover, Robin Wood, Philip Brophy, Noel Carroll, Barbara Creed, Harry Benshoff, and Linda Williams. These scholars explore horror via film criticism that unpacks concepts of **gender**, monstrosity, **queerness**, psychology, race and ethnicity, etc. in order to posit claims about how the films inform, persuade, and entertain us throughout static genre conventions and textual elements that reflect the sociocultural developments--evolution and regression--of humanity. But first, let's start with a theoretical perspective that is specific to film studies at large.

Auteur Theory

The French word "auteur" means author, and the theory developed out of French New Wave cinema movement of the 1950s that pushed for more experimental filmmaking over established film conventions, structurally and narratively. This theory holds that the director of a film is the recognized author of the text in the way that we associate traditional

definitions of authorship with written literature—one person as the sole creator of the text—although most contemporary analyses of moviemaking view it as a collaborative process in which a variety of roles (screenwriter, director, cinematographer, actor, editor, composer) contribute to authoring the text. Along with a designation of sole author, the theory also argues that one director’s creative, aesthetic style connects their work as a collective volume of films completely separate from other directors. Auteurism reveals itself when we consider creatives like Spike Lee, Kathryn Bigelow, Quentin Tarantino, and John Waters. Lee often uses a signature double-dolly tracking shot in many of his films—*Malcolm X* (1992), *Summer of Sam* (1999), *25th Hour* (2002), *Inside Man* (2006)—in which the camera (mounted on a dolly) moves with a character (seated on a separate dolly) as if to propel them forward through a crowd or other localized space at a point of epiphany, crisis, or conflict resolution. Bigelow, as an auteur, extends from directing films such as *Near Dark* (1987), *Point Break* (1991), *Strange Days* (1995), *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and *Detroit* (2017). The movies vary in genre from action and sci-fi to war and horror, but they connect through narrative examinations of technological advancements in war, vice, and crime; people groups (specialized military units, the Black experience of the Civil Rights Movement era, smut peddlers, vampire brood, surf culture); and concerns over atavism in humanity. And as much as we might initially think Tarantino and Waters are completely opposite as filmmakers, they share similar auteur characteristics. Tarantino became a household name with *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994), two films developed in the style of “cool” – movies about men for men that focus on masculinity, feature violence, and deliver catchy dialogue and one-liners. The director accesses **exploitation** cinema for visual style that celebrates the 1960s and 1960s, narrative structures that deal with revenge, and an appreciation for language that guarantees an R-rating. Water, on the other hand, became an overnight sensation of infamy with *Pink Flamingos* in 1972 by offering audiences a bold taste of **camp** that was either well-received or vehemently rejected for its depictions of graphic nudity, gross-out comedy, and human depravity. Both Tarantino and Waters have continued to reference their cool and camp stylings, respectively, visually and textually throughout their careers, and both directors exemplify a **Shakespearean troupe** at times as they developed their own community-created team of actors to work on multiple productions over time. Furthermore, horror—never a genre to be left out of the conversation—has George A. Romero’s six “... of the Dead” films that examine American consumerism, capitalism, and the economy while an international focus might zero in on Mario Bava as an auteur of the Italian **giallo**, hyper-focused on violence in the realm of mystery, crime, and suspense. All of these directors’ stylistic points of view and narrative sensibilities contribute to them being categorized as auteurs within cinema. What other film directors might reflect the principles of auteur theory?

Gender Studies

The spectrum of gender studies—overly simplified—covers gender and gender identity, along with sex and sexuality. Performing a close-reading of a film text through gender studies

demands an examination of gender non-conforming individuals, non-binary people, men, and women in their representations on the surface (visually) and subtextually (narrative content). When it comes to horror, there is no denying the genre's apparent love-hate relationship with women as its heroes and victims, both typically physically objectified, tortured, and celebrated. Clearly horror films objectify women's bodies and frequently position them as the survivors and heroes ("**The Final Girl**" concept in slasher films) of the texts. Even if you are not a typical audience member of the genre, many people easily recognize Marion Crane from *Psycho* (1960), Regan MacNeil from *The Exorcist* (1976), Carrie White from *Carrie* (1976), Laurie Strode from *Halloween* (1979), Ellen Ripley from *Alien* (1979), Nancy Thompson from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), Sidney Prescott from *Scream* (1996), and/or Grace Le Domas from *Ready or Not* (2019). Almost all of these women--minus Marion and Carrie--survive their attackers or extreme circumstances to live another day, but throughout their tumultuous narrative lifeline, they are surveilled, stalked, sexually assaulted, gaslit, emotionally tortured, and physically objectified. These situations play out on the screen; however, film criticism complicates the relationship between horror and women to showcase a multilayered approach to recognize what women represent in the genre as it positions them within these often violent and violating spaces.

Feminist criticism—in one aspect of it as a theoretical lens—asks us to read a text with a particular focus on the ways in which women are presented, treated, and characterized among other women, nonbinary and gender-nonconforming individuals, and men with attention to oppression, (in)equality, and progression (social, economic, political, etc.). When we examine the (in)equality of gender within a genre like horror, the imbalance is quite easy to recognize. In *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), all of the women exist on a lower status regarding power, authority, and strength of character as opposed to the men. Barbara, for example, falls into shock and becomes comatose after her first encounter with a ghoul (they weren't called zombies in the film). She is slapped, manhandled, and ignored when it comes to the group trying to survive the onslaught of ghouls throughout the night. When she does attempt to communicate, her emotional state represents **hysteria** and instability. Within the text, Barbara and the other women are shown to be physically and emotionally weaker than the men which seems to argue a position on how women are not effective leaders in crisis situations. Whether the director (George A. Romero) meant for an audience to receive or decipher that message from the film when it was first released in the 60s or so many years later now in the present cannot be known without direct acknowledgment from him; however, applying a lens of feminist criticism allows a viewer to consider the characterization of women among other groups—usually men—in the story.

If we apply the same criticism to a more contemporary film such as *Midsommar* (2019), a conversation about the strength and unity of women emerges from Dani experiencing a life crisis from her sister committing suicide and killing their parents by carbon monoxide

poisoning and continuing an unfulfilling relationship with Christian. As the couple take a trip to Sweden to observe a cultural celebration for academic study and help Dani forget the traumatic incident, she finds an unlikely new home among a foreign commune with women who help her confront her grief, anger, and confusion over the deaths of her sister and parents and frustration with her unsupportive boyfriend. On the surface, the film presents a traditional horror motif that warns Americans against traveling to international locales in which they do not understand cultural practices; however, viewing the film through the eyes of feminist criticism interrogates homosocial spaces for women to find strength in emotional release, to demonstrate bodily autonomy and sexual power, and find happiness in the self without need or want for others to make it happen for them. Dani shares her grieving process with the women of the commune in a group setting and learns to let go of things and people who do nothing to benefit her livelihood (Christian is burned alive). Although Dani's experiences are not new to many cultural groups around the world—quite simple and traditional from a reverse perspective—the trip to Sweden opens her eyes and those of the audience to different, empowering ways that women experience emotion against the grain of stereotypical depictions of weakness in expressing emotion.

Horror can also be complicated when it comes to applying criticism. When *Slumber Party Massacre* was released in 1982, it was deemed a standard **slasher** movie of the genre in the way it objectified the bodies of young women, sexualizing them for male audience members in a **male gaze** sensibility and offering them up as nothing more than unintelligent fodder for a hypermasculinized killer. But when people learned that Amy Holden Jones was the director and the story was written by Rita Mae Brown, they had to grapple with the concept of women writing and directing horror films that played into traditional elements of the slasher as a visual and narrative framing without attempting to showcase women in a different light than men who directed similar films. In this manner, feminist criticism can be applied to detail how women directors have the same freedoms to create **static characters** in horror, objectify bodies for visual pleasure, and characterize women in binary concepts of victim or survivor. In 2021, a reimagined version of the 1982 original film by the same title was produced in which the story is a reversal of the '82 movie as it physically and sexually objectifies the men instead of the women and depicts the men as extremely unintelligent as they are killed one by one through various scenarios. A similar reversal also exists within the story of *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985) which is mostly a revamp of the original film in the franchise with the final-girl concept and storyline intact but with a male high schooler as the lead character which makes him a final boy; replacing the gender of the actors and characters but keeping the original story structure queered the lead character, masculinized the girlfriend, and shifted the overall dynamics of stereotypical gender roles and identities toward stereotypical depictions of gay-male identity and assertive women. What resolutions might be arrive at by applying feminist criticism to this franchise sequel?

Ethnic Studies & Queer Theory

We now turn focus to ethnic studies which primarily involves inquiries of race and ethnicity, and queer theory which primarily functions to challenge the idea that heterosexual(ity) represents the standard, normative base for all humanity. Because ethnic studies can extend to components of nationhood and sexuality toward an evaluation of difference and queer theory can extend to consider how things are **queered** to view them outside heteronormative frameworks, we address the theoretical perspectives in a blended conversation; however, both ethnic studies and queer theory are vast fields of criticism independently that can be researched separately to learn more about their intricate, in-depth foundations and developments. To "**other**" in horror is to call attention to the characterization of its villains, victims, and survivors. This focus usually presents an audience with characters that are non-white and non-cisnet: BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and **queer** (LGBTQ+ as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, non-binary, gender-nonconforming, and more). On the surface, we might say that "others" in horror usually represent a minority group or faction within a larger localized community or society at large that refuse to conform or adhere to the status quo, thus they are ostracized in fear that they might overcome the majority in power; and within horror's affinity for **binary constructions**, a question develops as to which group is right or wrong, good or evil. But when we apply film criticism to the horror genre, a wealth of knowledge presents itself beneath the surface to reveal **subtext** regarding historical connections between the facts of reality and the fiction within the films.

Because so much of horror accesses binary constructs, when it comes to **race** and **ethnicity**, most often we receive a spotlight on Black vs. White people in the texts. Although there are many horror films with Korean, Mexican, West Indian, etc. casts, characters, and storylines, the concepts of race and ethnicity often focus on cultural histories that involve ancestral practices, superstitions, generational divides, and modern disconnects from tradition instead of pitting one people group against another. If we examine Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017) from a race and ethnicity critical perspective, several points are revealed: Black people have been stereotyped as more naturally physically fit and aggressive than white people; a longstanding struggle of power and authority dynamics between Black and white people has existed for hundreds of years; and there is an unspoken fear of majority versus minority group in which the latter somehow overpowers the former to reverse contemporary inequalities. *Get Out's* story of modern mad-scientist experiments that allow white people to transfer their consciousness into Black bodies provides audiences with a text that can be examined through a lens of race and ethnic studies to analyze the aforementioned points of thematic discussion. Chris' (Daniel Kaluuya – main character) vice of smoking cigarettes, the party guests' surveillance of him, and his interaction with the police officer as passenger in the car his girlfriend is driving–along with Walter's (the groundskeeper) physical prowess–represent just a few points in the narrative that operate to shine a light on stereotyping, inequality, and Black bodies as objects that can be bought and sold in reference to the slave auction block.

In a similar—but not the same—manner to race and ethnicity, queerness as other persists throughout the horror genre. Early films such as *Frankenstein* (1931), *Dracula* (1931), and a host of other early literary novels adapted to film and original screenplays—most notably by Universal Studios and Hammer Film Productions—showcased the outsider, the inhuman, the undead, and the unnatural as other. The presence of these monsters or monstrous entities have been queer coded by scholars to recognize their existence as representations of queerness that lies beyond the confines of what is considered normal or **normative** (measured against heterosexuality). In this manner, the monsters always had to die, be sent away, or somehow disappear or be defeated in order to return the social order back to its normative state. And so, we return to the discussion of not every writer or director purposely meaning to create films that depict monsters as queer representation symbolically or metaphorically, but **historicizing** a film allows us to **anachronistically** consider the time period in which a text was produced regarding the sociocultural moment its production might reference or be influenced by. Films produced just prior to and during the **Hays Code**—(late 1920s-late 1960s)—exemplified moral sensibilities meant to keep cinema “safe” from depictions of sex and sexuality, violence, and non-normative (read as non white cishet heteronormative) behaviors deemed as deviant.

From a contemporary perspective, we might look to *Thelma* (2017), a horror film about a college student battling childhood trauma, a lack of control over supernatural powers, and the uncertainties of a blossoming romance. Queer theory supplies a way to read the film regarding Thelma’s identity as lesbian and the problems she has connected to her father, trauma, and supernatural powers as a “**coming out as coming of age**” story; the horrors she experiences trying to control her powers and confront the childhood trauma associated with her father relate to the tumultuous time of sexuality awakening and the fear of revealing lesbian identity to family, friends, and self. In the film, the coming-out process is the monster instead of Thelma, and she must learn to confront the “evil” force in order to defeat it and learn how to: love herself, have a relationship with the woman she loves, help her mother (restore the ability to walk), and “forgive” her father (kill him for not accepting her—he planned to shoot her—when she was a child because her powers accidentally drowned her baby brother). The story is not a happy one, and it does not provide the most positive message about how and when to come out, but through a queer theory lens for a horror film we can access one interpretation of how the genre treats difference in sexuality. How else might we apply queer theory to film texts?

From this simplified discussion of theory and criticism within film—examined within horror studies—we take into account how some visual texts may be viewed through particular theoretical lenses to unlock arguments about humanity in our shared connections to fear, anxiety, and dread. Beyond this concise, niche investigation, we come to an understanding of

the ways in which directors operating within any genre may be designated as auteurs from the visual, technical, and written elements of their films along with stylistic signatures and appropriations and actor troupes. Other areas of theory and criticism—including but not limited to Marxist criticism, **psychoanalytic film theory**, genre studies, and **structuralist film theory**—provide us additional ways to frame a film as a text for academic study. These theoretical perspectives in cinema connect the medium to literary theory and literary studies in a unified, expanded, interdisciplinary, and intersectional angle from which to view literature. And when we watch films as visual literature, we consider which lenses will offer a deeper understanding of the texts when applied to them.

Wikipedia can be a great source to review simple definitions of the critical and theoretical approaches to analyzing a film listed above; the site can help you understand how to apply them to film; and it can provide background information about the people credited to developing the criticisms and theories. These critical analyses are not the only way to write about a film, so always check with your instructor to ensure that you approach writing about the text in response to guidelines for an assignment.

Attribution:

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Spotlight on The Horror Film

James Francis, Jr.

We can now put some of our film knowledge into practice by examining a selected movie. Prepare yourselves; we are taking a trip into horror. We'll take a look at the genre, an influential director's mini-biography, consider study questions for the film, and read a sample student essay.

Dark elements of folk and fairy tales from the oral tradition of storytelling became early **Gothic literature** and theatrical performances of the **Grand Guignol**; horror—before it was classified as such—developed into a genre focusing on the **grotesque**, sensational, **bizarre**, and terror elements that connect its audience to an overall sense of fear and dread.

Representative texts include Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), John Polodori's *The Vampyre* (1819), Sheridan

Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), all of which were later adapted into films. These written works and their complements featured monsters (werewolves, vampires, ghosts, witches, and demons), unexplainable phenomenon, and things that went bump in the night to frighten characters. Over time, 20th-century authors gained recognition for their works contributing to the world of horror fiction: H.P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch, Shirley Jackson, Stephen King, Anne Rice, Dean Koontz, Clive Barker (all listed authors have had works adapted into film). Along with these writers of adult fiction, children's literature and young-adult fiction authors such as Edward Gorey, Roald Dahl, Mary Downing Hahn, Christopher Pike, and R.L. Stine published material for younger audiences that linked to the horror genre. Contemporary horror fiction is more overt in its genre elements, but from Walpole's *Otranto* to Bloch's *Psycho* (1959), the foundation formed and continues to develop over 255 years later.

Film productions had a similar growth pattern; they exhibited early Gothic elements that became more formative for horror as its own category. One of the earliest productions, Georges Méliès' *Le Manoir du diable* (1896), is categorized as horror much like *Otranto* because of its story elements being connected to the supernatural: the appearance of a devil figure, a bat transformation, a skeleton, a cauldron, and use of a crucifix to vanquish the devil. The early Gothic writings were adapted into films not long after, as previously mentioned, and the horror-movie industry grew from the creation of original stories. As the movies proliferated with international influence and development, so did the natural need to further categorize them, most often in the form of hybrid-genre combinations: body horror, **psychological horror**, **found-footage**, **sci-fi horror**, the **slasher**, **comedic horror**, **horror romance** (yes, that exists), **supernatural horror**, and the **creature feature** to name a few popular categories. Modern filmmakers in Italian and American cinema—Dario Argento, Mario Bava, Alfred Hitchcock, Herschell Gordon Lewis, John Carpenter, Wes Craven, John Landis, Mary Lambert, David Cronenberg—became household names for their explorations of witches, the human psyche, the afterlife, blood and **gore**, and transformation. Contemporary and up-and-coming directors—Eli Roth, Rob Zombie, Takashi Miike, Jennifer Kent, Jordan Peele, Ari Aster, Nia DaCosta—carry on that tradition in films that address disease, revenge, grief, race, and trauma. Though the genre is far too varied to cover all of its creators and their work, a brief list that encompasses the subgenre categories above in bold includes (same order): Tom Six's *The Human Centipede: First Sequence* (2009), Kent's *The Babadook* (2014), Eduardo Sánchez and Daniel Myrick's *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), Amy Holden Jones' *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982), Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), David Gebroe's *Zombie Honeymoon* (2004), William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), and Matt Reeves' *Cloverfield* (2008). Horror has a home on the small screen, as well, with contemporary anthology series like Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk's *American Horror Story* (2011), Misha Green's *Lovecraft Country* (2020), and Little Marvin's *Them* (2021).

But out of all the film genres, why spotlight horror? Why do we like it? Why do we hate it? Why does it continue to develop as a genre? Horror—in all of its simultaneous grandeur of excess and subtlety—relates to audiences because it taps into and exposes our shared social anxieties, cultural terrors, and all things that unnerve and disrupt normative systems. We like it because we can make connections to the content, and that helps us work through our own real-life problems. We hate it because we can make connections to the content, and that scares us to the core of our existence. It continues to develop as a genre because humanity has no boundary or endgame on dread; we are constantly in varying states of worry, concern, fear, anxiety, and terror about the smallest of things (Did my package from Amazon arrive yet?) to global thoughts (What will happen when that new law is passed?). From monsters to human villains and unexplainable phenomenon, horror's scary elements and fear tactics are typically metaphors and symbols that make connections between the films and its willing and/or reluctant audience members. We spotlight horror for these reasons and the simple fact that it is the most synthesized genre, combining elements from all cinema which makes it an interesting category to investigate. At any given moment watching a horror film, the viewer might find themselves cowering in fear, laughing at absurdity, turning away in disgust, crying at the loss of a beloved character (human or animal), sighing in relief after a suspenseful moment, and even smiling or clapping from a demonstration of love and strength to overcome the impossible.

One staple of horror is the **zombie movie**, and there may be no better person to complete our focus on the genre than George A. Romero.

Biography: George A. Romero (1940-2017)

George Romero was regarded as a master of the horror genre, particularly as a pioneer of zombie cinema. His influential undead series started with his directorial debut, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), and continued with five sequels before his death: *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), and *Survival of the Dead* (2009). The director, who co-wrote the screenplay with John A. Russo, never used the word “zombie” in the film, but it was clear that his undead ghouls helped establish the subgenre, particularly for their slow-moving pace and mindless cravings for human flesh; developments in the subgenre—the zombie that only eats brains, the running zombie, the talking zombie, the infection/contagion horror film, etc.—came later. We can see the influence of Romero's work in contemporary productions such as: *28 Days Later* (2002), *Zombieland* (2009), *Warm Bodies* (2013), *World War Z* (2013), *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2016), *Train to Busan* (2016), and the ever-developing *The Walking Dead* franchise which started as a comic book series in 2003 and was adapted to television in 2010. Although Romero directed other films in the genre, he is most known for the undead series as critics note how the films help chronicle American consumerism, capitalism, race relations, class systems, and other socioeconomic concerns of the nation. Outside of horror, Romero directed a romantic comedy

(*There's Always Vanilla* [1971]) and a thriller (*The Amusement Park* [1973]), the latter which was considered lost and only recently acquired in 2021 for distribution to stream on Shudder, the Netflix of horror; these films focus on topics involving interpersonal relationships, time and aging, and mental degradation, everyday human concerns that also became a part of his horror films' subject matter. In a broader sense, this is just one way we can understand film as an archive of history; its fictitious content highlights real-world happenings.

***Night of the Living Dead* (1968)**

In Romero's first feature-length film, a group of strangers must work together to survive a night in a random farmhouse as they fight off an uprising of the dead. After watching the film, decide if you like it or not and why. This is the first step in responding to almost any film, but after the initial viewing of *Night of the Living Dead*, our attention can turn to a more critical film analysis of its form and content. The next section offers questions to help focus analysis, and then we will review—through annotation—one student's close reading of the film.⁴

Links to text:

Night of the Living Dead (available on [Kanopy for TAMU users](#)⁵ and [YouTube for general audiences](#))

Romero, George A., dir. *Night of the Living Dead*. 1968; Los Angeles, CA: Continental Distributing, Inc. YouTube, uploaded by Timeless Classic Movies, 27 August 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H91BxkBXttE>.

***Night of the Living Dead* Questions and Activities for Further Analysis**

To further a more in-depth understanding and analysis of the film, consider these inquiries:

1. How does Romero's use of black and white contribute to narrative subtext?
2. Historicize the film:
 - a. What role might late-1960s America play in the film's reception?
 - b. How is the state of the nation for 1960s America reflected in the film?
3. *Night of the Living Dead* is classified as a horror film. What elements support its genre label?
4. What does the film communicate about gender through its characters?

⁴ For a companion film that takes the viewer behind the scenes, see *Birth of the Living Dead: The Making of Night of the Living Dead*, dir. Rob Kuhns (2013): <https://texasam.kanopy.com/video/birth-living-dead>.

⁵ For more information on using Kanopy—including a sample list of available films—see the TAMU Library Research Guides for ENGL 203: <https://tamu.libguides.com/c.php?g=1123152&p=8216951>.

5. What other movies/TV series do you know that contain similar subject matter? How do they handle their stories in similar/different manners?
6. How does *NOTLD* address issues regarding power and authority?
7. Determine the tone and mood of the film based on its use of the camera (movement, angles, and types of shots).
8. Make a case to argue *NOTLD* is not a horror film. What other genres suit the movie and why?
9. How does the film connect a zombie narrative to an audience as opposed to a written work?
10. Use the [TAMU Libraries](#) to locate secondary sources that examine Romero's film.

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Sample Analysis of a Film

James Francis Jr. and R. Paul Cooper

How to Read this Section

This section contains two parts. First, you will find the prompt. The prompt is a very important element in any writing assignment. Don't be fooled by the fact it is short! Even though it is a short document, it highlights and makes clear every element you will need to complete the given assignment effectively. When writing an essay, the prompt is where you will both begin

and end. Seriously. Before you begin, familiarize yourself with the prompt, and before you submit your final draft, give the prompt one final read over, making sure you have not left anything out. *When* you visit the University Writing Center and Libraries, they can better help if you bring along the prompt. Both the [Writing Center](#)⁶ and the [Libraries](#)⁷ provide indispensable tools to aid students, so take advantage of their services.

The second part of this section contains a simulated student essay—the essay is not an actual student essay, but an essay written to demonstrate a strong student essay. The essay in this section is not meant to represent a “perfect” essay; it has its faults. However, this essay is an effective response to the given prompt. The “student” essay will be represented in a wide column on the left, and the grader’s commentary will be represented in a smaller column on the right. Use the example and the comments to help you think about how you might organize your own essay, to think about whether you will make similar—or different—choices.

Sample Prompt

After viewing *Night of the Living Dead*, establish a critical argument (persuasive claim/thesis) and provide a close reading of the text to support your position.

Assignment Description: A close reading of *NOTLD* informs the audience of the writer’s argument about a particular aspect of the film and how that element guides their analysis. The working thesis (writer’s claim) represents a unique perspective regarding the film that is simultaneously persuasive toward its intended audience. A statement of fact is not argumentative; therefore, the thesis should offer a debatable position connected to the film, something the reader may engage with while reading.

Content: Textual analysis should remain localized to the film itself— its form and content— without attempting to integrate personal discussions regarding the writer’s life, bias toward certain subject matter, or other. The essay will demonstrate a working knowledge of film terminology that applies to this particular analysis; many of these terms reside within the English 203 OER. Adherence to standard essay conventions (introduction/opening discussion, body paragraph development, topic sentences, conclusion) organizes the format for the analysis.

Research Expectations: As a close reading, the writing focuses on analysis of the text from the writer’s perspective. However, if secondary source material is desired, a maximum of three scholarly sources may be incorporated to aid contextual discussion, such as the history of the text, biographical information about the director, and/or the cultural resonance of the film.

⁶ University Writing Center, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/>.

⁷ Texas A&M University Libraries, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://library.tamu.edu/>.

Analysis represents the writer’s responsibility to have their voice control discussion throughout the essay without losing authority by including outside material.

Format: MLA format will be used for this assignment.

Scope/Page Count: Essay should range between 3-5 pages (Works Cited required to document the primary text and any secondary sources, but not included in page count).

| Student Essay | Instructor Annotations |
|---|---|
| <p>Hunter Plummer</p> <p>ENGL 203-Section</p> <p>Instructor Name</p> <p>June 8, 2021</p> <p>“Those things don’t make any noise”: Silence and Power in <i>Night of the Living Dead</i></p> | <p>Strong titles like this one indicate part of the focus and argument of the writing.</p> |
| <p>For almost seven minutes, not long into George Romero’s 1968 film <i>Night of the Living Dead</i>, the only “dialogue” to speak of is the female protagonist Barbra’s labored breaths and piercing screams. For this period, from her attempted escape from the first zombie to Ben locking them inside the abandoned house, the audience watches something like a silent film in which the story is told entirely through images and music. Even when the film’s dialogue-driven form returns, silence remains: most notably, Barbra spends most of the action continuing to not speak, and as Ben says, the zombies “don’t make any noise.” To be quiet in the film is to be in danger or to be seen as dangerous, but white men’s reactions to these silences cause</p> | <p>In the opening statement, the writer identifies the text and author to clarify the essay’s focus to the reader. This is a crucial point of communication in writing the introduction. An additional writing strategy is to open with brief discussion that helps connect your audience to the content. For example, the writer might explain their personal connection to the genre, make opening comments about similar films in the genre, pose a hypothetical question about related subject matter that they offer thoughts on, and more to welcome a broad audience</p> |

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| <p>more psychological and physical harm, further adding to broader conversations about race and gender surrounding <i>Night of the Living Dead</i>.</p> | <p>before focusing on the more localized purpose of the writing.</p> <p>The thesis statement informs the audience of the argument (claim) about the message(s) the writer interprets from a close reading of the film; it leads and/or guides essay content. It is also not always a single statement, as it can sometimes be extended into 2–3 sentences to fully develop the claim the writer wishes to make. Although traditionally found at the end of the introduction paragraph, the thesis often moves around within the paragraph’s structure.</p> |
| <p>Even before Barbra’s muted struggle, the film begins with silence. The first three minutes of the film are credits shown over shots of Barbra and Johnny’s car, accompanied only by the score. When they finally make it to the cemetery, Johnny is shocked when the radio suddenly starts working, the implication later being that the other-worldly origins of the undead disrupted the signal and plunged their car into silence. Then, just before the first zombie appears, Johnny repeatedly tells Barbra to get up from her silent prayer at their father’s grave; in this final moment, he is clearly uncomfortable and tries to take control by filling the silence that had already consumed them in the car and foreshadows the terrifying silence to come. Immediately following his protests, they see the zombie, the true silent enemy he</p> | <p>The topic sentence (first sentence) informs the reader about the focus of the body paragraph; in general, they act as mini-thesis statements (persuasive arguments) to guide and organize the content. The opening statement to this paragraph informs us that silence— as a critical point of analysis—occurs at the start of the film. This statement—like the other topic sentences in the essay—helps establish analysis of a specific sequence in the movie (the close reading) to make for a paragraph of concentrated, related, and relevant content discussion.</p> <p>In the second statement, the writer might incorporate specific</p> |

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| <p>should be focused on. Instead, he jokes about the man “coming to get you, Barbra,” leaving them both vulnerable to attack. The fight itself is loud because of Barbra’s screams, but once Johnny is thrown to the ground and dies, her actions become a pantomime, a performance without words.</p> | <p>film terms such as “establishing shot” when alluding to the first scene of the movie. We can use terminology specific to film to demonstrate our authority of the subject matter, thus strengthening the ethos of the writing.</p> |
| <p>The moment the zombie turns his attention back to Barbra, the score returns and quickly builds with horn-heavy music that is menacing and unnerving and accompanied by repeated, long notes from the strings. The score reflects Barbra’s fear, both growing to the point of being overpowering. The sound effects added in post-production (the car crashing, the thunder clapping, etc.) are nearly indistinguishable from the cacophonous soundtrack. Finally, when the noise and her fear reach a fever pitch, the horns suddenly stop as Barbra closes the door to the zombie. For a brief moment the only sounds are the storm outside and Barbra’s labored breathing. With each new discovery as Barbra then explores the house—the room of taxidermy, the corpse upstairs, and the dead phoneline—the horns once again build. The taxidermied animals lining the walls are <i>perceived</i> silent threats until she realizes what they are, and the corpse she finds is a silent reminder of the threat outside. The phoneline, however, is the clearest symbol of the fear of</p> | <p>The use of repetition may indicate a need to edit at the word level or it might function as a strategy of emphasis. In this paragraph, the writer might consider using similar/related words for “phoneline” to break up the repetition; however, toward the end, the writer claims “she has been denied” and “she has been silenced” in repeated word choice to reinforce the analysis of Barbra’s situational fears connected to the absence of sound</p> |

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| <p>silence. We see the zombie pull the phoneline down and Barbra try in vain to call out, her face contorting in <i>silent</i> anguish; she has been denied her one opportunity to be heard. She has been silenced to the outside world, to either warn them or seek rescue.</p> | <p>and being unable to utilize her voice.</p> |
| <p>Within seconds of his arrival onscreen soon after this, Ben is talking, filling Barbra’s continued speechlessness. Unlike, Johnny, however, he does not exert authority over her by trying to get her to speak. Instead, he too will confront the zombies silently. Ben’s arrival signals the end of Barbra’s turn as a silent film star; her silence suddenly becomes infantilizing, and her entire demeanor slackens. Occasionally, she will monologue or have an outburst of emotion, but for most of her remaining time onscreen, she is silenced and sidelined. She has become someone without autonomy and whom Ben feels responsible for, whom he must protect from the zombies and Mr. Cooper. It is the latter man’s appearance, along with Tom’s, that truly disrupts the situation. When they emerge from the basement, Mr. Cooper continually insists he could not hear the racket in the rest of the house and that they had no way of knowing what was happening, so they stayed put. Ben quickly pokes holes in these discrepancies, including by pointing out that “Those things don’t make any noise.” Here Ben, a Black man, proves to know more about these enemies than</p> | <p>The writer uses this paragraph’s topic sentence to indicate a shift in focus from Barbra to Ben regarding sound and silence. As much as the opening statement to a paragraph makes a claim related to the initial thesis, it also functions to maintain the flow of writing by transitioning from one topic to the next or presenting a continued/expanded discussion from a previous paragraph.</p> |

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| <p>anyone else, any of the white people, in the house; he knows that they are slow moving, are not especially strong, and most importantly do not make noise, their most menacing and distinctive quality.</p> | |
| <p>The radio plays throughout this sequence and that of Ben’s silent fortification of the house. What sets Ben’s silence apart from Barbra’s when she first comes to the house is the radio, the human voices perpetually “scoring” his work and connecting them both to the outside world. It is a passive way of filling the silence compared to Mr. Cooper’s attempts to wrest power from Ben through his incessant talking. Whereas the radio (and then the television) is a presumed white man imparting information, Mr. Cooper offers little more than speculation and antagonism. He perpetually argues with Ben and Mrs. Cooper and is the character most uneasy with Barbra’s silence. For a time, after almost letting the zombies kill Ben, Mr. Cooper joins Barbra and the others in a stunned silence, only to be revived when the television, their connection to the outside world, goes out. Confronted with larger overwhelming silence, he only talks about getting Ben’s gun, which he sees as the key to authority. This need to be in power and to fill the space with his presence brings about his murder (at the hands of Ben), his becoming one of the undead (at the hands of his largely silent daughter, a figure of both infantilization <i>and</i></p> | <p>The use of specific scenes, dialogue, and details from the film offers support to the writer’s claim and demonstrates their knowledge of the text throughout the essay.</p> |

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| <p>terror, a Barbra <i>and</i> zombie), and the deaths of everyone else in the house.</p> | |
| <p>At the end of the film, Ben, the lone survivor of the house’s night of terror, hears gunshots and barking overhead. This means that something other than the silent undead are above and that this might be his chance at rescue. Unfortunately, someone in the zombie-hunting mob of white men tells the sheriff, “There’s something in there. I heard a noise” and shoots Ben through the open window. Despite searching for their prey for hours and the sheriff espousing confidence on television that they were doing a great job, the agreement that a noise demands immediate murder rather than rescue indicates a woeful misunderstanding of the silence/noise dichotomy in this situation.</p> <p>Ben’s inability to make himself heard because the white men outside act so quickly, the impression that noise is the sign of a zombie, and the hunters’ disinterest to find out who is really inside by calling out (making their own noise) are his death sentence. The white hunters recall Mr. Cooper’s insistence that the noises overhead might have been zombies, and neither group was willing to investigate further. They perceived a threat based on inaccurate impressions and over-zealous confidence and acted upon it.</p> | <p>Although this sample writing represents a close reading with a focus on the writer’s perspective only, other voices could be added to the conversation by providing secondary source material (research) should the assignment call for such a requirement. Through its content, the essay also presents various avenues to which it may connect to theoretical approaches, namely feminist film theory and critical race theory. In general, <i>Night of the Living Dead’s</i> subject matter makes it a film that</p> |

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| | <p>can be examined through various lenses of criticism.</p> |
| <p>In <i>Night of the Living Dead</i>, the enemy is silence, the inability to be heard or to hear what is coming. Barbra’s encounter with the first silent killer essentially silences her and thus strips her of power for the rest of the story. Every man in the film tries to fill the silence but ultimately falls victim to it. Mr. Cooper’s over-confident attempts to become the dominant voice among the group contribute to his downfall, and Ben’s position as the voice of reason, as the only character using his voice to speak accurately about the silent zombies, is brought to an end by the same demand to be in power, to be <i>heard</i> no matter what. Even Johnny’s death at the beginning is the direct result of his trivializing the terror of silence that approaches. While some of the white men who insist on exerting authority face consequences by the silence they try controlling, they take down those already silenced by power structures, like Barbra and Ben, in the process.</p> | <p>The conclusion effectively functions to remind the reader of the essay’s focus and argument, provides reasoning to the claim(s), and demonstrates how the analysis was carried out. Toward the end, the writer might also go beyond the narrative to show how this one analysis connects to a larger framework in literature and/or society, which can be helpful as the topic concerns social issues; they can leave the reader with something to contemplate beyond the essay’s analytical framework, as effective writing (and sometimes not-so-effective writing) lingers with the reader to want to know more, discuss more, and continue the conversation.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Work Cited</p> <p>Romero, George A., director. <i>Night of the Living Dead</i>. Screenplay by John A. Russo and George A. Romero, Walter Reade Organization, 1968. <i>YouTube</i>, uploaded by Timeless Classic</p> | <p>Only the primary source was discussed, so the Work Cited contains a full citation for the film.</p> |

Movies, 27 August 2012,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H91BxkBXttE>.

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Plummer, Hunter. "'Those things don't make any noise': Silence and Power in *Night of the Living Dead*." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Creative Nonfiction

"To be creative means to connect. It's to abolish the gap between the body, the mind and the soul, between science and art, between fiction and nonfiction."

- Nawal El Saadawi

Introduction

Matt McKinney

The very term literature connotes texts that are fictional, so it might seem strange to you that this textbook would include a focus on nonfiction, as well. However, the label “nonfiction” belies all of the creative choices nonfiction writers must make in order to craft a work that reflects their purpose, addresses their audience’s expectations, and renders the subject faithfully and accurately. The presence of these creative choices in nonfiction entails that writers must focus on many of the same elements that fictional texts do: themes, symbols, structure, genre/medium, point of view, subject (“character”) development, allusions, etc. In addition to focusing on these elements, these creative choices manifest in all levels of a nonfiction text, from the cultures that surround it to the grammar and syntax of individual sentences.

As you read through this chapter, you will likely notice that it is structured differently from prior chapters, particularly in its inclusion of study questions after each layer of analysis. This organizational difference is intended to highlight the variety of possibilities available to scholars and students when analyzing a literary nonfiction text, as well as how to apply each layer of analysis in a close reading of a nonfiction text.

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Nonfiction Genres

Matt McKinney

As other chapters have pointed out, genres provide writers with structural templates and conventions that they can choose to adhere to or deviate from. Most readers are familiar with genre conventions and structures, and come to expect that writers will decide either to follow them or break them creatively. These decisions are the first indicator that nonfiction writers must make creative choices, just as fiction writers do. Here are some of the more prevalent genres in nonfiction.

Autobiographies & Memoirs

While most people are aware that **autobiographies** and **memoirs** are nonfiction texts that focus on the author's life, these words are not inherently interchangeable; instead, they represent an important creative choice that the writer made regarding what to emphasize in their life and how to structure it.

An autobiography always covers the entirety of the author's life, from birth until the present day. This focus entails a chronological structure, and also predisposes the writer to frame every phase of their life as thematically significant for one reason or another. An author's decision to cover the full extent of their life might suggest a desire to appear authentic to their audience (i.e. by not simply providing a highlight reel of their biggest accomplishments). It could also indicate that the author wants to contextualize their greatest or most famous accomplishments, so that the reader can see the struggles they endured or the formative moments they went through to get to their current status. Further still, the full scope of the author's life might call attention to a part of themselves that's less well-known but that they want their audience to understand. An autobiography can also be an author's attempt to take stock of their lives and form a narrative from it. Any and all of these motivations can inform the author's decision to write an autobiography.

Memoirs, by contrast, differ in that they only focus on a select part of an author's life. This narrower focus could be because the author wants to focus on a particularly formative or famous (or infamous) experience in their life. Some memoirs, like David Sedaris's works, are collections of memories, with each chapter covering an experience that ties to a larger theme about the author as a person or their outlook on life. Whether an author chooses to frame their life in an autobiography or a memoir, and regardless of their approach to either genre or their motive in crafting their text, none of these choices alter the fact that the author is focusing on real events (or at least their perception of them). As concrete and limited as nonfiction may appear in comparison to fiction, there is still quite a range of creative possibilities in this one genre.

Biographies

Though the focus of a **biography** is identical to that of an autobiography in that it is an account of someone's life, biographies differ in that the author is writing about someone else's life, and this entails an entirely different array of creative choices. To begin with, a famous person or historical figure often has multiple biographies written about them over long stretches of time, so a biographical author must focus on research in order to avoid libel and potential litigation. They must establish their work as definitive or unique in comparison to other biographies.

For example, let's say an author decides to write a biography about Robert E. Lee. Is the biography going to focus largely on his military career during the Civil War (as most Lee biographies do)? Will it focus on earlier times in his life (his childhood, time at West Point, the Mexican-American War), or during Reconstruction? Will it focus on more negative aspects of his legacy, such as his white supremacist beliefs and treatment of the enslaved Black Americans he owned? Will it review and critique prior biographies on Lee, or will it focus on new historical evidence? The author's answers to these questions will have the largest impact on how they craft this nonfiction text.

Essays

Similar to fictional works of literature, many nonfiction essays address themes of social, historical, and cultural identity and character. Unlike fictional works, which often explore these ideas through allegory or characters, essays give authors the ability to address readers more directly, frame contemporary issues in a variety of aspects (from ironic satire to direct calls to action), and also craft a mutual collective identity with the readers whom these writers want to reach. For example, two prominent authors of fiction, Dorothy Parker and Mark Twain, simultaneously published non-fictional satire and social commentary on contemporary events.

In other cases, some essays' influence has been so pervasive that they led to the creation of new genres. For example, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, originally composed as a series of essays rather than a novel, is often credited with inspiring the true crime genre that emerged after its publication.

Speeches

Similar to essays, speeches narrow the gap between a writer, their audiences, and contemporary events. In fact, speeches often narrow this gap even more so than essays. This is not only because they tend to respond to a more specific exigence than other nonfiction forms of literature, but also because they are either composed orally or meant to be read aloud at a specific moment in time.

The second nonfiction text that this chapter will focus on, Frederick Douglass’s “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” was prepared to be read at a specific event: an 1852 meeting of the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society in New York. Because of the speech’s import regarding the culture, history, and legacy of the United States, however, we continue to read it today and find it remains relevant in critiquing the white supremacist legacy of the nation.

Letters/Correspondence

Letters and correspondence (often from or between writers) can also be considered forms of nonfiction literature. More intimate than most of the other genres listed here, correspondence is shaped by the relationship between the writer and, usually, an audience of one. Letters exchanged form exigencies for one another (i.e., receiving a letter inspires the writing of another in response, and so on), and writers often employ the same tropes, schemes, and other literary elements that they might use in fiction. This includes point of view, diction, figurative language, symbolism, etc.

Additionally, **literary correspondence** can provide essential context for studying a fictional work, such as when an author writes to a literary critic or a loved one about a text. Mark Twain, for instance, frequently wrote letters to his publishers—enough for them to be published into their own collection, *Mark Twain’s Letters to His Publishers*.

Study Questions for Nonfiction Genre Categories

1. What genres of nonfiction cater to the broadest audiences, and which seem the most intimate? Why?
2. What should a nonfiction writer consider when choosing a genre for their text?
3. Take a look at the “Spotlight” section below. In terms of composition, what are some important ways an essay like Thomas Paine’s typically differs from a speech like Frederick Douglass’s?

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Spotlight on *Common Sense* and “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?”

Matt McKinney

In each section of the chapter, we will examine two nonfiction literary texts situated within US culture on similar themes: Thomas Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense* and Frederick Douglass’s speech “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July.” These texts will demonstrate and contextualize how creative choices are made and function in literary nonfiction.

To analyze these creative choices in more detail and make them more accessible, this chapter will start with a review of some of the more prevalent forms of nonfiction and how these forms can expand our conception of what literature is. From there, we’ll explore some general strategies and tips for analyzing works of nonfiction, beginning with revisiting the rhetorical situation (as mapped out in Chapter 9). More specific strategies, such as looking at the author’s biographical context and the cultural connections between the author and their audiences will also be covered. With the contextual “big picture” established by these concepts, we will then narrow our focus to the grammatical choices writers make, as well as the tropes and schemes they utilize, in order to better understand the foundations of writers’ creative choices.

As we cover each of these strategies for analysis in the subsequent sections will be accompanied by specific study questions to help you apply them to studying Paine’s and Douglass’s texts.

Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

Common Sense (1776)

Link to text: [Common Sense](#)

Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense*. Philadelphia: W. & T. Bradford, 1776. Project Gutenberg, 2021. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/147/147-h/147-h.htm>.

Frederick Douglass (1817 or 1818-1895)

What to the Slave to the Fourth of July? (1852)

Link to text: [What to the Slave is the 4th of July?](#)

Douglass, Frederick. "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July." July 5, 1852. In *Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852*. Rochester: Lee, Mann & Co. The Public Domain Review.

<https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/frederick-douglass-fourth-july-speech>.

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Analyzing Nonfiction in Terms of Culture

Matt McKinney

In order to effectively analyze a nonfiction work of literature, an essential first step is establishing an appropriate contextual framework. In most cases, the most external layer of that framework will be the cultures that the text, its author, and audience(s) are situated in. Meanings within a text are derived entirely from interactions with it, and culture inherently informs most of those interactions. Culture can be defined in terms of many forms of identity: race, ethnicity, nationality, education, religion, sex, gender, orientation, historical legacy, etc.

Cultural contexts can be broken down into a number of helpful components. These include:

- The time period in which the text was first published;
- The current time period, or another relevant temporal period.
- The cultural backgrounds of the author;
- The cultural backgrounds of readers or listeners.

Pursuing or synthesizing any of these factors can yield greater insight into a text's impact and legacy, as well contextualize the author's choices in crafting it. For example, focusing on the backgrounds of the author and the audience for *Common Sense* reveal an important contrast. Specifically, while most American colonists had been born in the colonies and spent their entire lives there, Thomas Paine had spent the vast majority of his life in England; he had only relocated to Pennsylvania at the end of 1774, just months before Lexington and Concord and nearly a year after the Boston Tea Party. While a difference in background might have raised some differences in perspective, Paine was able to use his own English background to his advantage in making his point. Notably, he used the pseudonym, "An Englishman," in the initial editions of the pamphlet. Since his arguments were against the British monarchy and on behalf of colonists who wanted to separate from Britain, this cultural ethos only lent credence to his claims.

In terms of "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July," Frederick Douglass also had a cultural identity distinct from that of his audience. As a formerly enslaved Black American, Douglass had a very different relationship with the Fourth of July as a holiday and the concept of American freedom in general, when compared to his majority white audience (including the white abolitionists in the room when he first gave the speech). This difference, in large part, influenced his decision to frontload the beginning of the speech with an acknowledgment of what the holiday symbolized for white Americans, as well as its undeniable historical impact. By starting the speech with this focus, he no doubt intended to make his audience more receptive to the contrasting viewpoint he then introduces about the holiday being exclusionary and hypocritical from the perspective of enslaved Blacks.

Just as examining the backgrounds of the authors and audiences of both texts complicates our understanding of them and the author's choices, examining each text within different temporal contexts also yields important insights. As an argument, *Common Sense* derives from Enlightenment philosophy, which challenged the divine right of kings and promoted the scientific method and reform in economics. None of these ideas are controversial in modern times, and as a result *Common Sense* feels far less radical now than when it was first published in January 1776. Furthermore, in January 1776 it was obviously not yet clear that the Continental Congress would vote to declare independence, let alone that the colonists could defeat the British in war and secure recognition as a sovereign nation. Centuries after these developments unfolded, *Common Sense* has secured its place as a foundational component of American national identity, and retroactively confirms the legitimacy of our country's existence.

Unlike *Common Sense*, however, some modern readers may still find Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" speech radical in its reframing of the holiday's legacy. Compared to *Common Sense*, students in American K-12 schools are less likely to be exposed to Douglass's speech and the perspective that Fourth of July celebrations highlight racial and social inequalities in the country. Paradoxically, the social progress that has been achieved

since Douglass initially gave the speech may convince some that the speech is no longer relevant. Ultimately, however, the speech's relative obscurity and controversy compared to texts like Paine's reinforces the fact that Douglass's criticisms have still not been fully addressed, and that the speech retains its relevance.

Study Questions for Cultural Analysis

1. What are some factors that a writer has to consider if they don't share the same cultural background as their audience?
2. Compare and contrast Paine's approach to his audience with Douglass's. Where do they align, and where do they differ?
3. What are some key aspects of American culture any writer should consider when engaging an American audience?
4. What factors should a contemporary nonfiction writer consider when writing to a Gen Z audience?

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Analyzing Nonfiction in Terms of the Author

Matt McKinney

Shifting from a wider focus on the cultural aspects of the author's identity to a narrower focus on the author's individual background and life experiences provides additional contextual insight. A biographical focus can emphasize:

- The impacts of key decisions a writer made during their life,
- Formative experiences they've had, including life events and prior careers;
- Key influences from family, friends, mentors, and communities;
- Their body of work as a whole, beyond one particular text.

An argument for any one of these emphases, or a combination of some, can be made when determining the biggest biographical influences on the author's choices. A biographical focus on Thomas Paine, for example, could argue that the staymaking business he owned in England, or the time he served in the British Navy as a privateer, influenced his later sympathies with colonial merchants. Alternatively, a researcher could instead emphasize the years Paine spent in Lewes, a British town that had a reputation for being anti-monarchy since the English Civil War, and where he first became involved in political activism. Another potential area of emphasis could be Paine's earlier political articles and pamphlets, including one he wrote against an excise tax in Britain, or his editorship with the pro-working class *Pennsylvania Magazine* and his close friendship with fellow printer Benjamin Franklin. Subsequent events in Paine's life following the American Revolution, such as his involvement in the French Revolution, could also be mentioned. However, the chronology of these events makes their influence on *Common Sense* more difficult to establish.

Similarly, Frederick Douglass's life offers many potential focal points for a biographical analysis of "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July." It would be hard to imagine, for example, a biographical analysis of the speech that didn't reference Douglass's own 1845 memoir, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. This memoir accounts for a number of seminal moments in Douglass's early life, including his learning to read, his being transferred among multiple enslavers, his physical confrontation with an overseer, and his eventual escape to New York City (though the details of this escape would not be revealed until later, since Douglass did not want inadvertently to prevent other enslaved Blacks from taking advantage of his same method). After he freed himself, Douglass's time among other abolitionists in Massachusetts and/or his ordainment as a minister in New York could also be emphasized as significant influences on his arguments and writing style. His close relationships with other anti-slavery and pro-women's suffrage activists, such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, Elizabeth Cady-Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony could also inform a biographical analysis. In addition to his anti-slavery work in the United States, Douglass also spent two years (1845-1847) in Ireland and England, where slavery had ended in the prior decade. The same reserved-to-impassioned stylistic shift in "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July" can also be observed in some of Douglass's earlier works, including his articles in *The North Star*, the nation's most prominent abolitionist newspaper. Douglass also published an open letter in *The North Star* to his former master, Thomas Auld, whom he condemns for his inhumane treatment.

As both Douglass's and Paine's cases demonstrate, a biographical analysis of a nonfiction literary work does not negate the value or contradict the findings of a cultural analysis of that work. Rather, analyzing both biographical and cultural contextual layers enriches each of them. A cultural analysis provides an overview of the social, political, and historical dynamics that shape an author's life, and the experiences they have and the choices they make situated

in these dynamics demonstrate both the influence of those dynamics and the significance of the individual author's agency.

Study Questions for Biographical Analysis

1. How does a biographical focus enhance our understanding of the author's choices in a nonfiction text?
2. What are some areas of potential overlap between cultural and biographical context?
3. What aspects of Paine's and Douglass's lives would you argue are most important to their respective texts?

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Analyzing Nonfiction through Literary Elements

Matt McKinney

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, concepts like structure, point of view, tone, themes, and symbolism are more commonly associated with fiction than nonfiction. However, nonfictional literature also incorporates them for similar reasons. These reasons often include:

- Framing and describing the experience of the writer or a group with whom the writer identifies;
- Conveying the writer's emotions towards the subject matter;
- Shaping the reader's experience with the text (either in terms of comprehension or in creating a particular ambiance);
- Shaping the reader's understanding of a concept or experience through comparison, substitution, or representation;
- Emphasizing important information;
- Organizing information on the sentence level for comprehensive and stylistic effects.

Let's review the role that prominent literary elements can play in analyzing the composition of a nonfiction text.

Structure

Structure can best be understood as the writer's attempt to reconcile their purpose(s) for writing with their understanding of their audience's needs and expectations. Some of these needs and expectations are predetermined by the genre. For example, people who read a biography expect (reasonably) that the author will cover their subject in chronological order.

Other times, however, the writer will subvert the audience's expectations to create a particular effect. David Sedaris's *Me Talk Pretty One Day*, for example, is a collection of humorous essays/memoirs of moments in his life. Instead of telling these stories chronologically, beginning with the onset of the actual event, Sedaris may start with a description of the main person involved in the story—their childhood, their likes and dislikes, another incident that helps define their character for the audience, etc. By doing this, Sedaris contextualizes the “character” for the audience, so that they will have a deeper understanding of their motivations and actions when the actual story unfolds.

In “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” Frederick Douglass also subverts his audience's expectations by at first seeming to cater to them. The first portion of his speech extols the legacy of the American Revolution and the Founding Fathers—in part because his (mostly white) audience is familiar with and culturally connected to this legacy, and also because he is setting up his eventual critique of the holiday to be more nuanced. When the speech shifts to the emotions that the holiday evokes for himself and enslaved Black people, the audience feels the contrast of these experiences more sharply due to the speech's structure.

Point of View

In fiction, point of view helps the writer establish different relationships within and around the text. This includes the relationships between the reader and the writer, between the reader and the characters, and between characters.

These principles also operate in nonfiction texts. Just as in fiction, a third person or omniscient point of view puts distance between the author and the content, so that the former is observing or removed from what unfolds (see Ch's 3 and 4 for more on narrators). For example, Hunter S. Thompson's essay “The Hippies,” describes the broader progression of hippie culture in the 1960s, the subcultures within it, and cites other writers' perspectives on it as well. Although Thompson's writing style is distinctive (as was his lifestyle), he does not insert himself into the piece. This creates a distance from the subject that potentially adds to his credibility, and also implies that he did not consider himself part of this phenomenon.

In *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine does the opposite and inserts himself directly into the subject matter. He primarily does so through plural pronouns like “we” and “us,” which explicitly link him to the patriot cause and the colonial experience. Since the pamphlet was initially published anonymously, this created the impression that it was written by someone who had spent a great deal of time in the colonies. When Paine was discovered to be the author, the plural pronouns reflect that the ideology of the American Revolution was more important to him than his being a recently arrived native Briton.

Some nonfiction writers even use second person, which frames the reader as the subject and thus a more active participant in the writer’s thoughts and focus. Ralph Waldo Emerson often invokes second person in his essay “Self Reliance,” which engages the reader in considering the advice Emerson gives:

But why should you keep your head over your shoulder? Why drag about this corpse of your memory, lest you contradict somewhat you have stated in this or that public place? Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then? It seems to be a rule of wisdom never to rely on your memory alone, scarcely even in acts of pure memory, but to bring the past for judgment into the thousand-eyed present, and live ever in a new day.

In each of these cases, the writer’s adopted point of view has a significant impact on the reader’s experience. Furthermore, each point of view option offers similar effects and advantages whether used in fiction or nonfiction.

Themes

While themes are present in both fiction and nonfiction, they are typically much more explicit in the latter. If F. Scott Fitzgerald had had Nick Carraway utter aloud, “The point of this story is that the American Dream is dead, if it was ever a reality to begin with,” in *The Great Gatsby*, it would have been a little on the nose, and probably disrupted the reader’s experience of the narrative. Instead, Fitzgerald conveys this theme through more subtle means, such as imagery, symbolism, plot arcs, and character interactions. By contrast, works of nonfiction tend to focus more on informing the reader, which means that the text’s central ideas need to be more directly stated.

Both *Common Sense* and “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” get to their main ideas extremely quickly. Not only does this efficiency show respect for the reader’s time in consuming a nonfiction text that’s meant to inform and persuade, it also signposts the structure and focus of each piece for the reader (especially in *Common Sense*). In other words, theme and structure are often more explicitly linked in nonfiction than fiction.

Symbolism

Symbolism in nonfiction literature often serves at least one of two purposes. Rather than anchoring a narrative, symbols can help to concretize abstract ideas in a nonfiction piece for the reader. Conversely, symbolism can also allow a nonfiction writer to express information in a more creative or poetic manner. In an 1873 letter to his sister, for example, famed American naturalist and writer John Muir wrote his famous line, “The mountains are calling & [sic] I must go.”¹ Here the mountains symbolize Muir’s transcendentalist beliefs, as well as the natural world as a whole. Muir also personifies the symbol, which reinforces his connection to the wilderness.

Throughout *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine uses the image of a parent and child to symbolize Britain’s relationship with the colonies. This symbol is powerful and reinforces his argument in a few different ways. First, the parent and child reflect the cultural connection Britain had with the American colonies. It also reduces the moral and ideological scope of the conflict to a familial relationship most people experience. Further still, it embodies the tension, difficulty, and pain of outgrowing or severing a relationship that had previously been beneficial. Ultimately, this image and Paine’s use of it reflects the important role symbols play in tapping into the emotions of a nonfiction text’s audience—even when the primary goal of the text is simply to convey information.

Study Questions for Literary Elements

1. How would you characterize the relationship between theme and structure in most nonfiction texts?
2. In what ways do the use of these literary elements align and diverge between fiction and nonfiction?
3. What are the advantages each point of view type offers in a nonfiction text?
4. How does symbolism in nonfiction engage readers emotionally?

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¹ John Muir, “Letter from [John Muir] to Sarah [Muir Galloway], 1873 Sep 3,” 1873, University of the Pacific Scholarly Commons, accessed August 23, 2022, <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/jmcl/12515/>.

Analyzing Nonfiction on the Sentence Level

Matt McKinney

As previously discussed, layers of external context such as cultural and biographical circumstances provide a macro-level lens through which to view and understand a literary nonfiction work's impact, the exigencies to which it responds, and how the author's presence and choices manifest themselves. Conversely, it's also important to analyze texts on a micro level, specifically looking at how an author's decisions on the sentence level shape our assessment of larger choices and patterns in the work.

In order to conduct an analysis of a text on the sentence level, readers should be able to identify and understand the importance of the following sentence components:

- **Independent clauses** are the main portions of a sentence, as they contain a subject-verb-object (SVO) configuration and represent complete thoughts on their own. The other components of a sentence both modify the meanings of these independent clauses and branch around them (to the left, right, or middle).
 - Note: Depending on the placement, branching creates different effects. Left-branching creates buildup prefacing the independent clause, middle-branching adds clarifying information on the subject before moving to the verb, and right-branching creates an effect of falling action after the independent clause.
- **Dependent clauses** also contain an SVO configuration, but unlike independent clauses, they cannot stand alone as sentences. Dependent clauses can perform several different modifying functions in a sentence. These include conveying subordinate information (adverb clauses), clarifying information (an adjective clause) or standing in for a noun (a noun clause).
- **Phrases** are modifiers that do not have an SVO configuration. Similar to dependent clauses, they can also modify sentences in different ways. Conveying relationships in time and space (prepositions), providing background action or extending action (verb phrases), or clarifying nouns (noun phrases) are all examples of this.

To demonstrate how these different components function in a literary passage, let's look at some samples from *Common Sense*. Here is the first sentence of paragraph 31 from the pamphlet:

MANKIND [sic] being originally equal in the order of creation, the equality could only be destroyed by some subsequent circumstance.

In the first sentence “the equality... circumstance” is the independent clause, with “equality” being the subject, “could only be destroyed” being the main verb in conditional form, and “some subsequent circumstance” being the object. Because an independent clause has more “weight” in a sentence than other components, placing it at the end concludes that sentence on a more definitive note.

Further, now that we have identified the independent clause, we can see that the remainder of the sentence consists of modifiers and is, therefore, left-branching. “Mankind being...creation” is primarily a type of noun phrase called an absolute phrase, because it features a secondary noun performing a background, participial action.

Let's look at another sentence from paragraph 31 in *Common Sense*:

Oppression is often the consequence, but seldom or never the means of riches; and though avarice will preserve a man from being necessitously [sic] poor, it generally makes him too timorous to be wealthy.

Here we have two independent clauses; the presence of a second independent clause is signaled by the semicolon (as is the case with this sentence). The two independent clauses in this passage are, “Oppression is...riches,” and “it generally makes him..” The most significant modifier in the passage is “though avarice...poor.” Because this modifier has an SVO configuration (“avarice will preserve a man”), we can tell that it's a dependent clause rather than a phrase. From there, we can deduce further that it is an adverb clause, because it is conveying subordinate information to the second independent clause. Putting the modifying adverb clause between these two independent clauses has a few important effects: it bookends the sentence with weightier components, it creates variety in the sentence's rhythm and thus makes it more engaging, and also provides background information that prefaces the second main clause.

Although the content and form of Frederick Douglass's speech differ from Paine's pamphlet, its sentences also operate by the same principles. Douglass writes:

Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare

to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery—the great sin and shame of America!

A reader can tell at a glance that this sentence is rich with modifiers, and, in fact, branches in all three directions. Here’s what the sentence looks like broken down to its single, independent clause and the modifiers it requires to make sense:

I will dare to call in question and to denounce everything.

Even within this single clause, we have several infinitive phrases (to call and to denounce) that expand the main action of dare.

Here’s what the modifications on the left (preceding the subject) look like:

Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion,

This is a participial verb phrase, because it starts with a verb performing a background action (i.e., Douglass standing with God and the slave is a background action to his dare, and it is being performed as he goes into the main action of “dare”).

Here are the modifiers in the middle (between the subject and verb):

in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon,

All three “in the name of”s in this part of the sentence are prepositional phrases which contextualize the main action of “dare,” making it more specific and complex. There are also several adjective clauses in here—“which is outraged,” “which is fettered,” and “which are disregarded and trampled upon”—that clarify the nouns “humanity,” “liberty,” and “the constitution and the Bible,” respectively.

Here are the modifiers on the right:

[everything] that serves to perpetuate slavery—the great sin and shame of America!

“That serves to perpetuate slavery” is an adjective clause with an infinitive phrase. It provides a more specific context for what Douglass means by “everything.” “The great sin and shame of America” is an appositive noun phrase, which also serves to clarify exactly how Douglass views slavery.

Study Questions for Sentence Analysis

1. How do participial and absolute phrases create layers of action within a sentence?

2. What kinds of modifiers are most prevalent in Paine’s and Douglass’s texts, and how do they shape the larger piece?
3. What kind of modifying phrases and clauses tend to branch a sentence in the middle, and why do you think that is?
4. How do you distinguish an independent clause from a dependent clause?

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Analyzing Nonfiction through Tropes and Schemes

Matt McKinney

In addition to examining sentences in terms of modifiers and branching, a sentence-level analysis of nonfiction literature also encompasses the use of **tropes** and **schemes**. In this particular context, tropes refer to the manners in which writers alter, manipulate, or play with the literal meanings of words. Schemes, by contrast, refer to syntactical patterns the writer employs to create a particular rhythmic effect in a text. Both tropes and schemes contain different subcategories within themselves, which signify their particular mechanisms and effects.

Tropes

Just as in fiction, nonfiction writers use tropes to expand and alter the meanings of words for several purposes: to clarify, to entertain, and to consolidate. There are more specific types of trope than this chapter could possibly cover, but it’s very helpful to be aware of three major categories of trope types. These are listed below.

Tropes of identification encompass metaphors, similes, and analogies, among others. These tropes link two distinct subjects with one another in order to make a comparison. These comparisons often accentuate certain aspects of each subject that the writer wants the reader to understand. Different tropes of identification also create different levels of distance between the two subjects compared. For example, a simile (“He was as unstable as a powder

keg”) creates more distance between subjects than a metaphor (“He was a powder keg”). Be mindful that no comparison is perfect, so all similes will be imperfect on some level. For example, life is like a game of chess in that being strategic and goal-oriented are good qualities, but unlike chess, people don’t start life with equitable resources, and sometimes “winning” is not about defeating an opponent.

Tropes of substitution also link two subjects; however, these two subjects already have a concrete connection with one another. The most common tropes of substitution are metonymy and synecdoche (external vs. internal substitutions, respectively). Metonymy can manifest in a number of external substitutions such as:

- **Container for contained:** That was such a tasty **dish**.
 - This substitution classifies a wide variety of meals and cuisines under one category, emphasizing its status over origin or type.
- **Controller for controlled:** **Putin** invaded Ukraine.
 - This substitution calls attention to the man responsible for the invasion, rather than the soldiers carrying out his orders.
- **Action for actor:** That biker has a sweet **ride**.
 - This substitution makes the subject of the biker look more active, and is less formal than “motorcycle.”
- **Effect for cause:** They took a swig of **confidence** to get on the dance floor.
 - This substitution highlights the reason why this person is drinking alcohol in a tense or nervous situation.
- **Building for organization:** **The White House** is taking a hard stance on the crisis.
 - This substitution provides a shorthand for all the parties responsible in the executive branch and forms them into a cohesive whole that also signifies their locale.

Synecdoche, by contrast, is most often a substitution of a part for the whole, such as when a body part stands in for the entire person. As a result, synecdoches are often more intimate or visceral than metonymies are (“He has my heart” or “I can’t stand that neckbeard” or “The hands left the factory”).

Tropes of inversion alter the literal meaning of a word, usually for dramatic or sarcastic effect. Irony is the most common of these types of tropes, and typically inverts the meaning of a word. Variants of irony, like hyperbole or litotes (understatement), alter literal meaning by

degrees. Still other tropes of inversion, like periphrasis, discuss a subject in a deliberately long-winded and vague manner to create a particular rhetorical effect.

Frederick Douglass employs tropes from all three categories in “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July” to great effect:

This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. This, to you, is what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your great deliverance; and to the signs, and to the wonders, associated with that act, and that day...

Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival...

The American church is guilty, when viewed in connection with what it is doing to uphold slavery; but it is superlatively guilty when viewed in connection with its ability to abolish slavery.

In this passage, Douglass uses an analogy to frame the importance of the 4th of July as a day of emancipation. This analogy, which compares the day to Passover, not only links the nation to Judeo-Christian beliefs, but also foreshadows Douglass’s later points on the feelings of enslaved Black people. He also uses the synecdoche “your minds” to sharpen the focus on his audience’s imaginations. In the next section, he uses hyperbole and irony to illustrate how hypocritical the 4th of July’s celebration of freedom from tyranny is. Finally, in the third section of the quote, he uses the metonymy “American church” as a substitution for American Christians; this metonymy emphasizes the institution on a large and small scale.

Schemes

The rhythmic patterns that schemes create in a nonfiction text can vary in type, degree, and intensity. Some, like parallelism, are barely noticeable at times; others, like anastrophe, inherently call attention to themselves. Below are the major categories of schemes, with some textual examples to demonstrate how they function.

Schemes of balance are syntactical patterns that create symmetry on the word, phrase, and clause levels. These schemes create fluidity when information is stacked, making it easier for readers to process new information. For example, parallelism can be found in a text as mundane as a shopping list (“I need bread, milk, and chocolate chips”). If all of the items are of the same syllabic length, then you would have both a parallelism and an isocolon (“I need

bread, milk, and eggs”). Another type of balance scheme, antithesis, uses symmetry to highlight contrasting elements (“All is fair in love and war”).

Schemes of repetition create a rhythmic emphasis at key points in a sentence to stimulate recall and amplify the repeated words’ or phrases’ importance. Sometimes each instance of the repetition maintains equilibrium with the others, such as anaphora or epistrophe (when a word or phrase is repeated either at the beginnings or ends of sentences, respectively). Other times, the repetition crescendos in length and intensity, as we see with the climax scheme.

Schemes of omission remove words and phrases that would ordinarily appear in a sentence, but only to a degree where the sentence is still comprehensible to the reader. Removing these parts of a sentence can streamline its readability, shift the emphasis in a sentence, and create other unique rhythmic effects. For example, applying ellipsis to “She loves me, and I love her” results in a more poetic sentence: “She loves me, and I her.” Other schemes of omission include asyndeton, which omits conjunctions (“I came, I saw, I conquered”) and polysyndeton, which adds them (“Neither rain nor snow nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds”).

Schemes of unusual word order, as the name implies, rearrange the syntax of a passage in an unconventional way, or otherwise disrupt the flow of a sentence. Rearranging the words of a sentence via anastrophe, for instance, can make an otherwise plain passage stand out: “the three brothers” versus “the brothers three.” Parenthesis alters the sentence as a whole by interjecting an aside phrase or clause (like this one) somewhere in the middle.

These four scheme types overlap frequently in nonfiction literature. Passages in Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* frequently demonstrate this layering:

A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom...

Going through this passage bit by bit, we can see quite a few schemes operating in conjunction with one another here. “A thing wrong” is an example of anastrophe, and the pairing of “wrong” and “right” is an antithesis (a scheme of balance). “Gives it a...” and “raises at first...” is an example of parallelism that gives equal weight to both actions.

As a long and violent abuse of power is generally the Means of calling the right of it in question (and in Matters too which might never have been thought of, had not the Sufferers been aggravated into the inquiry), and as the King of England hath undertaken in his own Right to support the Parliament in what he calls Theirs, and as the good people of this country are grievously oppressed by the combination, they have an undoubted privilege to inquire into the pretensions of both, and equally to reject the usurpation of either.

In this longer sentence, each repetition of “as” is an anaphora that also begins a parallelism, which helps the reader intuit that each of these adverb clauses is building towards the independent clause at the end of the sentence (which in turn functions as the climax). The parenthesis of (“and in Matters too...”) adds context to the first clause while clearly demarcating the interjection.

Combined, our being able to identify each scheme and the effects they create give us a greater understanding of Paine’s intentions in terms of motivating his readers to take action, as well as a greater appreciation of Paine’s craft as a writer.

Study Questions for Tropes and Schemes

1. What are some ways tropes and schemes can work together to create particular stylistic effects in a literary work of nonfiction?
2. How do tropes and schemes help a writer establish a rapport with their audience?
3. What are some of the most prevalent tropes in *Common Sense*, and how do they reflect Paine’s purpose for writing?
4. What are some of the most prominent schemes that Douglass uses, and how do they help him appeal to the emotions of his audience?

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Writing About Nonfiction Literature

Matt McKinney

Each of the layers of analysis that we’ve covered in this chapter—genre classification, cultural and biographical contexts, literary elements, sentence analysis, and tropes and schemes—are all potentially fruitful areas of exploration for a literary essay about a nonfiction text. Incorporating them all, however, would likely be overwhelming for most undergraduate

papers, forcing the writer to either skim the surface over each of them or turn in an excessively lengthy draft. How, then, should a writer decide which layers to focus on and which to potentially omit?

The two biggest factors to consider in answering this question are progression and connections. Generally speaking, when you're moving from macro- to micro-levels of literary analysis, or vice versa, it's best to stick with going in the same direction as much as possible. Moving back and forth between sentence analysis and cultural context multiple times in rapid succession, for example, is likely going to confuse your reader. Being consistent in your paper's progression, however, can amplify the points you're making and emphasize their progression for the reader. Concepts that are relatively close to one another in scale (like cultural and biographical contexts) also lend themselves to being easily connected with one another.

It's also important, however, to help the reader understand explicit connections between macro- and micro-concepts. For example, how does an author's use of a particular metaphor or symbol reflect the cultural backgrounds of the writer and their audience? How does the genre of a nonfiction text clarify the writer's structural choices? Being able to answer these questions about and make these connections within your text will not only demonstrate your understanding of it, it will make your analysis more creative and compelling for the reader. Without being able to make these connections, it will be harder to determine as the writer which layers of analysis are most important. It's also much easier to fall into the trap of simply listing a bunch of concepts that are present ("The writer uses metaphors, isocolon, and antithesis in this piece."), which doesn't help the reader understand the larger significance of the author's choices or your analysis.

In order to approach analyzing a nonfiction piece more systematically, it's best to split your analysis into answering three questions: the what, the why, and the how. Each question covers a different aspect of the text. As you review each question and the different ways you could answer, keep in mind that you do not need to cover them all in an undergraduate essay (particularly those within the why).

1. The **what** is the primary stylistic "feel" of your text. In other words, what writing techniques does the writer use, and what emotions/perceptions do they evoke? Keep in mind that:
 - The "feel" will not be homogeneous, but is likely to change within any passage, and definitely across passages. These changes are interesting and have to be noted.
 - The "feel" is not always immediately apparent, and likely your relationship to the text and the writer will shape what the feel is. This fact is usually essential to your argument: what does your approach and context do to the effect?

- The aim is NOT to convey the same feeling in your own writing. So in describing here, we don't meet imitating (we're practicing that elsewhere). Rather, try to come up with an analytic language to describe the feeling and then provide some textual evidence so that we can "know that feel."
2. Explain **why** the stylistic feel is important or interesting by considering questions of context, either at the time of writing, now, or both. Note that this is likely to require (informal) research, although some texts will contain meta-reflection that can be used as evidence. Possible approaches:
- Consider context internal to the text: how does the style and this effect relate to (alter, become essential for) what is being said or described?
 - Consider the cultural contexts at the time of writing. What was going on that might demand this effect?
 - Consider elements of authorship: what do we know about that author's approach and aim that would help us understand these effects? (While author intention is not to be taken as authoritative, it can help clarify the stylistic approach as long as you also attend to the text first and foremost).
 - Consider the rhetorical challenges that your text might be addressing in terms of audience preconceptions, resistances, hopes, experiences, etc.
 - Consider the current setting for reading this text, particularly in how it might alter, change, or perhaps need the effect described in the what portion of your paper.
3. The **how** consists of a detailed analysis of the stylistic nuances present in your text. These should include the literary elements, the sentence-level stylistic choices, and the tropes and schemes. However, what you focus on will be determined by what you are trying to show (your overall thesis) and by the text itself--not all stylistic elements will support your larger argument (that is, they won't all be interesting) nor will every text possess all the elements of style we discuss in this course.
- Do not just describe what the text is doing, but analyze it. To do so you need to introduce a passage in relation to your thesis, insert the relevant passage into your paper (3-8 lines at a time), and then point out what is interesting in that passage and why.

Although nonfiction is defined in antithesis to fiction, nonfiction literature ultimately applies many of the same literary elements (and in the same manner) as fiction. Understanding the variety of genres and forms that nonfiction literature can take helps us to contextualize the writer's choices in the text. Additionally, analyzing additional layers of context such as the life

of the author and the cultural contexts relevant to authors and their audiences adds further insight to a nonfiction text's composition. On the sentence level, identifying patterns of branching and modifier usage, as well as the applications of tropes and schemes, helps us to appreciate how the smaller choices that authors make compound within a work.

The essay below will demonstrate how to approach analyzing a literary nonfiction text using the what/why/how approach, focusing on Douglass's "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July."

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Sample Analysis of Literary Nonfiction

How to Read this Section

This section contains two parts. First, you will find the prompt. The prompt is a very important element in any writing assignment. Don't be fooled by the fact it is short! Even though it is a short document, it highlights and makes clear every element you will need to complete the given assignment effectively. When writing an essay, the prompt is where you will both begin and end. Seriously. Before you begin, familiarize yourself with the prompt, and before you submit your final draft, give the prompt one final read over, making sure you have not left anything out. *When* you visit the University Writing Center and Libraries, they can better help if you bring along the prompt. Both the [Writing Center](#)² and the [Libraries](#)³ provide indispensable tools to aid students, so take advantage of their services.

The second part of this section contains a simulated student essay—the essay is not an actual student essay, but an essay written to demonstrate a strong student essay. The essay in this section is not meant to represent a "perfect" essay; it has its faults. However, this essay is an effective response to the given prompt. The "student" essay will be represented in a wide column on the left, and the grader's commentary will be represented in a smaller column on

² University Writing Center, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/>.

³ Texas A&M University Libraries, Texas A&M University, 2021, <https://library.tamu.edu/>.

the right. Use the example and the comments to help you think about how you might organize your own essay, to think about whether you will make similar—or different—choices.

Sample Prompt

203 OER Nonfiction Essay

Essay Description & Components

In this paper you will perform three preliminary tasks: one that answers the question “what?,” another that answers “why?,” and another that answers the “how.” You don’t need to cover every approach listed under the numbers (such as #2); these are just a range of ideas. The sections in the chapter cover the different components this handout details.

1. Describe the primary stylistic feel of your selection (the what). Keep in mind that:
 - a. The “feel” will not be homogeneous, but is likely to change within any passage, and definitely across passages.
 - b. The “feel” is not always immediately apparent, and likely your relationship to the text and the writer will shape what the feel is.
 - c. The aim is NOT to convey the same feeling in your own writing.
2. Explain why the stylistic feel is important or interesting by considering questions of context, either at the time of writing, now, or both. Possible approaches:
 - a. Consider context internal to the text: how does the style and this effect relate to (alter, become essential for) what is being said or described?
 - b. Consider the cultural contexts at the time of writing. What was going on that might demand this effect?
 - c. Consider elements of authorship: what do we know about that author’s approach and aim that would help us understand these effects? (While author intention is not to be taken as authoritative, it can help clarify the stylistic approach as long as you also attend to the text first and foremost).
 - d. Consider the rhetorical challenges that your text might be addressing in terms of audience preconceptions, resistances, hopes, experiences, etc.
 - e. Consider the current setting for reading this text, particularly in how it might alter, change, or perhaps need the effect described in the what portion of your paper.

3. Provide a detailed analysis of the stylistic nuances present in your text. These should include both the sentence-level stylistic choices and the tropes, schemes, and images.
 - a. Do not just describe what the text is doing, but analyze it. To do so you need to introduce a passage in relation to your thesis, insert the relevant passage into your paper (3-8 lines at a time), and then point out what is interesting in that passage and why.

| Student Essay | Instructor Annotations |
|--|--|
| <p>Korku Mensah</p> <p>Dr. Matt McKinney</p> <p>4/15/2022</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“This Fourth of July is Yours, not Mine”: Frederick Douglass Speaks on Fifth of July</p> | |
| <p>In 1852, Frederick Douglass was invited to give a speech to a group of privileged white people at the Rochester Anti-Slavery Sewing Society’s Fourth of July event to mark the independence anniversary celebration of the United States of America. Douglass delivered his speech on July 5th, 1852, a day after the anniversary celebration, in Rochester, New York. He chose to give his speech on July 5th instead of July 4th as a statement in support of his argument in which he implies that in light of the perpetual violence and brutality been enforced by the institution of slavery against enslaved</p> | <p>I like how quickly your intro gets to the immediate context of the speech.</p> <p>Since the first sentence provides the year, you don’t need to repeat that information in the next sentence.</p> |

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| <p>people in the United States, the country’s celebration of liberty and independence is ironic and holds no essence for enslaved people. In the speech titled “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?,” Douglass presents a rhetorical argument to oppose the institution of slavery. He speaks specifically against the Fugitive Slave Law of 1853, which mandated that enslaved people be returned to their enslavers, regardless of wherever they were in a free state. In a careful train of thought that threads together ethical, religious, and sociopolitical arguments, Douglass remonstrates the ironies in the values of the United States, particularly calling attention to the existing exploitative nature of slavery as an economically efficient system of wealth production for white Americans.</p> | <p>The FS Law was passed in 1850 (1853 would be after Douglass’s speech).</p> <p>Your thesis makes a strong and specific claim about the text. However, you do allude to your argument earlier in the introduction. I would avoid mentioning Douglass’s use of irony until your thesis to make your argument more impactful.</p> |
| <p>Douglass’s speech has three informally structured argument-based sections. He begins his address by focusing on a general public audience, then moves his focus to the church, and then addresses Republican politics. This presentation structure allows him to engage a broader audience and highlights how intrinsically connected politics and religion are in American discourse and practice. Throughout the speech, Douglass uses the second-person pronoun – “you” – to refer to his white American audience, establishing them as his sole unified audience who are Christians yet believe in their privileges over</p> | <p>I really like how you chose to focus on structure for one of your early body paragraphs; this gives you the ability to deep dive on more specific points later, and set up a general to specific pattern in your essay points.</p> <p>Your topic sentence claim could be a bit more argumentative. Why did Douglass choose this structure? Briefly making a claim about this will help the reader understand your assessment of Douglass’s choices.</p> |

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| <p>others. He switches tones from philosophical to critical and employs specific linguistic allusions to present his ethical, religious, and political arguments. With his rhetorical strategies, Douglass develops a passionate speech that persuasively addresses the oppressive system of slavery and calls for its urgent abolition.</p> | |
| <p>At the beginning of the speech, Douglass appears to be kind and gentle with his audience, honoring their forefathers as being “decorous, respectful, and loyal” (4) while addressing them as “fellow citizens.” He presents these ethical postures to please his audience and gain their trust, to begin with. A switch in tone and argument follows as he calls the Fourth of July celebration hypocritical, making his audience begin to feel uneasy at this point. Douglass switches between styles/tones and arguments to manage the feelings of his audience while getting his points across to them without losing them. Douglass also employs some referential techniques to control his audience’s imagination and establish his arguments on rhetorical appeals. For example, he uses biblical linguistic imageries like “the weak against the strong” (3), the “national altar” (8), “the canopy of heaven” (10), and “God speed” (21) – from an abolitionist’s poem that he introduces at the end of his speech. These Christian imageries are techniques that Douglass uses</p> | <p>“Douglass switches between styles/tones...” reads more like a topic sentence because you’re making a claim about the writing, rather than making a factual statement. It’s great that you’re incorporating textual evidence in this paragraph, but this should generally come after you’ve made your point. Otherwise, putting your sources in the topic sentence can create the impression that they’re framing the focus rather than supporting yours.</p> |

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| <p>to make his argument familiar and appealing to his White American Christian audience. Likewise, Douglass makes several references to the Constitution of America, which he emphasized as a “GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT” (19) to give authority and authenticity to his arguments. These frequent rhetorical references to religious and political documents again show how religion and politics are intertwined in the American psyche.</p> | |
| <p>Perhaps the most important point of the speech is captured in the title (What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?). This interrogative statement/question demands answers from his audience while pointing out the hypocrisy and irony of asking him, a formerly enslaved person, to give a speech about the “national independence” (8) from which Douglass feels “not included” (8) by stating that: “This Fourth [of] July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn” (8-9). In his speech, Douglass lays out his thesis in this emotional moment, contrasting the white American’s “high independence” (8) with the “stripes and death” (8) suffered by enslaved Black Americans. Douglass develops a narrative that clarifies that there exist two distinct American experiences, and there is an “immeasurable distance” (8) between them.</p> | <p>Great work with this topic sentence: you get your argument across quickly.</p> <p>You don’t need a colon to introduce the quote, since “that” leads into it organically.</p> |

Douglass's personal lived experience as a formally enslaved Black American gives him the authority to speak about the vast distinction in the experiences of white and Black Americans. According to his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, Douglass was subjected to physical brutality on Edward Covey's plantation when he was about 16 years old. His firsthand experience on this plantation exposed him to the horror of slavery and informed his growth into a passionate advocate for freedom and equality. Douglass's early life experiences shaped his adult life, nurturing his passion into a seasoned orator, writer, and activist for the end of slavery and the humanity and equal rights of all people. The solid reputation he built for himself over the years in his activism earned him the invitation to the 1852 Fourth of July event at Rochester. The speech draws on Douglass's lived experiences as he argues that the United States' "shouts of liberty and equality" (11) are false. He exposes the violence and brutality that is imminent in the system of slavery. Douglass impresses upon his audience that slavery is unjust and should be ended by probing and projecting the American value system's inherent ironies that encourage and support one group of people to enslave the other.

"Formerly" enslaved rather than formally. Italicize book titles as well.

I like that you connect Douglass's early life to the speech, but I would mention earlier in the paragraph that his invitation was based on his status as a former slave, rather than waiting to the end to make this point.

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| <p>Douglass exposes the complex American society of the 1850s. He forces his white American audience, who pride themselves on the liberty that was a core founding value of America yet undermining the freedom of enslaved people, to see through their hypocrisy and complication. Douglass asks poetically: “Is this the land your Fathers loved; The freedom which they toiled to win?; Is this the earth whereon they moved?; Are these the graves they slumber in?” (13-14). Employing this poetic style of presentation, with the element of anaphora, in making inferences about the core values of the American past, Douglass pushes his audience to admit to themselves the hypocrisy in claiming that they value equality when they do not believe in the freedom and humanity of all people. In effect, Douglass criticizes America by focusing on the country’s own history.</p> | <p>What does Douglass expose about this society? Clarify briefly for your reader’s benefit.</p> |
| <p>In sum, Douglass presents his arguments, in part, from a philosophical standpoint, making statements like “oppression makes a wise man mad” (4) and referring to the forefathers as those who “did not shrink from agitating against oppression” (6). Douglass gets his audience to agree with him in these persuasive statements as he appeals to their values and belief systems. Also, Douglass references America’s act of inviting “fugitives of oppression from abroad” (18) to project the irony that “the fugitives from [their] own land [they]</p> | <p>Very strong conclusion, especially in the second half where you illustrate the speech’s significance in contemporary America. I would suggest including some sort of recap of your body paragraph points, so that you can illustrate how you’ve synthesized them.</p> |

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| <p>advertise, hunt, arrest, shoot and kill” (18). By this revelation, Douglass submits that oppression occurs in America contrary to the country’s purported “love of liberty” (17). Having established that the forefathers resisted oppression and noted slavery as a system of oppression, Douglass solidifies his arguments and drives home his point on the hypocrisy of the American society given the country’s history and acclaimed values. Although slavery is extinct by law, it is extant through its quintessential relationship with racism, subjecting and suppressing African American bodies and cultures through America’s social and criminal justice systems. This is a systemic or a new form of oppression with the same impact as their enslaved ancestors endured. And since Americans still celebrate their founding values of liberty, justice, and equality, the continuous presence of racism in America today signals the perennial hypocrisy of American society.</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Work Cited</p> <p>Douglass, Frederick. ““What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”.” <i>Teaching American History</i>, 27 Apr. 2022, https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/.</p> | |

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Mensah, Korku [pseud.]. "Literary Nonfiction: 'This Fourth of July is Yours, not Mine': Frederick Douglass Speaks on Fifth of July." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

Writing a Literary Essay: Moving from Surface to Subtext

Introduction

Dorothy Todd

In a literature classroom, conversations are the primary means through which you will communicate the ideas and arguments that you have developed about the texts you encounter. These conversations may take the form of a classroom discussion, a series of online forum or discussion posts, or even a research paper. This chapter will introduce to you the habits of mind that will help you think about your writing as participating in conversations and will also describe the processes of writing a literary essay that includes research.

Like so many of the activities that we participate in daily, writing is a process. Any process usually consists of a series of steps. When we set out to plant flowers in a pot, for instance, we all tend to follow the same basic process: we find a pot that we like, put soil in the pot, carefully place the plant in the soil without damaging the roots, add soil to fill the pot, water the plant regularly, and enjoy the blooming flowers. Similarly, there are certain common characteristics of academic writing, and the best way to ensure that your writing includes these characteristics is to follow the steps of the **writing process**. There's one important caveat: not everyone's writing process will look *exactly* the same. Your classmate might create extensive word webs before drafting each assignment while you find that creating a thorough outline best prepares you to write a successful essay. Both of your processes are equally valid. Part of the writing process is figuring out what combination of strategies works best for you. One thing is certain, though: starting a complex writing assignment the night before it is due is not an effective writing process!

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Joining the Conversation

Dorothy Todd, Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, and Kathy Anders

The best way to get off on the right foot as you begin the writing process is to think of your writing as part of a conversation. Now you might be asking yourself, “How is writing a conversation?” After all, when we think of writing, we tend to think of the solitary individual putting pen to paper or maybe even the flutter of anxiety that emerges when it’s just you, a blinking cursor, a blank computer screen, and a looming deadline. Yet if we stop and think about it, writing is almost always a response to the circulation of ideas happening around us. A student might write an op-ed in the university newspaper in response to a new campus policy. A child at summer camp might write a letter to their best friend at home after making friendship bracelets during arts and crafts. You have probably written many assignments in which you participate in a conversation by responding to a question that your instructor posed. In all of these instances, writing occurs in response to, and in conversation with, other ideas. But even if an instructor does not provide a specific prompt to which you should respond, a good writer will still enter into conversations through their writing. Consider this oft-cited passage by philosopher Kenneth Burke and how this understanding of conversations might inform the way we write:

You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him. . . . The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in process.

—Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*¹

From the standpoint of writing a literary essay with research, the most striking element of this passage is the idea that we do not jump headlong into the conversation without first getting a sense of the conversation. Just as it would be foolhardy to launch a boat into a stream without first determining the depth and speed of the water, as well as what lies downstream, it is injudicious to enter a conversation until you know the nature of it. When we do decide to enter the conversation by stating our argument—what Burke refers to as “put[ting] in your oar”—we do so using the language, rhetorical strategies, and agreed-upon conventions of the conversation. You will not be rhetorically effective if your argument does not reflect and respond to the conversation into which you are entering.

¹ Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 110–11.

Finding Your Voice

Joining the conversation, however, does not mean losing your individual **voice**. In fact, joining the conversation allows you to find and amplify your voice as you bring your unique perspective into a conversation that has previously not benefited from your presence. Students sometimes think that the mark of “good” academic writing is inscrutability. The longer the sentences and the more obscure the words, the better the argument, or so the thinking goes. Remember, though, that the goal of all writing is to communicate one’s ideas and arguments clearly and effectively. The best writing thus occurs when a writer effectively navigates complex, multifaceted ideas through the clarity and precision of their own unique voice.

A Note About Academic Conventions

While bringing your unique voice to the conversation is invaluable, you should also remember that there are certain agreed-upon conventions when it comes to writing about literature. For instance, we use present tense when we write about literary works because the actions with the texts are considered to be always happening. When you think about it, it makes sense: you can open a book to the same section at different times in your life and there are the same words conveying the same actions (although not always the same meaning). For example, if you are composing an essay about *Twelfth Night*,² you might write the following:

In the play’s open scene, Orsino remembers, “O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first, / Methought she purged the air of pestilence” (1.1.20-21).

Even though Orsino uses past tense to tell us what he is recalling from his past, you, the literary critic, use present tense when you are writing about it.

Finding Out What’s Out There: Discovery and Exploration

Now that we have established how the process of writing about literature begins by joining a conversation, you might be wondering how you find these conversations! Your instructor will probably point you toward some of them, perhaps by introducing a particular **theoretical framework** for studying a text or by assigning a secondary source for you to read in conjunction with a primary text. However, to really find out what kinds of conversations scholars are having about a particular text—and to identify how you might contribute to that conversation—you will need to do exploratory research.

² William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/twelfth-night/>.

Before moving into any exploratory research you might undertake, however, let's define a few important terms you will undoubtedly encounter. **Primary texts**, or primary sources, are typically original sources upon which scholars base other research. Primary sources have not been filtered through analysis or evaluation and are fixed in the time period involved. Letters, diaries, manuscripts, and even social media posts are common types of primary sources. In ENGL 203, you will commonly encounter other primary sources: novels, plays, poetry, stories, etc. **Secondary texts** or sources are often created using primary sources. They typically involve analysis or evaluation of primary sources, often with the benefit of hindsight or distance from the time period involved. Commentaries, criticisms, and histories are a few common types of secondary texts.

There are many types of research that happen with literary texts. In the case of older works, you may discover that there are conversations about the text that have been going on for hundreds of years, and you may be more interested in what contemporary scholars have to say about a work than what scholars from one hundred years ago have posited. You might be interested in the history of how a text was physically created and published, or you might want to know about how a text fits into the historical circumstances in which it was composed. Whenever you begin trying to get a sense of what is being said about a text, you may begin exploring secondary texts.

Sometimes this might begin as a Google search, or by perusing a Wikipedia entry. This type of browsing and exploration can help you discover in broad strokes the conversations surrounding a text. As you do this, note which words people use to describe those questions. For example, if you are looking for topics regarding a certain literary theory, you may find that scholars in that area use specific terms for that theory, such as "feminist" or "psychoanalytic." If you do any preliminary searching in engines like Google, examine your results for key terms that stick out, and make a note of them so you can use them to browse in library databases. While sources like Wikipedia can be helpful for discovering terms, browsing in a library database will let you refine a topic by showing you material that is specific to literary scholarship, much of which is not available openly on the web.

Exploring databases or journals can be a great way to uncover the conversation about a particular work of literature. Maybe you have to write a paper incorporating a theoretical lens about one of the texts you're reading this semester. You can try some exploratory searches in a database such as *MLA International Bibliography* to get an idea of what conversations about that text are already happening.

For instance, if you're interested in writing an essay on *Twelfth Night*, you could try searching for *Twelfth Night* in *MLA International Bibliography*, as is depicted in Figure 8.1. By indicating that *Twelfth Night* is the Primary Subject Work, you're telling the database that the articles it finds should be analyzing *Twelfth Night*. Once you've found items about *Twelfth Night*, you can start adding some additional terms in the second search box to indicate the theoretical lens

you want to explore. You could try *econ** to find materials discussing both *Twelfth Night* and economics/economies, or you might use the root term *fem** to search for articles examining *Twelfth Night* within a feminist framework or to find articles that consider the play's female characters. Tip: The * (asterisk) tells the database to look for terms with any ending after the text you added (e.g., *fem** yields materials including any of the following words: female, feminine, feminism, feminist).

The screenshot shows the Texas A&M University Libraries search interface. At the top, it says "Searching: MLA International Bibliography | Choose Databases". The search bar contains "twelfth night" and "econ*" with an AND operator. There are two more search boxes with "AND" operators and "Select a Field (optional)" dropdowns. A green "Search" button is on the right. Below the search bar are links for "Basic Search", "Advanced Search", and "Search History".

On the left, there is a "Refine Results" sidebar. It shows the "Current Search" as "SK twelfth night AND econ*" and an "Expander" for "Apply equivalent subjects".

The main search results area shows "Search Results: 1 - 7 of 7" and "Relevance" and "Page Options" dropdowns. The first result is "1. Shakespeare's Illyria, Sicily and Bohemia: Other Spaces, Other Times, or Other Economies?". It includes a book icon, the author "By: Procházka, Martin. pp. 1-17 IN: Adanur, Evrim Doğan(ed.); Mentеше, Oya Batum(preface) IDEA: Studies in English. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing; 2011. xiii, 547 (book article)", and "Subjects: English literature; 1500-1599; Shakespeare, William (1564-1616); Twelfth Night (1601); The Winter's Tale (1610-1611); comedy; romance; setting; other place; fictionality; historicity; spatiotemporal relations; **economy**".

Figure 8.1 Searching for *Twelfth Night* AND *econ** in *MLA International Bibliography*.

Exploratory searching can help you see how robust the conversation is about a particular topic. Searching for *Twelfth Night* AND *econ** brings back only a handful of results, while *Twelfth Night* AND *fem** brings back many results. (See "Diving into Research" below for more detailed information about strategies about successful database searching.) This tells you that there is much more conversation happening about *Twelfth Night* using a feminist lens (although that doesn't mean that an economic reading of *Twelfth Night* isn't a valid one).

Exploratory searching doesn't just help you see whether there are a lot of sources available on a particular text or topic. Such searches will also help you start to understand the conversation that is happening. Recall the analogy by Burke at the beginning of this chapter: in order to put your own oar (your claim or argument) into the stream (the critical

conversation, or what credible sources are saying about the topic), you must first assess that stream (read the sources), and then dip your own oar in (write your own response). Clicking on “Find Text @ TAMU” will bring you to the article/book chapter/book, if available electronically. Take a look at some of the abstracts to help you get a sense of the ways that other scholars are applying that theoretical lens to the text you’re interested in. Does anything pique your interest? Does it give you any ideas on how you could apply that theoretical lens in your own way in order to contribute to the conversation?

One important thing to note about this type of exploratory searching is that not every text is written about as extensively as *Twelfth Night*. If you try searching for the title of your text and don’t get any or very few, results, here are a few strategies you can try:

1. Simplify your search. Search for the title of your text alone, without any filters like “Primary Subject Work” or theoretical lenses.
2. Add alternate terms, like the author’s name. For example, you could search *Twelfth Night* OR *William Shakespeare*.
3. Add broader terms like the genre or time period. For example, *Twelfth Night* OR *William Shakespeare* OR *drama* OR *Elizabethan*.

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Generating Ideas

Dorothy Todd, Sarah LeMire, and Terri Pantuso

As mentioned above, once you get a sense of the conversations revolving around your chosen text or texts, it’s time to think about how you might add to one or more of these conversations. Even if you have a good sense of what you want to write about, the following strategies (used either individually or together) can help you generate ideas for the focus of your paper, identify potential evidence for your argument, and begin to develop an organizational structure for your essay.

Common Brainstorming Strategies

For all of the following strategies, write down as many ideas as you can as quickly as you can. Don't judge the ideas based on their quality; just focus on coming up with as many as possible. These techniques work well in groups or on your own.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a general term where a writer randomly comes up with topic ideas as they occur in their brain. There are no criteria, one simply lists ideas for topics. An example of what this might look like follows:

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Standards of beauty in novels | Portrayals of nannies in poetry | Poems that talk about food |
| Plays about kings | Movie adaptations of Shakespeare | Short stories about war |
| First-person adolescent girl narratives | Depictions of non-traditional families in novels | Weather as a central character in plays |

Freewriting

Give yourself about 5-10 minutes to write, nonstop, ideas that come to mind about your potential topic. Do not worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar, or any rules. The goal is to get your ideas out as they come to mind. This is different from brainstorming because you are writing one nonstop sentence rather than a list of words. Sometimes known as freewriting, this technique affords you the opportunity to work through ideas. An example follows:

Sula is a book about women's relationships with other women and with their children and in the absence of men. It is a book that explores themes of racial inequity, unequal treatment, it is difficult and awkward. It is one of Toni Morrison's best books even though it is short. I like short books, this does not mean it is not a good book. It is a critical piece of writing on difficult topics. Difficult topics sometimes make people uncomfortable, but being uncomfortable can lead to change. But Sula never changes, but the community does. Community is important during times of trouble.

Clustering or Creating a Cluster Map

Select 2-3 words that you feel are central to your topic. Write each one in the middle of a page and draw a circle around it. As you think about each word individually, write other ideas that relate to those central words around your central topic and draw circles around the branching ideas. Connect them with lines to the center/central topic. This method is referred to as clustering because your ideas cluster around the central topic. This visual method can be used to develop your thesis.

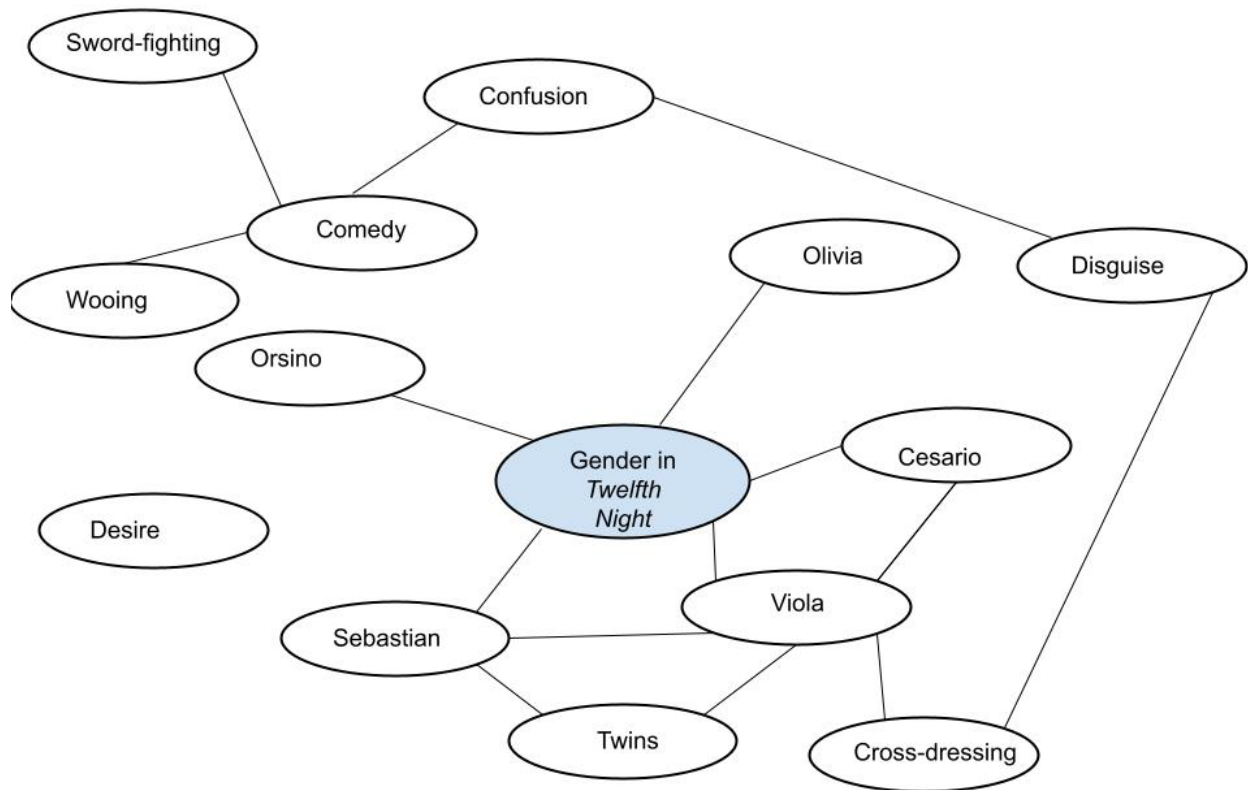


Figure 8.2 Clustering or Creating a Cluster Map based on the topic of Gender in *Twelfth Night*

As you list ideas and start thinking about connections between words and concepts, you might find yourself moving from a broad set of ideas (gender in *Twelfth Night*) to a more narrow focus that would be an appropriate topic for an essay (considering how the presentation of gender in *Twelfth Night* informs the play’s comedic scenes). Notice how creating a cluster map also reveals how open-ended a potential topic could be. A writer could have started out with the same topic—gender in *Twelfth Night*—and moved in an entirely different direction, perhaps thinking about depictions of masculinity through the characters of Orsino and Sebastian.

Creating a Word Map

Pick a key word, concept, idea, or theme from the text. Write down possible definitions, synonyms, and antonyms for your chosen word or concept. This technique can help you make previously unnoticed connections across a text and can even help you identify potential search terms before you delve into research. An example follows below:

| Key word/concept/idea/theme | Synonyms | Antonyms |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Despair | Destitute; broken dreams; nothingness; despondent | Optimistic; happy; endless possibilities; hope |
| Enlightenment | Knowledge; insight; aha moment; new information | Stunted; deterred; restrained |
| Food trucks | Mobile restaurants; meals on wheels; edibles on the go | Fixed buildings; restaurants; cafes; fine dining |

Designing a Venn Diagram

Draw a pair of intersecting circles. In one circle, list the text you're interested in writing about: in this case, *Twelfth Night*. In the second circle, write down an aspect of the text that interests you. Let's say you're interested in gender in *Twelfth Night*. You'd list *gender* in the second circle, and then brainstorm other related terms, such as *sexuality* or *women*, to support or narrow down your topic, as is depicted in Figure 8.3.

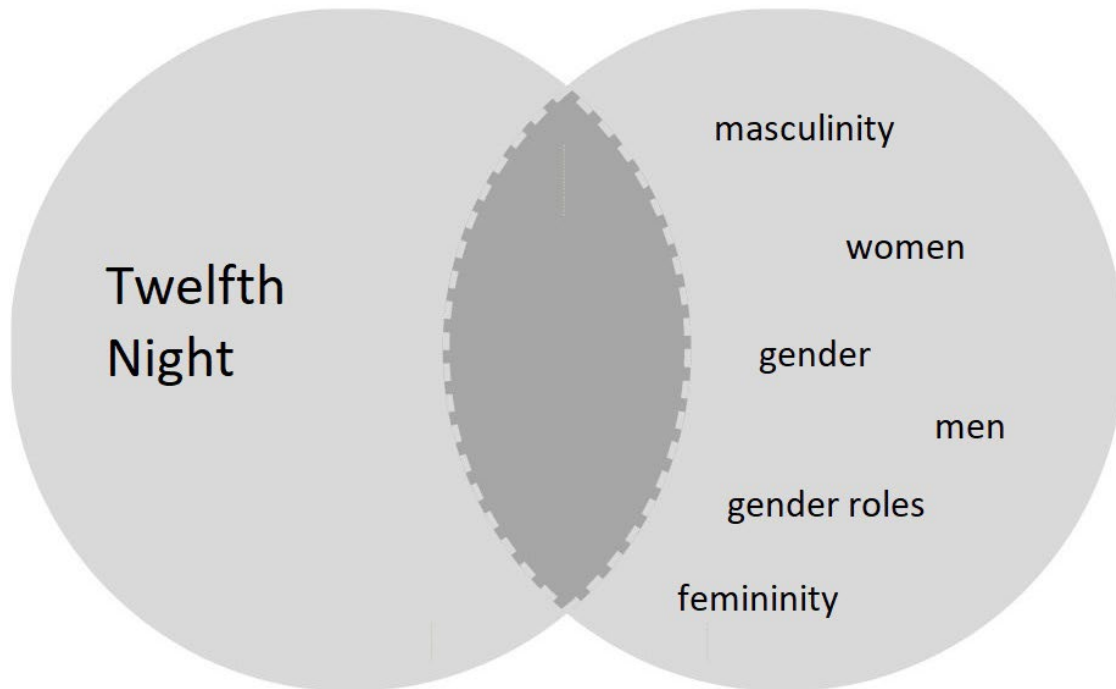


Figure 8.3. Venn Diagram of *Twelfth Night* and potential topics related to gender.

As you list terms, you may find that there is a concept that piques your interest. For instance, you may find that the idea of gender roles in *Twelfth Night* seems interesting. You could then use this topic for your essay.

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Diving into Research: Finding and Using Specific Sources

Dorothy Todd and Sarah LeMire

Once you have brainstormed a topic, a good next step is to explore library databases to see what research you can find on that topic. When writing about literature, there are a number

of types of sources that you can use as support for your writing, depending on your particular topic.

- The most common type of source is **literary criticism**, or books and articles that analyze literature. For instance, this type of source might look like an article analyzing the importance of clothing in *Twelfth Night*.
- It is also common to include sources from other disciplines, such as psychology or history. For instance, a history book about clothing in the Elizabethan era might be useful for a paper about gender and clothing.

The campus library is a good place to start looking for sources. Unlike search engines or publicly available databases like *Google Scholar*, library databases often focus on specific disciplines, so you are more likely to get relevant results.

To get started, go to the library homepage at library.tamu.edu and click on the Databases tab.

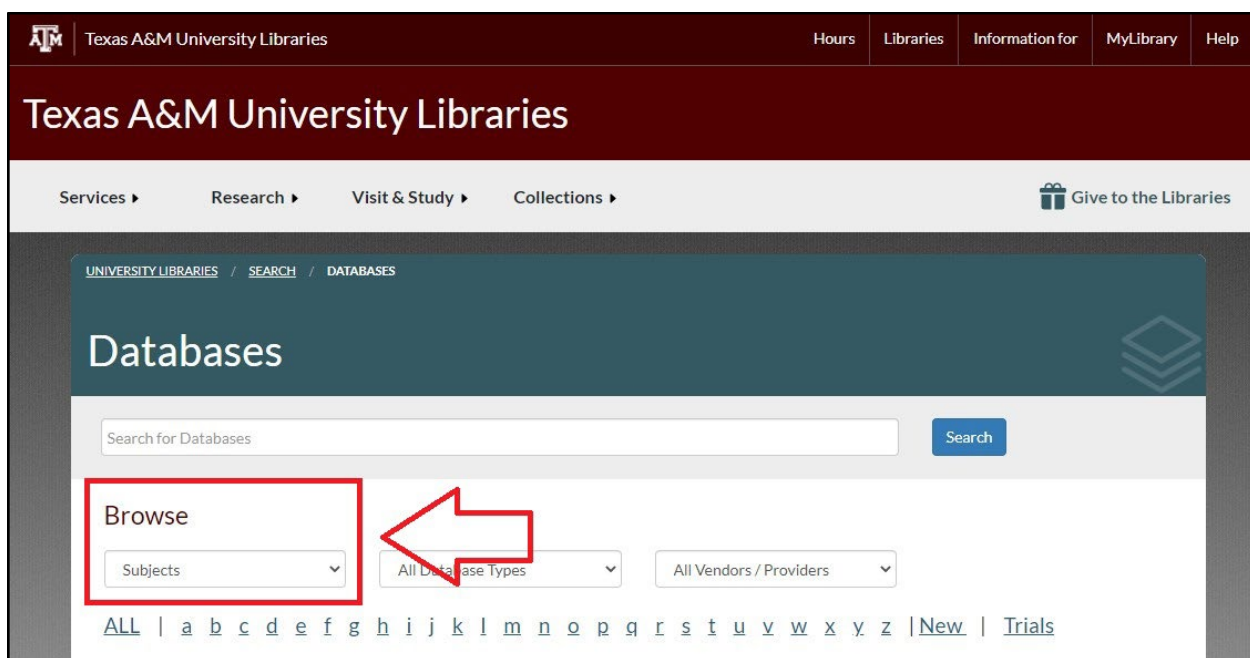


Figure 8.4 Browsing by subject within Databases on Texas A&M University Libraries site.

You can browse by subject, as pictured in Figure 8.4, to see the databases for different disciplines. If you're writing about a work of literature, often the English databases are the best place to start. If you're writing about a film, you may want to check out the film databases. Don't forget that databases for other disciplines may be helpful as well.

A common database to use for literary research is *MLA International Bibliography*, which is found listed with the English databases. *MLA International Bibliography* and other literary

criticism databases contain a variety of sources, including references to print sources like books and book chapters.

The search in *MLA International Bibliography* and many other databases operates like the Venn diagram previously described. Because discipline-specific databases are more focused than interdisciplinary databases like *Google Scholar*, it often helps to brainstorm several alternate terms for your intended topic before entering your search in the database. For instance, if you're interested in issues of gender, searching for terms like *sexuality*, *men*, *women*, *male*, and *female* can be useful alternate terms to finding sources related to gender (Figure 8.5). Similarly, you could search for the author of your text, its time period, or its genre in addition to searching for the title of the text. This strategy is particularly helpful when searching for contemporary texts or texts that have not been written about as extensively as Shakespearean texts.

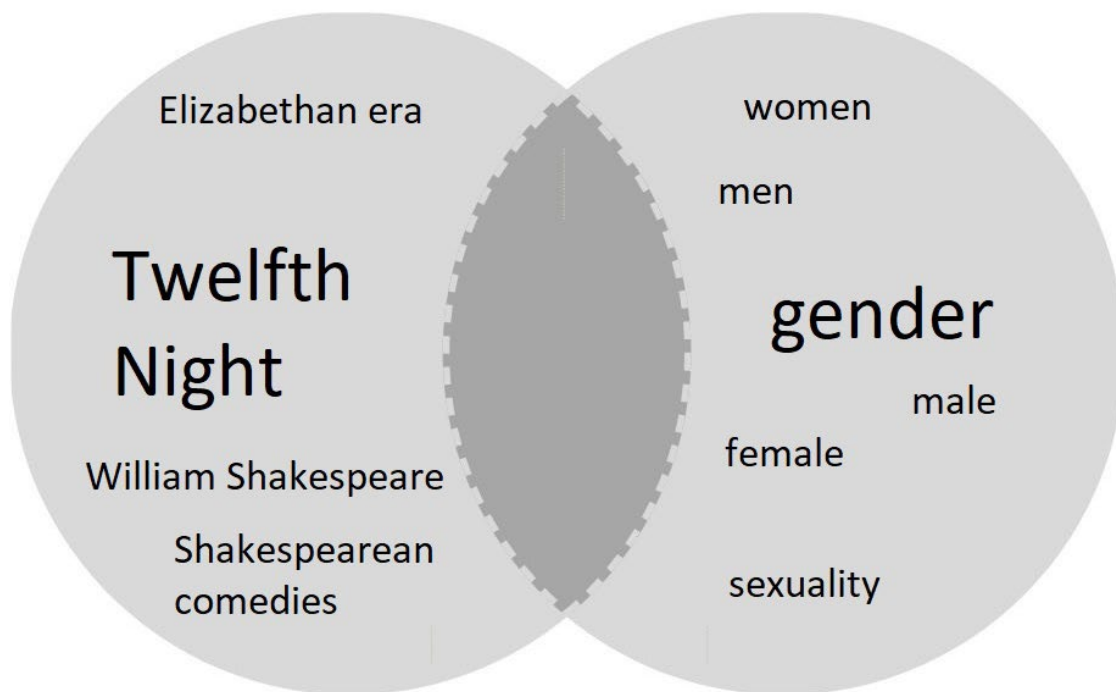


Figure 8.5. Venn Diagram of potential search terms related to *Twelfth Night* and gender.

Once you have brainstormed your search terms, you can enter them in the database (Figure 8.6). All of the terms from the first circle of your Venn diagram will go in the same search box, while all of the terms from the second circle of your Venn diagram will go in the second search box. As your topic begins to come into focus, you may add a third or fourth circle (or more) to your Venn diagram.

You can connect search terms in a library database using Boolean operators. **Boolean operators** are the terms AND, OR, and NOT. These terms tell the database how to interpret your combination of search terms:

- **AND** tells the database to look for items that include all of your search terms (e.g., results that talk about *both* gender and *Twelfth Night*).
- **OR** tells the database to look for items that include either of your search terms (e.g., results that talk about *either* *Twelfth Night* or Shakespeare).
- **NOT** tells the database to exclude a term. For instance, you might want items that talk about *Twelfth Night* and gender, but that exclude sources about dress. Use this operator with caution, though, as it is easy to inadvertently exclude relevant sources.

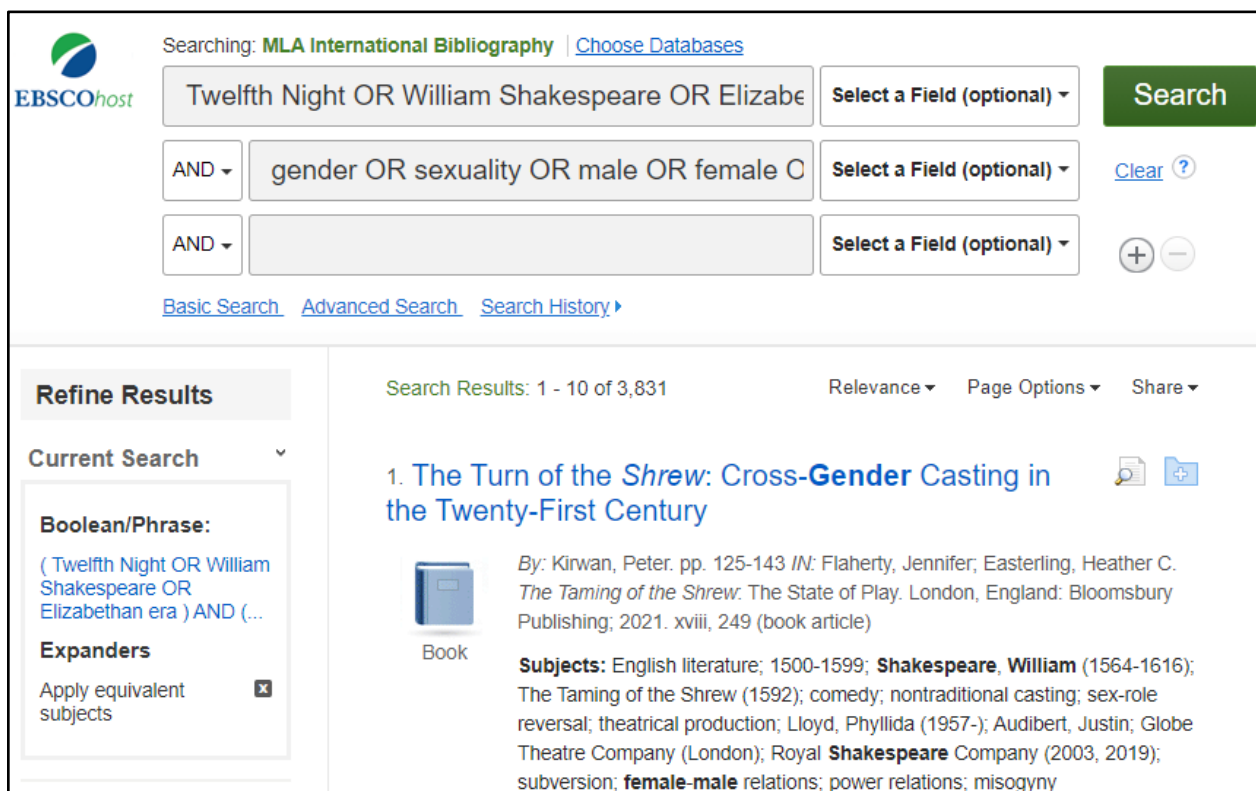


Figure 8.6. Searching for *Twelfth Night* OR *William Shakespeare* OR *Elizabethan era* AND *gender* OR *sexuality* OR *male* OR *female* in *MLA International Bibliography*.

Your search results will give you a sense of how much your topic has been written about in scholarly literature. For this search, there are thousands of sources available, and you will want to narrow down your results. For other topics and texts, there may be very few or even no sources available. That's okay! Thinking conceptually about your topic can help you find sources to support your argument. Think again about other ways to search for your topic. In which genre or genres does your text belong? If you are writing about the importance of music in *Night of the Living Dead*, you might search for *Night of the Living Dead* OR horror

movies. If you are writing about revenge in *Cask of Amontillado*, you might search for *Cask of Amontillado* OR mysteries.

Once you have refined your search strategy, you can begin to look through the sources you've retrieved. Some sources, like many journal articles, will be available electronically. Other sources, like the one in Figure 8.6, are found in books on the shelf. To view these sources, you can retrieve the book from the shelf, or you can make a request to have the book retrieved for you. Although electronic sources can be easier to access, don't discount the value of print sources. You may find all of the sources you need with just a quick trip to the stacks.

Reading Literary Criticism and Other Secondary Sources

Once you've found sources that look promising, it's time to dig into them. When reading literary criticism and other secondary sources, you want to practice the same active reading strategies you employ when reading any text for your college courses. These strategies include, but are not limited to, highlighting, underlining, taking notes, and asking questions of the text. Staying actively engaged with texts while reading them leads to better comprehension and helps you develop a sense of how other writers build arguments and convey information.

Along with the active reading strategies you are used to employing, here are a few specific strategies that will help you navigate the nuance and complexity of literary criticism and other secondary sources:

1. Ask yourself why you are reading the source. What about the source initially made it look promising when you were sorting through sources? What do you hope to learn or discover from this source?
2. Identify the source's thesis or main argument. Literary criticism and other forms of secondary sources often employ a standard structure, so look for an articulation of the source's main argument at the end of the introductory section of the source.
3. Identify the larger context or conversation in which the author is making their argument. Are they responding directly to other scholars? Do they reference other lines of thinking that precede them? Do they explicitly or implicitly position themselves within a particular school of thought or employ a particular theoretical lens?
4. Trace the relationship between the source's higher-level arguments and lower-level arguments. How does the author's evidence and analysis contribute to the source's main argument or thesis? Creating a simple outline allows you to see these relationships more clearly and helps you identify successful strategies for organizing your own writing.
5. Don't worry if you don't understand everything the first time you read the article. Literary criticism is dense, and you might have to reread sections of the source to

comprehend it. You might need to look up words in a dictionary or do a quick Google search to familiarize yourself with new concepts.

6. If you've employed active reading strategies and are still grappling with the source's argument or evidence after reading the source a few times, don't be afraid to reach out to your instructor. Your instructor can be a great resource in helping you distill a particularly complex source.

Joining the Conversation is Not Repeating the Conversation

Once you get a sense of the conversations that are occurring, it is time to think about how you might join one or more of them. Keep in mind that repeating the conversation is not the same as joining the conversation. You don't want merely to describe the conversation that is taking place. Instead, you want to engage actively in it, and that means building upon, responding to, disagreeing with, or refining the ideas that currently make up the conversation. Simply repeating the conversation rather than contributing to it is a common pitfall among college writers, and students tend to find themselves in this position when they try to apply the following type of logic in their arguments:

1. I argue that metonymy figures prominently in this poem.
2. Scholar X also argues that metonymy figures prominently in this poem.
3. I am correct in my argument that metonymy figures prominently in the poem because someone before me made the same argument.

Keep in mind that you want to contribute to the conversation about a text rather than only use the conversation to support your own ideas about the text. You also want to avoid only cherry-picking pieces of the conversation that support your own argument. Instead, you want to make space for your argument within the conversation by engaging critically with the ideas circulating within the conversation. Disagreeing with an idea is a straightforward way of entering into the conversation, but to contribute meaningfully to the conversation, you need to disagree with an idea AND explain *why* you disagree. Similarly, simply agreeing with an idea might help you enter the conversation, but in order to make yourself an important part of the conversation, you need to agree with an idea AND refine, expand, nuance, or otherwise build upon the idea with which you agree. This distinction may seem small, but approaching a literary essay as a conversation to which you are contributing will radically change how you conceptualize your argument, how you engage with scholars, and how you utilize evidence.

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Writing Your First Draft

Dorothy Todd, Claire Carly-Miles, and Terri Pantuso

Once you've identified a promising topic for your essay and have identified sources that you plan to incorporate into your essay, it's time to start drafting. While we often refer to writing as a *process*, it's more accurate to refer to writing as *a set of processes*. The singular word "process" suggests that there is one set of steps that we must complete in a particular order, and once we move through the process from the first step all the way to the last step, we are finished. In reality, writing is iterative or recursive, meaning that we might revisit or return to steps within this process as we move from brainstorming ideas to submitting the final draft. For instance, after writing your first draft, you might need to return to the process of developing and refining your thesis to make sure that it accurately reflects the evidence you've presented throughout your paper. Thinking of writing as a set of processes rather than just a singular process is also useful because the steps you take while writing your essay—and the order in which you take them—might not be exactly the same steps that your classmates use to write their essays. The most important aspect of mastering the writing process is finding a set of processes that works for you!

Developing a Thesis

A **thesis statement** articulates the central idea or main focus of your essay. It is a sentence (or sometimes a couple of sentences in a longer paper) that presents your argument. Usually, the thesis comes at the end of the first paragraph of the paper. A thesis should have two parts, a topic and a comment, so that readers will both know what your paper is about and be able to identify the specific claim that you are making about your chosen topic.

Sample thesis: Topic (what you're writing about) + comment (why it's important to write about the topic or what you want to say about it).

Remember that a good thesis statement should also be debatable. No one wants to read an essay in which you make an argument for a claim that is an established fact or for an idea that no one would disagree with. Similarly, you want to make sure that your thesis presents an argument that readers will care about and that changes the way they might think about a given text. In other words, your thesis should matter. If you find yourself asking “so what?” after drafting your thesis, you probably need to revise and refine! Lastly, a thesis statement should be appropriate in scope for the length of the paper. It would be nearly impossible to develop a convincing argument about the use of punctuation in Emily Dickinson’s poetry in a 1,000-word essay, but an essay of that length is well suited to making a claim about Dickinson’s unique use of punctuation in a single poem, perhaps “I’ll tell you how the Sun rose.” A narrow thesis, perhaps even narrower than you might initially anticipate when developing your working thesis, will allow you to develop your argument thoroughly and support it with concrete evidence (i.e., specific quotations and details from the text).

Keep in mind that your thesis is like a thread running through your essay. When hemming a pair of pants, for example, you do not always see the thread as you move the needle through the fabric, stitching from one side to the other. When examining one side of the fabric, you will see a disconnected line; however, there is always a consistent thread holding the hem together. Your thesis functions in the same way as you ‘thread’ it throughout your essay using topic sentences and keywords that relate back to the concepts in your thesis. Some of your body paragraphs might include anecdotal evidence related to your thesis, definitions of key concepts, comparisons to similar concepts, or further details that clarify your thesis.

If you think of your thesis first as a research question, then develop it into a statement that might change as you draft several times, you will see how your thesis should evolve to reflect the research you discover. While your thesis should come in the introductory section of your essay, sometimes you may find it elsewhere in your first draft. Oftentimes, in fact, you may review your first draft and find that your thesis appears most clearly in your concluding paragraph and that this final paragraph may even work better as your introductory paragraph. Keep an open mind and be prepared to revise in order to clarify your argument and strengthen your entire essay.

Identifying Problematic Thesis Statements

Now that we’ve discussed the features of a strong thesis, it’s important to identify some of the most common characteristics of weak thesis statements and to consider how to address these weaknesses.

Many students learned the five-paragraph essay form in middle or high school. When using this form, writers draft an introductory paragraph that concludes with a three-pronged thesis, then write three body paragraphs with one paragraph devoted to each of the three points mentioned in the thesis, and then wrap up the paper with a conclusion paragraph. Many

students had great success employing this form in writing assignments and standardized tests prior to college, so why give it up now? Simply put, a five-paragraph essay structure does not accommodate the habits of mind and rhetorical strategies that we need to develop as growing writers. Complexity, uncertainty, tension, risk, and revision are all parts of writing, and the five-paragraph essay structure encourages us only to examine evidence to the degree that we can slot that evidence into one of our three predetermined categories/paragraphs. Good writing occurs when we consider the ways in which evidence confirms—but also complicates—our ideas. Additionally, five-paragraph essays are usually quite boring to read. When you tell your readers in the thesis statement the three main ideas that your paper will discuss, readers have little motivation to read beyond the thesis. You have effectively revealed all your evidence in the first paragraph and have confirmed to your readers that there will be no complications or complexity in your ideas.

Thesis statements that are overly broad, that do not accurately reflect the arguments and evidence of the rest of the paper, or that make a claim with which no one would disagree are the other most common types of weak thesis statements. Consider the following thesis statement problems:

- **Too broad or vague:** If you can't successfully make your argument with the available time, space, and resources, you've probably made your thesis too broad. Think about narrowing the scope of your argument or qualifying your claim so that you will be successful in proving your claim.
- **Simply factual instead of debatable:** If you have a hard time imagining anyone disagreeing with your thesis, you've probably developed a thesis that is not debatable. Interrogating the interesting, the unusual, the unexpected, and the seemingly out of place in your chosen text(s) will help you move toward a claim that is debatable and that will inspire your readers to join in the conversation with you.
- **Not relevant:** If you write your working thesis, draft your paper, and never revisit your thesis during the process of revision, there is a high likelihood that your thesis does not accurately reflect the rest of the paper. As we encounter and make sense of evidence throughout the process of writing a draft, our understanding of our topic grows and becomes increasingly nuanced. Make sure that your thesis is always reflecting your most up-to-date understanding of your topic by revisiting your thesis often while drafting and revising.

Below you'll find three problematic thesis statements. Which of the above problems does each thesis statement struggle with, and how might you revise each in an attempt to remedy that problem (keeping in mind that the following might present more than one problem)?

1. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola assumes the identity of Cesario to serve as a page in Orsino's house.

Is this first thesis statement debatable? If it isn't, what might the author add to make it so?

2. In *Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare uses images of music, lovesickness, and madness.

This second thesis statement presents three topics (images of music, lovesickness, and madness). Already, we are able to predict that the essay that follows will have a body paragraph dedicated to each of these topics. If that essay's scope is ~1000 words, it is highly unlikely that the essay writer can actually develop an interesting argument about all three of these topics in the space provided. Yet even if they could, the thesis statement contains no comment on any of the topics. Yes, Shakespeare includes these images in his play, but so what? Why should we care? What's interesting about them? What is the rationale for the writer including these three topics in the same essay? How are they related to one another?

3. In *Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare considers gender.

This third thesis statement is way too broad and is also limited to a topic without elaborating on the significance of that topic. The essay writer needs to focus this thesis and include a comment about the topic. In narrowing the focus of the thesis and in making sure that it has a comment, they might try something like the following:

In *Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare emphasizes the limited opportunities afforded to early modern women through Viola's crossdressing and disguise as the page boy Cesario.

Now the topic is narrow and there is a comment about the topic; the writer is no longer discussing gender in an overly broad way but is instead focused on *how* Shakespeare's play engages with ideas about gender through Viola's disguise as Cesario. There is plenty to argue about both for and against this thesis, but now it is debatable, and we will expect the essay writer to demonstrate to us *how* they analyze evidence in order to support this thesis.

Organizing Your Essay

Once you've developed a working thesis, it's time to consider the organization or structure of your essay. A good organizational structure is paramount in academic writing; without clear and thoughtful organization, your essay will not be as persuasive as it could be. A strong essay will have its evidence arranged into paragraphs that are cohesive and that flow logically. To make sure your paper is organized effectively, you might create an **outline** in which you organize your thesis, sub-topics, and evidence using a series of headings and subheadings. Depending on the assignment, your instructor might require such an outline.

You might also choose to sketch out your paper's organization in a less formal way; writing down all the points you plan to address or even drawing a schematic in which you group points and evidence together will ensure that you have a plan of action for the paper's overall organization and for the organization of each paragraph.

Essays typically have three sections: an **introduction**, a **body** (composed of body paragraphs), and a **conclusion**. You might not necessarily draft the paragraphs in this order, but it's important to know how each section of the essay functions so that you can make sure each and every paragraph is in its most effective place by the time that you submit your final draft.

Introduction

The **introduction**, as the name suggests, should introduce readers to your topic, contextualize the topic, and present your thesis as clearly as possible. The introduction will often be a single paragraph, but in longer papers, two or even three paragraphs might make up the introductory section. In any case, the thesis should come at the end of the introduction, regardless of whether the introduction is a single paragraph or a small cluster of paragraphs. As you set out to write your introduction, make sure that you do not start your paper with an overly broad statement. Claims about all of human history or universal experiences at the beginning of your essay don't give your readers any sense of what your paper is really about. Skip the "since the beginning of time" or "in that day and age" type statements and get straight to the topic of the paper. A well-crafted introduction will pique its readers' interest without having to depend on sweeping statements or empty truisms.

Body

Body paragraphs in literary essays function like pieces of a puzzle. When you put all of the pieces of the puzzle together, you get a clear picture of the entire argument AND you are able to see how the pieces connect together. Each body paragraph provides a necessary and discrete part of the overall argument, and no two body paragraphs deal with the same sub-topic. To extend the puzzle simile, each piece of the puzzle provides a unique piece of the overall picture of the puzzle' design, and no two puzzle pieces should be identical.

So, how do you build a good body paragraph? Try to remember focus, coherence, and content!

First, make sure that the entire paragraph has one, and only one, focus. The topic sentence should accurately communicate the main point of the paragraph, and all of the content in the paragraph should clearly connect back to the topic sentence. In this way, the topic sentence functions for the paragraph similarly to how the thesis functions for the entire essay.

Second, create coherence within the paragraph so that readers understand the logical flow of your argument. You might ask yourself why a particular sentence follows the one before it

or why you presented evidence in a specific order. You can enhance the coherence of your paragraph by using transitional words and phrases to signal to readers the relationships between individual sentences or ideas. For example, using the transition “however” alerts readers that you are preparing to say something that contrasts with the idea communicated in the previous sentence. Similarly, the use of “moreover” or “additionally” lets readers know that you are adding more detail, or extra layers, to the ideas articulated in the previous sentence.

Lastly, ensure that the paragraph has enough content. A body paragraph needs several sentences to develop sufficiently. Provide ample evidence in each paragraph, and make sure you follow each piece of evidence with clear analysis. This evidence and analysis will function as content of the body paragraph, which will in turn ensure the idea presented in your topic sentence is thoroughly developed. When writing a literary essay, remember to include specific quotations from the text (and analysis) that support your topic sentence (and therefore support your thesis).

Developing Body Paragraphs

In developing the paragraphs that make up the body of your essay, you will consider several elements: topic sentences, evidence, analysis, and transitions.

Topic Sentences

As described above, each body paragraph should begin with a **topic sentence**. The topic sentence’s most obvious function is to present the topic of the body paragraph. Each body paragraph should have one (and only one) main idea, and the topic sentence should clearly communicate this main idea.

The more closely we examine good topic sentences, however, the more we realize that topic sentences are the heavy lifters of body paragraphs. Good topic sentences allow your evidence to work effectively and allow your argument to develop clearly and logically. In addition to presenting the main topic of the paragraph, topic sentences should also clarify the relationship between the paper’s thesis and the specific evidence explored within the paragraph. In other words, a good topic sentence should signpost the specific part of the thesis that an individual body paragraph addresses. Lastly, a good topic sentence should aid in the transition process as readers move from the preceding paragraph to the paragraph that the topic sentences opens.

Let’s return to the revised thesis sentence we considered above: “In *Twelfth Night*, William Shakespeare emphasizes the limited opportunities afforded to early modern women through Viola’s crossdressing and disguise as the page boy Cesario.” The topic sentence for your first body paragraph should signal to readers the movement from the introductory section of the paper to the body section of the paper. Given the thesis, the topic sentence could be

something like the following: “Audiences first encounter Viola as a shipwrecked maiden with no male companion in a foreign land, and Shakespeare highlights in this opening scene that Viola’s gender puts her in a precarious, and potentially dangerous, position.” Similarly, the topic sentence for a body paragraph that follows another body paragraph should help elucidate the connection between, or logical progression from, one main idea to the next. For example, the body paragraph that follows the paragraph about the potential dangers Viola’s gender presents when she first arrives in Illyria might mention these challenges and then make the move to the freedom that her disguise as the page boy Cesario quickly affords her in Illyria: “While Viola initially was unable to find a space into which she could safely integrate herself in Illyria, she quickly finds safety, autonomy, and companionship once she dons her disguise as the male Cesario.” We would then expect the body of this paragraph to develop the idea of Viola’s newfound freedom in Illyria once disguised as Cesario and such development will then depend on the writer’s use of evidence, analysis, and transitions, as discussed in detail in the following sections.

Evidence

No matter the texts you analyze and the literary conversations into which you enter, your use of **evidence** serves the crucial function of supporting your argument. Without convincing evidence, every argument crumbles. Depending on the type of writing you are doing, evidence can come in a variety of forms including, but not limited to, data or statistics, anecdotes or stories, expert opinions, examples, and definitions. When writing a literary essay, you will frequently use textual evidence in which you draw specific **quotations** from and create **summaries** or **paraphrases** of small sections of your chosen primary text(s). Further, if you include research in your essay, you similarly will draw appropriate quotations from or create summaries or paraphrases of ideas from the secondary sources you find during your research to provide evidence in support of your thesis. Note: Each and every time you quote, summarize, or paraphrase a text, you must cite that text clearly and correctly, both in the body of your essay in parenthetical citations and at the end of your essay on the Works Cited page.

Summary, paraphrase, and quotation each serve different functions, so make sure that you choose carefully your method of incorporating evidence into your paper.

When you summarize, you use your own words to communicate the main ideas of someone else’s text in a condensed form. Remember that because you are communicating someone else’s ideas, even though you are using your own words, you need to include a citation each time you summarize. Summary works best as a way of incorporating evidence into your paper when you are focusing on big ideas.

When you paraphrase, you reword a portion of someone else’s text, putting it into your own words and using your own sentence structure. The original text and your paraphrase should

be around the same number of words. As is the case with summary, you need to include a citation for each paraphrase because you are communicating the ideas of someone else. Paraphrases work best when you want to focus on the details of a passage of text but don't need to draw attention to the specific words or sentence structure.

When you include a quotation in your essay, you incorporate into your text a portion of someone's else text using their exact words. As is the case with summary and paraphrase, all quotations should include citations since you are communicating someone else's ideas and using their language to do it. Quotation works best when you want to draw attention to the words themselves or when you cannot communicate the idea as effectively in your own words. Each time you include a quotation in your text, make sure that you frame it with your own words. Do not simply drop the quotation into your essay in between two sentences of your own writing. The passages below illustrate the difference between a properly a **dropped or floating quotation** and an **incorporated or framed quotation**:

Dropped/floating quotation concerning *Twelfth Night*:³

Audiences first encounter Viola as a shipwrecked maiden with no male companion in a foreign land, and Shakespeare highlights in this opening scene that Viola's gender puts her in a precarious, and potentially dangerous, position. "And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother he is in Elysium. / [...] What think you, sailors?" (1.2.3-6).

Notice how the floating quotation doesn't make sense when it is dropped in after the essay writer's sentence instead of being smoothly incorporated smoothly into the writer's own introduction of the quotation.

Correctly incorporated/framed quotation concerning *Twelfth Night*:⁴

Audiences first encounter Viola as a shipwrecked maiden with no male companion in a foreign land, and Shakespeare highlights in this opening scene that Viola's gender puts her in a precarious, and potentially dangerous, position. Following her rescue from the shipwreck, Viola immediately beseeches the Captain who saved her, "And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother he is in Elysium. / [...] What think you, sailors?" (1.2.3-6).

³ William Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night*, Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, eds. (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/twelfth-night/>.

⁴ William Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night*, Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine, eds. (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/twelfth-night/>.

Notice how the essay writer introduces the quotation so that the reader has an idea of what is happening in it and why it is being used. Note also the bracketed ellipses ([. . .]) that indicate that the essay writer has omitted a small section of the text, deeming it not necessary to their use of this quotation as a piece of evidence. As long as the writer has not changed the fundamental meaning of the quotation, they can choose to omit a few words, here and there, that may make the quotation unnecessarily long for their purposes.

The paragraph, however, is not complete yet. If the writer simply ends the paragraph after giving the quotation, the reader has little to no idea how the writer means for that quotation to support the thesis argument. This problem then leads us to the need to include analysis following the quotation in order to make clear how the quotation develops the writer's main argument.

Analysis

Analysis is the process by which you explain to your readers *how* your evidence functions to support your argument. One of the most common pitfalls of college writers is the tendency to present readers with large quantities of evidence yet very little analysis. They assume the evidence speaks for itself. As a writer, you cannot assume that your readers will intuit how your evidence functions to support your claim. You have to explain to your readers both how you are interpreting your evidence and how these interpretations in turn bolster your thesis.

Imagine two maps leading to treasure. The first map has inscrutable symbols all over it. It does, in fact, show the path to the treasure, but it is difficult to navigate with the map without knowing the meaning of the symbols. Does X mark the spot of the treasure? Or does X mark "you are here"? The second map is identical to the first but with one significant difference. The second map also includes a key detailing the meaning of each symbol on the map. Someone might find their way to the treasure using the map without the key, but they are much more likely to find the treasure, and have a more enjoyable time doing it, if they have access to the map with the key. An essay without sufficient analysis is like the map without the key. It forces your readers to try to make sense of the evidence in your paper without any guidance. An essay with sufficient analysis, on the other hand, guides readers through the evidence so that they can easily reach the same conclusions as the writer.

Consider again the quotation in which Viola questions what she will do in Illyria and mourns her lost brother. As discussed above, the essay writer has introduced the quotation and incorporated it into their own writing through proper framing. The writer's work with this piece of evidence, however, is not yet finished. Instead of assuming that the meaning of Shakespeare's text is self-evident and they can move on to the next part of their argument, the essay writer must analyze the quotation by explaining how it functions to support their thesis. Take a look at how the analysis that follows the quotation develops the paragraph's main point:

Body paragraph with evidence and analysis concerning *Twelfth Night*:⁵

Audiences first encounter Viola as a shipwrecked maiden with no male companion in a foreign land, and Shakespeare highlights in this opening scene that Viola's gender puts her in a precarious, and potentially dangerous, position. Following her rescue from the shipwreck, Viola immediately beseeches the Captain who saved her, "And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother he is in Elysium. / [...] What think you, sailors?" (1.2.3-6). While Viola is undoubtedly mourning the apparent death of her brother, she significantly connects the loss of her brother to her concerns about finding a place for herself as a lone woman in Illyria, emphasizing the safety a male companion offers a young woman. For a brief moment, Viola believes that Lady Olivia's household might offer shelter and safety to a single woman, but the Captain informs her that Olivia has "abjured the sight and company" of all (1.2.41-42). Unable to find a place in Illyria to which she could safely retreat as a woman, Viola decides she must conceal her identity and assume the disguise of a man to ensure her survival.

The discussion after the quotation provides an analysis concerning *what* is happening on a textual level when Viola connects her uncertain future in Illyria to the loss of her brother, and *how* this relates to the writer's topic sentence that Viola's gender as female puts her at risk in Illyria. The analysis begins to argue that Viola has few options in Illyria while dressed as a woman. In this way, the essay writer begins to convince the reader that the thesis is sound (and therefore should be taken seriously) and that it adds something interesting to the critical conversations about this play.

Transitions between and within paragraphs

While each body paragraph does not need a robust conclusion in which you summarize or restate that main point(s) of the paragraph, you do need to make sure that none of your paragraphs end abruptly. Think about creating a smooth **transition** between ideas as you conclude one paragraph and move on to the next. As stated above, and considering the points above about the relationship between evidence and analysis, you don't want to end a paragraph with a quotation. A quotation at the end of the paragraph is evidence without analysis. As you wrap up each body paragraph, you should think of putting yourself in a position where it logically makes sense to pick up with your next body paragraph. Ask yourself: how are what I've just said and what I'm about to say related?

⁵ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/twelfth-night/>.

Even within a body paragraph, you will probably need to transition between ideas as you move back and forth between evidence and analysis. Simple words and phrases can do most of this transitional work for you. Some words and phrases signal that you are arguing in the same direction that you were previously arguing (“additionally,” “moreover,” “furthermore,” etc.) while other words and phrases signal that you are changing directions (“nevertheless,” “but,” “however,” “on the other hand,” etc.). Let’s take one final look at the sample paragraph we started drafting above—this time in its complete form—and notice how the paragraph and the one that follows it connect to one another both through their content and by using transitions at the beginning and throughout the rest of the paragraph (transitions are **bolded**):

Body paragraphs demonstrating transitions in their discussion of *Twelfth Night*:⁶

Audiences first encounter Viola as a shipwrecked maiden with no male companion in a foreign land, and Shakespeare highlights in this opening scene that Viola’s gender puts her in a precarious, and potentially dangerous, position. Following her rescue from the shipwreck, Viola immediately beseeches the Captain who saved her, “And what should I do in Illyria? / My brother he is in Elysium. / [...] What think you, sailors?” (1.2.3-6). While Viola is undoubtedly mourning the apparent death of her brother, she significantly connects the loss of her brother to her concerns about finding a place for herself as a lone woman in Illyria, emphasizing the safety a male companion offers a young woman. For a brief moment, Viola believes that Lady Olivia’s household might offer shelter and safety to a single woman, but the Captain informs her that Olivia has “abjured the sight and company” of all (1.2.41-42). Unable to find a place in Illyria to which she could safely retreat as a woman, Viola decides she must conceal her identity and assume the disguise of a man to ensure her survival.

In contrast to Viola’s inability to find a space into which she could safely integrate herself in Illyria while presenting as a woman, she quickly finds safety, companionship, and autonomy in Duke Orsino’s household once she dons her disguise as the male Cesario. Act 1, scene 4 begins with Viola, now disguised as Cesario, serving Orsino’s house, and as Valentine—one of Orsino’s serving men—speaks to the disguised Viola, the audience learns that she has quickly become an indispensable member of Orsino’s household: “If the Duke continue these favors towards you, Cesario, you are like to be much advanced. He hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger” (1.4.1-4). Viola had few options while wearing women’s clothing; disguised as Cesario, **however**, she finds herself protected by virtue of serving in the Duke’s household, receiving “favors” (perhaps money

⁶ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/twelfth-night/>.

or weapons as is often shown on stage) from Orsino, and building a strong rapport with Orsino, thus becoming one of Orsino's most trusted companions in the span of just three days. **Yet** it is not just the means for survival and friendship that Viola finds while crossdressed as Cesario; disguised as a man, Viola also experiences an unprecedented level of freedom. When Orsino instructs Cesario to woo Olivia on the Duke's behalf, he neither provides Cesario with a script nor tells him what to say, instructing him only to "[s]urprise her with discourse of my dear faith" (1.4.27). As a woman, Viola's behavior and speech are strictly regulated, but disguised as a man, she can travel freely from one household to another in Illyria and speak as she sees fit. **Even more to the point**, Viola's disguise as Cesario and the autonomy it affords her empowers Viola to forge another important relationship, this time with Olivia.

Consider how the first transition in this paragraph forges a relationship between it and the preceding paragraph. The connection is one based on difference, as clearly stated in the transitional phrase "In contrast to." Now take a look at the transitions within the paragraph. These ensure that the content flows by making clear connections between the sentences. The transitional phrases "however" and "yet" signal that the essay writer is bringing in new information that contrasts with what came before in the paragraph. "Even more to the point" tells the readers both that the essay writer is adding new information and that we should pay very close attention to this additional analysis.

Conclusion

A **conclusion** functions to wrap up your essay and signals to readers that you have persuasively constructed an argument that is worthy of continued consideration. To remind readers of the care with which you have built your argument, you should gesture back to your thesis and the body of the essay, but refrain from repeating your thesis and topic sentences verbatim. Lastly, make sure that you do not introduce completely new ideas into the conclusion; doing so can distract readers from the actual focus of your essay.

Let's return one last time to the argument about how Viola's disguise as Cesario in *Twelfth Night* brings attention to the limited opportunities of early modern women. Observe how the following concluding paragraph reiterates the essay's main thesis, includes a recap of the big points made in the body paragraphs, and incorporates two short, pertinent quotations from the text in order to cement the thesis argument:

Conclusion concerning *Twelfth Night*:⁷

As Viola transforms from helpless, shipwrecked maiden to a mover and shaker in Illyrian society with the aid of her disguise as Cesario, Shakespeare reveals to audiences just how limited the options were for early modern women. By juxtaposing Viola's opening scene in the play (in which she presents as female and has no place to turn to) with the subsequent scenes (in which she wears the disguise of Cesario and is able to build relationships with Orsino and Olivia as well as set the stage for a series of nuptials), the double standards of early modern gender expectations becomes increasingly pronounced. Serving in Orsino's household as Cesario, Viola finds companionship with Orsino and as well as the means for survival and unprecedented autonomy. In the company of Olivia, Viola—dressed as Cesario—finds not only more companionship but also her voice as she articulates her love for Orsino (even if she does have to pretend that she is speaking of Orsino's love for Olivia). Lastly, there is Cesario's, albeit unwitting, facilitation of the marriages of Orsino to Viola and Olivia to Sebastian; it's hard to imagine any of these weddings taking place had Viola not donned her male disguise and, as Cesario, enamored both Orsino and Olivia. Yet perhaps the most powerful evidence of Shakespeare's sustained attention in *Twelfth Night* to the limit society places on women in the early modern period is the fact that despite Orsino, Olivia, and Sebastian discovering that Cesario is actually Viola, Viola does not return to her female attire, even after Orsino tells Viola, "let me see thee in thy woman's weeds" (5.1.286). In a world where women have little power or autonomy, the play powerfully concludes with Viola choosing to continue wearing the pants.

If we look at this concluding paragraph, we will see that it points back to and confirms the thesis in the first sentence without simply restating the thesis or reusing all of the same language from the thesis. Next, the paragraph reminds readers of the main points of the body paragraphs without simply recycling each body paragraph's topic sentence. Finally, the writer brings the essay to a close with a powerful final thought that both wraps up the essay as a whole and encourages the readers to keep thinking.

The fact that your writing is participating in one or more conversations impacts the way you approach your conclusion. Your argument does not exist in a vacuum, so neither should your conclusion. Think of the conclusions as the place in your essay where you not only remind your readers of your argument and how you've developed it, but also the place in which you prepare for the next person to join the conversation that you've shaped and refined through

⁷ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, eds. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/twelfth-night/>.

your contributions to the conversation. Essentially, your conclusion is like an exchange zone in a relay race: it's the space in which you wrap up your leg of the race and pass the baton to the next runner on your relay team. Even if you run a fast leg of your race, the relay team won't be successful if you don't have a smooth handoff of the baton. Similarly, a good conclusion should both remind us of the good work you've done throughout the essay and position your argument so that it's clear how readers and writers might pick up your argument and continue the conversation by putting in their own oars!

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Revise and Edit

Dorothy Todd and Claire Carly-Miles

It's tempting to think you are finished with a writing assignment the minute you finish writing the last sentence of the conclusion, but revision and editing are every bit as important as drafting. Taking seriously these steps of the writing process will elevate your rough draft to a final draft that is ready for submission.

Revise Your Work

Revision is an integral, albeit often overlooked, part of the writing process. Students who have primarily written in timed-writing situations such as standardized tests or final exams might not have much practice with revision, so here are a few things to keep in mind as you incorporate revisions into your writing process. First and foremost, revision and editing (discussed in more detail below) are two different parts of the writing process. While editing focuses on the sentence level to correct errors, revision focuses on a holistic examination of your paper. In other words, while revising, writers want to focus on the "big picture" of the paper. Do keep in mind, however, that even though your revision tends to focus on the "big picture" of your paper, small changes, even those on the sentence level such as adding logical transitions or rewording for clarity, can have a large impact on the overall effectiveness of your essay.

As you re-read your paper, you might consider the elements that make a good body paragraph (discussed above in the “Developing Body Paragraphs” section): focus, coherence, content. These are largely the same characteristics that define a good essay, as is described below:

Focus: Make sure that your essay actually revolves around your thesis. Does each paragraph clearly relate to the thesis? Do you point back to the thesis throughout your essay? Is all of your evidence functioning to demonstrate the validity of your thesis, or do you have extraneous bits and pieces that don't help your argument?

Coherence: Make sure that your essay has an effective organizational structure and that it flows logically. Does it have an introduction, a body series of body paragraphs, and a conclusion? Do you use transitions to connect ideas within paragraphs and to link paragraphs together? Does the order of your body paragraphs make sense, or will it confuse readers?

Content: Make sure that you have provided adequate content so that your readers are convinced of the strength and validity of your argument? Does the body section of the paper have enough relevant content to confirm your thesis? Do individual body paragraphs have enough relevant content to support the individual topic sentences? Have you provided concrete evidence from your primary text(s) in the form of quotations, paraphrases, and summaries?

Reverse outlining is one useful strategy for revision. In a **reverse outline**, writers take a completed draft of their paper and remove all of the supporting content. What you are left with is your thesis and your topic sentences—in other words, a bullet-point list that allows you to see the structure of your paper in a quick glance. You can also try writing out a brief sentence articulating the main argument of each paper to make sure that each topic sentence accurately communicates the main idea of its body paragraph. Reverse outlining can help you identify strengths and weaknesses in the organizational structure of your paper, uncover sections of the paper that would benefit from more content or stronger transitions, and even determine whether your thesis accurately reflects the material in your body paragraphs.

As mentioned above in the “Developing a Thesis” section, you want to revisit your thesis frequently while drafting and revising. Writers often refine their thesis statements throughout the writing process as they encounter complicating and confirming evidence through the process of researching, writing and revising. Writers also often “write their way to the thesis,” meaning that writers often uncover their strongest arguments while they are in the process of drafting. Sometimes, the best articulation of the paper's argument comes at the conclusion of the first draft rather than in the sentence or sentences that the writer initially identified as the thesis. There is nothing wrong with discovering the best version of

your thesis as you write as long as you revise accordingly. After all, writing is a recursive process of discovery!

Edit Your Work

Editing is the process of focusing on the sentence level to correct errors. Typically, editing involves identifying and correcting spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. You might also improve sentence structure during the process of editing. Your instructor might mark but not correct editing errors on a draft with the expectation that you will address these errors before submitting the final draft. Similarly, your instructor might mark errors on a graded assignment. Review these errors so that you can avoid making them in future assignments. You might even want to make a list of common errors or trouble spots in your writing and return to that list when you edit and proofread subsequent assignments. Always ask your instructor if you are uncertain about how to correct these errors.

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Peer Review

Dorothy Todd

Peer review is a process in which you share your writing with other people and other people share their writing with you. The goal is to improve the quality of everyone's work. While you might not have ever completed peer review in a classroom setting, you've probably read over a friend's writing assignment or had a friend, parent, or guidance counselor read over something that you've written before you submitted it. That's peer review.

It's important to acknowledge the difference between peer review and **proofreading** or **editing**. While your instructor will probably give you specific directions for conducting peer review, a good rule of thumb is that peer review, like revision, primarily focuses on the content of the writing while proofreading editing focuses on mechanics such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation. If, however, you notice a specific pattern of errors in your classmate's writing—perhaps they repeatedly leave out needed commas—you might want to bring this pattern of errors to the writer's attention. The reason why we don't focus much on

spelling, punctuation, and grammar during peer review is because writing is still developing. There's no point in worrying much about a comma error in a sentence that your classmate is likely to rewrite as they improve the organization of their paper.

So, what does it mean to focus on the content of the writing? In a nutshell, focusing on the content means that you help your classmates make sure they are meeting the requirements of the specific assignment. For example, if the assignment is to write an argumentative literary essay, you as a peer reviewer, might need to help the writer determine if they have a clear, argumentative thesis; an easy-to-follow organizational structure; concrete examples and/or evidence from the primary text(s); compelling analysis of these examples and/or evidence; and more. Depending on the particular strengths or weaknesses of your classmates' writing, you might need to help them determine how to develop more compelling arguments, how to organize their argument logically, how to make a thesis more argumentative, where to focus their attention as they conduct further research, or even how to conclude their paper powerfully.

What to Expect During Peer Review

While the specifics of peer review might vary from assignment to assignment and class to class, here are a few things to anticipate and to keep in mind:

- First and foremost, follow your instructor's specific directions
- You will work with at least one other classmate
- Instructors will often provide rubrics to use, questions to answer, a form to fill out, or other tools to guide you through the peer review process
- If you are doing peer review in class (synchronously):
 - The writer might read the paper aloud while the peer reviewers listen, make notes, and then discuss the paper
 - You might trade papers and work through them quietly and then discuss each paper
- If you are doing peer review outside of class (asynchronously),
 - You will most likely mark up the assignment using a comments feature on a word processor, LMS, or other application. **If you have access to a Google Drive, you can drop your paper into a Doc, share it with your reviewer, and then be able to see their comments there, as well as reply to their comments, if you like.** Make sure that you reach out to your instructor if you have any questions about how to use the tools.

Writers and their peer review partners often have brief discussions prior to, and after, reading one another's essays. Depending on whether you are completing peer review synchronously or asynchronously, this conversation might take place face-to-face or via an online forum. Most frequently, these conversations focus on the particular concerns writers have about

their drafts. For example, if you have concerns about your topic sentences, ask your peer review partners—before they begin reviewing your paper—to pay special attention to these sentences while reviewing your essay. Along the same lines, you, as a peer reviewer, should ask the writer if they have any specific concerns about their essay. After everyone has reviewed one another's papers, consider working together to develop an action plan for revision. What are the two or three main revisions that would most improve each essay? Where should each writer focus their attention as they revise?

How to Give Feedback

The most important thing to remember as you review your classmates' essays is to provide all of your feedback with an attitude of helpfulness. As a peer reviewer, it's your goal to help your classmates write the best version of their essays, so make sure that your feedback you provide—both the praise and the suggestions—are collegial, specific, and actionable.

Students often underestimate their ability to help their classmates, but remember that everyone can provide useful feedback! While you might not be a wiz with thesis statements, perhaps you have a knack for clear and logical organization. Focus on your own strengths when providing feedback to your peers and trust your gut; if something strikes you as unclear or unwieldy, it probably is. Follow these steps and you *will* end up helping your classmates develop a stronger paper.

As mentioned above, it is often useful to have a brief discussion with the writer prior to peer reviewing a paper so ask if the writer has any specific concerns about their paper. This conversation can help guide your peer review, but remember that you might identify strengths or weaknesses of the essay that the writer themselves was not aware of.

Also remember to review the assignment requirements while peer reviewing. One of the easiest ways to help your peer review partners is to confirm that they have met all assignment requirements. If they have met all requirements, you can point out to the writer how and where, and you can even make suggestions for strengthening these elements of the assignment. If the writer has not met all requirements, make sure that you bring this fact to their attention and provide suggestions for how they can ensure all requirements are met.

Remember also that peer review is not an entirely altruistic act. One of the best ways to become a better writer is to read lots of different styles of writing, and as you peer review your classmates' essays, you will undoubtedly be exposed to different writing styles, processes, and approaches. Helping your peers also allows you to help yourself!

How to Use Feedback

Just as you should give feedback with an attitude of helpfulness, you should receive and use feedback with this same attitude. Remember that your peers are trying to help you write the best possible essay; they are not trying to attack your intelligence or hurt your feelings. Do your best to separate your essay from you as an individual, and try to accept feedback from your peers graciously.

Deciding when and how to incorporate feedback into your paper is often one of the most difficult aspects of peer review for writers. While it is your paper and ultimately your choice as to whether or not you use the feedback you receive, remember that your peers are trying to help you. Trust that they have your best interest in mind and that they have taken the peer review assignment seriously. If you have a question about a peer reviewer's recommendations, ask the reviewer! If you are still unclear, you can always follow up with your instructor.

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Representing the Conversation

Kathy Anders

When you write papers about literary texts, you are joining an ongoing conversation of ideas between texts and readers. A particularly interesting aspect of this conversation concerns ethics between writers and readers. These ethics concern the enormous value that literary texts and their conversants bring to society. As a reader engaging in a conversation, you derive a personal benefit from the process of thinking about, understanding, and responding to literary works. When you write about them, your work has a value both as a means of demonstrating your learning and as a contribution to an ongoing conversation. The literary text, scholars and commentators' articles, books, and web entries, as well as your own paper and writings, all have value as **intellectual property**.

Intellectual property is a creative work that has certain rights for the creator or right holder associated with it. In the United States, literary works fall under the category of **copyright**, which comes with a particular set of rights, provided that certain conditions are met. There are limitations on these rights, regarding their duration in time (when an item's copyright term ends it falls into the **public domain**), and exceptions for when and how other people can use copyrighted works for purposes such as research, teaching, or news reporting, i.e., **fair use**.

When you are using the intellectual property of others, it is important to recognize that there are ethical dimensions to that use. We have societal norms concerning how such works can be used given their value, just as there are norms about how someone can use the works that you create. In the case of writing papers about literature, you want to pay particular attention to how you represent the words and ideas of others. You can do this by making sure that you cite your sources when you incorporate someone else's text or ideas into your paper. It is expected that you will have to quote material either from the literary work you are analyzing and/or from other scholars in the field as a part of joining a conversation. When you do so, you respect their work by including citation markers showing that you are either quoting (copying portions of a text verbatim) or paraphrasing (rephrasing portions of a text to represent the ideas in your own words). Making sure that you cite your sources when you use someone else's words or ideas in your paper means that you are not plagiarizing a work. Because of the great value of ideas and the expressions of those ideas in university societies, where things like research articles, books, papers, and presentations are key components of academic work, **plagiarism** is generally considered to be a serious offense. These same rules apply to your own work, which should also be represented ethically by others.

Beyond ensuring that you meet the ethical norms of using other people's texts, citations help future readers trace the scholarly conversation that you have entered upon writing your own text. Just as you may want to follow up on a source that you see quoted in an article, other people may wish to do the same when they read your work. Providing citations helps anyone interested in the same topic join your conversation.

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Citation Formatting

Sarah LeMire and Dorothy Todd

Most students are familiar with at least one or two citation styles - perhaps you have used MLA format in the past, or have some experience using Chicago style. There are actually thousands of citation styles. They typically contain most of the same information, but they each present citation information a little bit differently. Some citation formats include the author's full name, while others use only initials. Some citation formats use title case, meaning they capitalize the first letter of every word; other citation formats use sentence case, in which they only capitalize the first letter of the sentence and any proper nouns. There are many subtle formatting differences between citation styles, and it takes careful attention to detail to ensure that you have each of your citations formatted correctly.

In this section, you'll find a set of examples to get you started with Modern Languages Association, or MLA, format. This section is not intended to be a citation manual. For in-depth questions, consult the *MLA Handbook (9th ed.)*.

Properly formatted MLA citations include two main elements: the works cited entry and the in-text citation. Below you will find sample citations for a variety of commonly-used reference types.

Works Cited

The **Works Cited** page is found at the end of your paper or project, and it includes all of the sources used when developing your paper or project. References are listed in alphabetical order by the author's last name, and if the source does not have an author, the source should be listed alphabetically according to its title. Each reference will have a hanging indent to make it easier to visually distinguish between each reference. The Works Cited page should have the title "Works Cited" centered at the top of the page, and the Works Cited page, like the rest of the document, should be double-spaced.

No Author

If there is no author, the title moves into the place of the author. The reference should then be alphabetized by the first word in the title within the reference list.

Example:

"Down the Line." *The Olio: An Annual*, The Corps of Cadets of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, 1895, pp. 54-58.

Single Author

In MLA style, when there is a single author, you should list them with the last name first, followed by the full first and (if available) middle name or initial.

Example:

Lyke, Austin. "Institutional Effects of Higher Education Acquisitions: The Case of Texas A&M School of Law." *AERA Open*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2018, pp. 1-11. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858418816092>.

Two Authors

When there are two authors, the first author with their last name first, followed by their first name and (if available) middle name or initial. The name order is reversed with the second author, and the word *and* is used to connect the two. Be sure to keep the authors in the order in which they appear on the source.

Example:

James, Adrian, and Lori Moore. "Understanding the Supplemental Instruction Leader." *Learning Assistance Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2018, pp. 9-29. *ERIC*, eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1170156.

Three or More Authors

When there are more than three authors, list the first author's last name, followed by *et al.* This is a Latin phrase meaning "and others" and is used in some citation formats as a way to abbreviate a list of names.

Example:

LeMire, Sarah, et al. "Taking a Fresh Look: Reviewing and Classifying Reference Statistics for Data-Driven Decision Making." *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2018, pp. 230-234. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/refuserserq.55.3.230.

Institutional Author

Sometimes the author isn't a person – instead, it's authored by an organization. In this case, you'll list the organization as the author. If the organization and the publisher are the same, only list the organization as the publisher and use the title as the author.

Example:

Stats in Brief: What High Schoolers and Their Parents Know about Public 4-year Tuition.
U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National
Center for Education Statistics, Nov. 2018.

Book

In MLA format, books list the author, followed by the title in italics. MLA, unlike APA, does not typically include the place of publication. If the book is accessed electronically, note that it is an e-book (usually after the title).

Example:

Dromgoole, Glenn. *Aggie Savvy: Practical Wisdom from Texas A&M*. State House Press, 2005.

Article from Database

You will commonly access articles from online databases like JSTOR or Project Muse databases, as opposed to finding them directly via a journal or in print. In this case, MLA format requires that you include the name of the article, name of the journal, *and* the name of the database in your citation.

To help the reader access the article, always include the doi (permanent url) if there is one available. It is generally listed near the top of the article. It may appear as doi: or <https://dx.doi.org/> followed by a sequence of numbers and/or letters. The doi number typically starts with the number 10, as in the example below. If there is a doi available, include it in your citation using the format [https://doi.org/\[insert doi number\]](https://doi.org/[insert doi number]). If a permalink is available instead of a doi, it can be used instead.

Example:

Rutledge, Lorelei, and Sarah LeMire. "Broadening Boundaries: Opportunities for Information Literacy Instruction Inside and Outside the Classroom." *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2017, pp. 347-362. *Project Muse*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2017.0021>.

Newspaper article

Example:

Boren, Cindy. "It Took Seven Overtimes for Texas A&M to Beat LSU in the Craziest College Football Game of the Year," *Washington Post*, 15 Nov. 2018,

www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2018/11/25/it-took-seven-overtimes-texas-am-beat-lsu-craziest-college-football-game-year/_Accessed 6 Jul. 2019.

Website

Example:

"About us." *Aggie Shields*, 2019, www.aggieshields.org/about.

YouTube video

Example:

"Fearless on Every Front." *YouTube*, uploaded by Texas A&M University, 8 Sept. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIRup0e8kTk.

Interview

MLA includes unpublished interviews in the Works Cited. Key details to include are the name of the person interviewed and the date of the interview.

Example:

Anders, Kathy. Personal interview. 14 Jul. 2019.

Lecture

MLA format also includes lectures and lecture slides in the Works Cited.

Example:

Pantuso, Terri. Lecture. Rhetoric and Composition, 10 Sept. 2019, Texas A&M University.

In-Text Citations

MLA **in-text citations** use the last name(s) of the author followed by a space and the page number for the source material, when available. Only use the page number if the source is paginated (e.g., a book chapter or article that has a page number in the corner).

In MLA format, you can also embed the author name directly into your sentence (e.g., Smith found that...), in which case the parenthetical at the end of the sentence should include only the page number.

No Author

As with the Works Cited entry, the in-text citation will use the title if there is no author available. Use the first few words of the title if it is long, and place it in quotation marks.

Example:

("Down the Line" 56).

Single Author

Example:

(Lyke 4)

Two Authors

When there are two authors, list the last names of both connected by an ampersand. Be sure to keep the authors in the order in which they appear on the source.

Example:

(James and Moore 19).

Three or More Authors

When there are more than three authors, list the first author's last name, followed by *et al.* This is a Latin phrase meaning "and others" and is used in some citation formats as a way to abbreviate a list of names

Example:

(LeMire et al. 261).

Institutional Author

As with the reference list, you'll list the organization as the author in the in-text citation.

Example 1 (document is paginated):

(Texas A&M University 14).

Example 2 (document is not paginated):

(Texas A&M University).

Two or More Works by the Same Author

When you use two or more works by the same author in your essay, provide a shorthand version of each title to differentiate them from one another. Include the author's last name, a comma, the shorthand version of the title, and the page number, if applicable, in the parenthetical citation. The author's name should not be included in the citation if you introduce the author's name in your sentence.

Example 1 (author's name not mentioned in sentence):

(Morrison, *Beloved* 37)

Example 2 (author's name mentioned in sentence):

(*Beloved* 37)

Non-Paginated Sources

Web sources that are not paginated should include a stable indicator of location such as chapter number, if available.

Example 1 (author's name not mentioned in sentence):

(ch. 2)

Example 2 (author's name mentioned in sentence):

(Brontë, ch. 2)

Formatting Long Quotations

Long quotes are indented and blocked off from the text of the essay. The distinction between short quotes and long ones is somewhat arbitrary, but quotes of more than about three lines should be set off from the rest of the essay in the manner illustrated here.

Note that the quotation marks have been eliminated. The indentation indicates that the material is quoted directly from a secondary source. Quotation marks are used only if the original uses quotation marks. Note also that after a short quote comes the parenthetical citation followed by a period, but in the long, indented quote, like this one, the period precedes the parenthetical citation. (Author 39)

Most instructors do not appreciate too many long direct quotes in student essays, especially if the quotes create the impression that students are turning in a "cut and paste" assignment.

Attribution:

LeMire, Sarah, and Dorothy Todd. "Citation Formatting." In *Surface and Subtext: Literature, Research, Writing*. 2nd ed. Edited by Claire Carly-Miles, Sarah LeMire, Kathy Christie Anders, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, R. Paul Cooper, and Matt McKinney. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

LeMire Sarah. "Citation Formatting." In *Informed Arguments: A Guide to Writing and Research*. 2nd ed. Edited by Terri Pantuso, Sarah LeMire, and Kathy Anders. College Station: Texas A&M University, 2023. Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#). Used here with permission of the author.

Sample Research-Based Literary Essay

James Francis, Jr., Dorothy Todd, Nicole Hagstrom-Schmidt, and R. Paul Cooper

Part of the writing and research process often involves reviewing the work of other writers to comprehend strategies for content development, organization, and analysis. When reviewing a sample essay, a writer should never base how they create their own work on the sample or attempt to copy it in form and/or content. Instead, reading a sample essay can be a beneficial process for a writer to consider how to open the essay discussion, structure the content, approach critical analysis of a text, and integrate research perspectives into the conversation.

Here are a few questions to consider when reading a sample essay:

1. Does the writer offer a convincing, concise, and clear claim to guide the research? How?
2. In what way(s) are the arguments within the essay supported by evidence from the text(s)?
3. What techniques and strategies for writing persuasively can you identify?
4. How effective is research (secondary source material) utilized to develop content and analysis?
5. What tone does the writer establish in the essay content? Is it consistent?
6. Can you recognize a distinct voice of the writer or has the research taken over their argument?
7. Does the conclusion do more than just summarize/restate the initial thesis and essay content?

8. Are there strengths and weaknesses in the organization/formatting? List them.
9. Is the word choice appropriate for the essay and its intended audience?
10. Overall, how well does the essay respond to the assignment prompt and guidelines?

These types of questions represent related inquiries we may ask when writing an essay draft and throughout the revision and editing process. By performing evaluative checks on sample writing, a writer learns how to apply a similar review of their essay to strengthen its form and/or content. Furthermore, this activity connects us to our own work by focusing our attention on which writing and research strategies to employ in order to create an effective, credible, and authoritative essay. Additionally, keep the lines of communication open with your instructor to always discuss how they intend for you to engage with sample writing materials in the course.

Sample Prompt

Assignment Description: The purpose of this essay is to effectively communicate a persuasive argument based on research and analysis of primary and secondary texts. For this assignment, you will engage in secondary research and close reading of a primary text to develop an original, nuanced argument about one of the play's we've read this semester.

Content: Strong essays will utilize close reading techniques, including attention to dramatic elements, meter, rhyming, double meanings of words, and other rhetorical/poetic features. Furthermore, they will put forth a clear, interesting, and unique interpretation of the text in question. Weak essays will not utilize or discuss the text; rather, they may quote but only to summarize. Weak essays also tend to simply summarize the plot or give surface readings of a passage, character, or theme. Additionally, because this is a research-based literary essay, strong essays will include thoughtful engagement with secondary sources. Weak essays will not utilize or discuss the secondary sources; they might include quotations from secondary sources but only to echo the argument the essay-writer is attempting to make. For more details about the use of secondary sources, see the following section.

Research Expectations: At least three scholarly sources will be incorporated to aid in the development of your argument. Supplemental sources, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* or a reference to another text we have read are encouraged but not required. The research may support your claim, offer counterargument, and/or provide contextual discussion such as the film's production history or socio-cultural response to the film. The essay will be guided by the writer's voice (your claim), not the research material.

Format: Follow MLA 9 guidelines.

Scope: Essays should range between 1500 and 2000 words. (Works Cited required to document the primary text and any secondary sources, but not included in word count).

| Student Essay | Instructor Annotations |
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| <p>NOTE: This simulated student sample essay allows us to look back upon the close-reading samples of the previous chapters and the writing and research strategies of this chapter to focus on how research furthers textual analysis and connects the writer’s voice to a larger conversation about the text.</p> | |
| <p>Naomi Davidson Dr. Jane Doe English 203: Writing About Literature 20 May 2022</p> <p>“Nothing that is so is so”: The (In)Sanity of Self-Deception in <i>Twelfth Night</i></p> | <p>Naomi uses a quotation from the play she is analyzing in her title. This technique is a classic option for titling a literary essay. Note also how the part of the title following the colon provides a quick, initial overview of the paper’s topic. It functions a bit like a precursor to the actual thesis statement.</p> |
| <p>Appropriately for a play named after a festival, William Shakespeare’s <i>Twelfth Night</i> is full of pranks, jokes, and ruses. Act 3 Scene 4 has perhaps the greatest concentration of deceptions with no fewer than ten cases of mistaken identity (or attempts by characters to deceive others), but these are in truth prevalent throughout the entire play. Many of these instances involve Viola, who has from early on in the play been disguising herself as the young man Cesario. As Cesario, she acts as one of Duke Orsino’s attendants and ultimately falls in love with the duke himself. However, one of Cesario’s duties is to help “his” master woo the</p> | <p>In this introductory paragraph, Naomi starts with something that most readers know about the play: Viola’s disguise. Then, she pivots to focus on something that is less obvious: the self-deceptions of Malvolio and Olivia. This approach might be improved by shortening the Viola example or introducing the idea of “self-deception” in relation to Viola to better tie these two points together. Nevertheless, this a good beginning to an essay that goes beneath the surface.</p> |

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| <p>countess, Olivia. Ironically, Olivia herself falls for the disguised Viola, whom she believes to be a young man. Yet “Cesario” is not the only person about whom Olivia is being deceived. Her steward Malvolio is tricked into believing that Olivia is in love with him, while the antics he believes she has asked him to perform to win her over make Olivia believe him insane. Both of these characters, Olivia and Malvolio, are being tricked by others, yet they both also demonstrate in the play how they are deceiving themselves as well.</p> <p>Ultimately, these self-deceptions are what allow for <i>Twelfth Night’s</i> comedic conclusion even as they darken the brightness of that conclusion.</p> | <p>Traditionally, the thesis in a college literary essay will come at the end of the first paragraph. To avoid confusion, Naomi signals her thesis statement with the word “ultimately.” Other writers might use terms such as “I argue” or “This paper asserts” to similar effect.</p> |
| <p>Olivia is simultaneously the character most aware that she is deluding herself as well as the character least aware of the many ways she is being deluded. In Olivia’s first appearance onstage, Feste gently mocks her excessive grief over the death of her brother, pointing out that “to mourn for [her] brother’s soul, being in heaven,” makes her a fool (1.5.68–69). Though acknowledging her Fool’s astuteness, Olivia does not demonstrate similar insight following this scene. She mistakes the real gender of “Cesario”; she and Malvolio are the sole dupes of the plot by Maria, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian to make Malvolio appear insane; and she completely misidentifies Sebastian. Yet upon being told of</p> | <p>Good use of brackets to ensure that the quotation fits the sentence!</p> <p>Naomi makes a fascinating point in this paragraph about Olivia deceiving herself. However, the</p> |

Malvolio’s insanity, Olivia remarks, “I am as mad as he, / If sad and merry madness equal be” (3.4.15–16). Olivia refers here to her position of being in love with Cesario, a man who appears wholly uninterested in her, as a kind of madness. The idea of love as madness is commonplace, but Olivia also suggests that deceiving herself into believing Cesario might grow to love her is a form of insanity. **In fact, Joost Daalder in “Perspectives of Madness in *Twelfth Night*” even argues that Olivia may be predisposed to suffer from delusions, which make her particularly susceptible to Viola’s disguise, and that part of the audience’s pleasure derives from *not* falling victim to these delusions: “the art of illusions may encourage encourage delusion on the part of those who are inclined to suffer from it anyway... Thus, for example, [the audience] can at all times tell that Viola is a woman, but her disguise as a male seriously deludes people like Olivia” (Daadler 106-7). While I agree that the audience watching the play would be aware of the irony that “Cesario” is merely a disguise and not a real individual at all, I contend that an additional layer of irony exists and contributes to the audience’s understanding of Olivia’s self-delusions.** Even as the audience revels in recognizing the source of Olivia’s delusions, other characters in the play—unaware of Cesario’s disguise—insist on Olivia’s sanity, which in turn causes the

quotation that she has selected (3.4.15–16) does not immediately show that Olivia is engaging in self-deception. In the quotation, Olivia is comparing her sadness with Malvolio’s sudden happiness. To make this point stronger, Naomi could break down the quote further or pull in additional contextual evidence from the scene that proves otherwise.

Here we see Naomi incorporate a secondary source into her argument. Note that she does not simply toss a quotation from the scholar into the middle of her argument as evidence of her own argument’s validity but instead introduces the author’s argument and then responds to the argument. In this case, Naomi agrees with some aspects of the scholar’s argument while disagreeing with other aspects. She marks her engagement with the scholar’s argument through the phrases “I argue” and “I contend.” While this is a very useful strategy, the “I” can get repetitive. You can also say “this essay argues” to avoid repetition or to introduce arguments without the use of “I.”

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| <p>audience to question these characters’ sanity as well. Sebastian, whom Olivia marries under the impression that he is Cesario (apparently their wedding vows do not include an exchange of names), later denies that Olivia could be mad:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">if ’twere so, She could not sway her house, command her followers, Take and give back affairs and their dispatch With such a smooth, discreet, and stable bearing As I perceive she does. (4.3.16–21)</p> <p>Arguably Sebastian, who marries a woman he has met earlier that very day, is not the best judge of what behaviors sane people perform, but his union with Olivia makes room later for the unmasked Viola to marry Orsino.</p> | <p>Naomi’s use of humor emphasizes her unique ethos while also noting a potential counterargument.</p> |
| <p>Once Sebastian reunites with his twin sister Viola—who has been disguised as Cesario—and Orsino, Viola, Olivia, and Sebastian pair off so that the comedy can conclude with its required multiple weddings, Olivia’s self-delusion gives way to a recognition that she might be entering into a loveless marriage with a stranger. In “Love, Disguise, and Knowledge in <i>Twelfth Night</i>,” Maurice Hunt claims that “Sebastian’s miraculous epiphany releases Olivia and Orsino (as well as Viola) from their burdens, making possible the giving up of deceit and dissembling” (Hunt</p> | <p>Sebastian functions as the connector that allows Naomi to move smoothly from a paragraph about Olivia’s self-delusion concerning Cesario to a paragraph focusing on the specific self-delusion of marrying Sebastian in place of Cesario.</p> |

490). **While Hunt is right that Sebastian’s arrival in Illyria allows for Viola to reveal her true identity and for the play’s characters to abandon their self-deceptions, Hunt fails to consider the shadow cast over play’s conclusion by the fact that *Twelfth Night* could not have concluded with multiple marriages**

were it not for Olivia’s initial infatuation with the lie that is Cesario. After all, Olivia is demonstrably silent on stage during the revelation of Sebastian and Viola’s identities. After her exclamation of “Most wonderful!” upon seeing both twins for the first time (5.1.236), Olivia does not speak again for 55 lines, and when she does speak, it is not about her partnering with Sebastian.

Sometimes the silences of characters speak just as loudly as their words; Isabella’s silence following the Duke’s proposal of marriage in *Measure for Measure* is similarly striking.

Meanwhile, during Olivia’s silence, Sebastian explains to her that she has been “mistook” (5.1.271) and “deceived” (5.1.274), foregrounding the deception (of others and of the self) in the play’s matrimonial conclusion. In a final-ditch effort to sustain the relationship she forged with Cesario, Olivia, upon hearing the nuptial plans for the two couples, does not address her soon-to-husband Sebastian but instead speaks to Viola and addresses the relationship with her that these marriages will solidify: “A sister! You are she” (5.1.344). Olivia thus finds herself “happily” married

Here, Naomi acknowledges the validity of part of the scholar’s argument while also highlighting the scholar’s oversight. By then turning to the detail that the scholar failed to consider, Naomi adds a new idea to the scholarly conversation in which she is participating.

To strengthen her point about the usefulness of considering a character’s silence, Naomi points to another of Shakespeare’s plays, *Measure for Measure*, in which a character does not speak when presented with the possibility of marriage. Were Naomi to expand this paper, she could perhaps consider scholarship addressing Isabella’s silence and apply that scholarship to her reading of Olivia’s silence.

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| <p>yet still longing for the fiction she had with Cesario.</p> | |
| <p>Malvolio, too, deludes himself about his chances in romance, even to the point of being declared insane by the other characters, ultimately resulting in his tragic disillusionment. His sexual desire for his mistress leads him to fall completely for the plot laid by Maria and Sir Toby. Believing his fantasies confirmed by Olivia’s purported letter, he finds himself unable to hold any conversation with her without reading too much into her words. She calls him a “fellow” (3.4.66), using the word in its sense of “a friendly or polite form of address to a person of lower social status, esp. a servant” (“fellow, n.” 6a), but Malvolio interprets her meaning as indicative of a peer or even partner: “And when she went away now, ‘Let this fellow be looked to.’ ‘Fellow!’ Not ‘Malvolio,’ nor after my degree, but ‘fellow’” (3.4.82-84). Olivia <i>is</i> calling him after his degree, but Malvolio is too blinded by the letter’s pretense and his own self-aggrandizement to understand what she says.</p> | <p>Notice how a simple transition word here allows Naomi to sign to readers how this paragraph flows logically from the preceding paragraphs.</p> <p>This paragraph is an excellent example of close reading. Naomi focuses on a single significant word (“focus”) here and its multiple meanings.</p> |
| <p>Malvolio’s continued faith in the letter—despite Olivia’s response to him and the strangeness of her supposed requests—could be considered a self-delusion that edges into insanity. Using</p> | |

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| <p>Feste’s description of the three stages of Sir Toby’s drunkenness (1.5), Joost Daalder finds that, in Shakespeare’s play, madness is the middle step on a scale which begins with foolishness and ends with drowning (105-106). If we accept Daalder’s argument, then Malvolio’s actions in the play imitate inebriation: first, he fools himself about the possibility of Olivia loving and marrying him; then he descends into madness (in the view of Olivia herself) with his uncharacteristic behavior; and finally he (metaphorically) drowns in the darkness while Feste pretends to perform an exorcism. As Feste himself predicted early in the play, “the Fool shall look to the madman” (1.5.135-36). Yet that too is a deception; Ivo Kamps points out in “Madness and Social Mobility in <i>Twelfth Night</i>” that “Malvolio is convinced of his own sanity, and... the audience knows he is not mad” (241), just as Feste and the other conspirators do. The only one fooled is Olivia, and although sympathetic to Malvolio’s seeming insanity she does not aid him or even seem to be aware of his plight. These two characters are so focused on their own self-delusions they cannot see past them.</p> | <p>Notice how Naomi takes the scholar’s analysis of another foolish character in <i>Twelfth Night</i>—Sir Toby—and applies this analysis to Malvolio.</p> <p>The phrase “these two characters” at the end of the paragraph might lead readers to believe that the following paragraph will focus on both Olivia and Malvolio. While Olivia is mentioned in the following paragraph, Malvolio is the primary focus of the following paragraph. Tweaking this concluding sentence could improve the paper’s flow.</p> |
| <p>The truth of Malvolio’s gulling and of Olivia’s romantic indifference to him casts a shadow over the end of the play.</p> | |

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| <p>Malvolio’s final line promises general payback, even though the main perpetrators (Maria and Sir Toby) are two of the few characters currently absent from the stage: “I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you!” (5.1.401). This line almost concludes the play (excluding Feste’s epilogue-esque song, only ten lines follow it), and Malvolio exits before Olivia can express her sympathy for his state. The moment is notably gloomy in an ending otherwise full of long-lost siblings reuniting and disguises being humorously discarded, and none of the characters appear able to speak to it in any meaningful way. There is no further resolution for Malvolio, and the play moves inexorably on to a comedy’s wedding-filled conclusion. Ivo Kamps suggests that Malvolio as a character is representative of an “aspirant middle class” (242) with a “desire for upward social mobility” (237). But if so, it is important that Malvolio’s arc actually runs along Daalder’s folly-madness-drowning scale. Though earlier in the play Malvolio believed his social status was poised to rise, by its end he discovers he has in fact fallen and lost his previous position. Self-deception causes this fall even as it obscures the truth of Malvolio’s situation from him.</p> | <p>Naomi expertly brings two scholar’s arguments into conversation with one another, thus providing her with a new reading of Malvolio and the relationship between his self-delusions and his desire for social mobility.</p> |
| <p>Insanity and deceit of all kinds are integral to the plot of <i>Twelfth Night</i>, and without these elements the play would end</p> | <p>Ideally, you’ll want the first sentence of the concluding paragraph to be a restatement of the initial thesis statement. In this statement, we see</p> |

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| <p>before it even began. Self-deception, especially regarding love, moves characters to behave in ways that eventually force the comedic ending, but not all of the characters are able to share equally in that ending. None of the marriages that end the play unite characters whose classes differ as much as Olivia’s and Malvolio’s do, suggesting the limits of the play’s comedic pairings to bring happiness to each and every person. Malvolio deludes himself into thinking that his lowly position as a steward is not an impediment to his pursuit of Olivia whereas Olivia’s assumption that she could maintain power in her marriage is as delusional as the fiction of Cesario. Perhaps these high hopes are the biggest acts of self-deception within <i>Twelfth Night</i>. Even as the comedy depends on self-deception, characters who are deceived by both themselves and by others cast a shadow over the purported happy ending. The romance and happiness are diluted by this shadow, causing the audience to question whether any of these marriages will sustain themselves after the play ends—or whether that too is self-deception.</p> | <p>the repeated elements of plot and deceit, but insanity (which is discussed at length in the body paragraphs addressing Malvolio) was not included in the thesis. To make this paper even stronger, Naomi should consider revising her thesis statement to include this important point.</p> <p>This conclusion offers several fascinating thoughts on how <i>Twelfth Night</i> structurally functions. As a reader, I’d like to see these thoughts developed in body paragraphs as they’re crucial to the thesis posited at the end of the introduction.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Works Cited</p> <p>Daalder, Joost. “Perspectives of Madness in <i>Twelfth Night</i>.” <i>English Studies</i>, vol. 78, no. 2, 1997, pp. 105-110. <i>Taylor & Francis Online</i>,</p> | <p>Works Cited Sources (all primary and secondary) are listed alphabetically by author last name (or title of work if no official author exists); no bullet points, numbering systems, or other organization symbols should be used.</p> |

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00138389708599065>.

“fellow, n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/69094. Accessed 13 June 2021.

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