Essay and Applied Criticism

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الرموز المستخدمة

فيديو للمشاهدة.

رابط خارجي.

أسئلة للتفكير والتقييم الذاتي.

أنشطة ومهام.

تواصل عبر مؤتمر الفيديو.

Schedule of Readings

	Topic	Critical Text	Application text
1	Plato	Revision (P.9)	
2	Aristotle (I)	*Poetics* (P.13)	Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (P.25-40)
3	Aristotle (II)	*Poetics* (P.18)	Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (P.41-60)
4	Aristotle (III)	*Poetics*	Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (P.61-87)
5	Arthur Millers	"Tragedy and the Common Man" (P.88)	
6	Psychoanalytic Criticism	Textbook, Ch. 5 (P.91)	
7	Psychoanalytic Criticism	Textbook, Ch. 5 (P.91)	Blasim: *The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes* (P.115)
8	Post-colonial criticism	Textbook, Ch. 6 (P.122)	Conrad: *An Outpost of Progress* (P.148-157)
9	Post-colonial criticism	Textbook, Ch. 6 (P.123) Achebe: "An Image of Africa"	Conrad: *An Outpost of Progress* (P.158-165)
10	Post-colonial criticism	Textbook, Ch. 6 (P.137) Orwell: "Shooting the Elephant"	Conrad: *An Outpost of Progress* (P.166-170)

Introduction

When analyzing a work of art, literary critics ask basic questions concerning the philosophical, psychological, functional, and descriptive nature of a text. Since the time of the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, the answers to these questions have been seriously debated. By asking questions of Twain's or any other text, and by contemplating answers, we too can become participants in this debate.

Traditionally, literary critics involve themselves in either theoretical or practical criticism. Theoretical criticism formulates theories, principles, and tenets regarding the nature and value of art. By citing general aesthetic and moral principles of art, theoretical criticism provides the necessary framework for practical criticism. Practical criticism (known also as applied criticism) then applies the theories and tenets of theoretical criticism to a particular work, *Huckleberry Finn*, for example.[1]

Feminist criticism, Marxist criticism, and postcolonial criticism are built on a fundamentally different basis: the desire for social justice. Each takes up the cause of a particular group of disadvantaged people. Feminists work for improvements in the status of women. Marxists want to help those who are disadvantaged by the class system, especially laborers and those who live in poverty. Postcolonial critics want to reveal the ways

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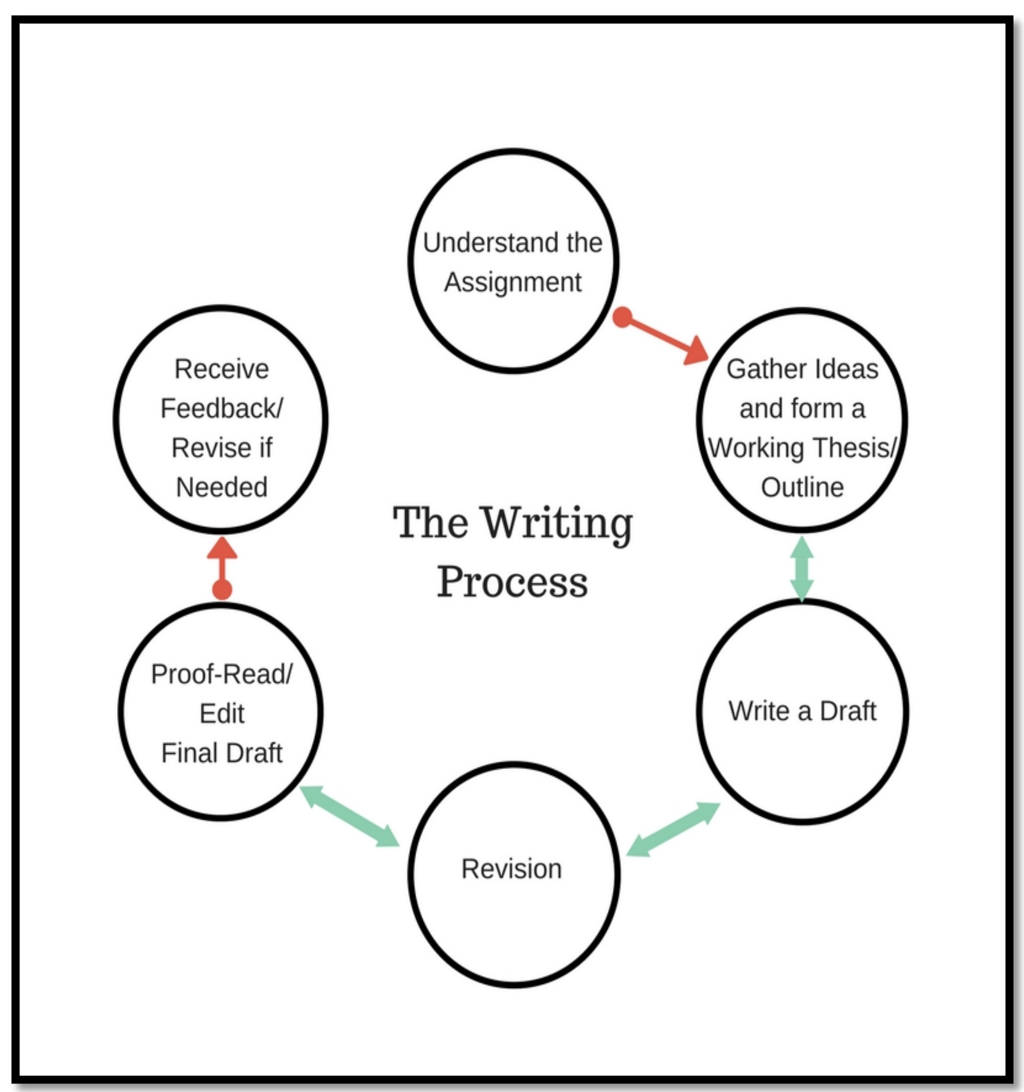
[1] Charles E. Bressler. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994.

in which colonized people were exploited by the colonizing power, and try to repair some of the damage done.

Another type of standpoint group is made up of critics working in green studies and eco-criticism. Their social goal is to promote awareness that our healthy existence on our planet depends on protecting the environment and on reversing the seemingly inexorable production of greenhouse gasses, which result in global warming and its devastating effects.



Chapter One

Each literary theory poses different sets of questions when analyzing a literary text. Thus, to write a critical essay on a certain literary work, you should:

1. **Choose a literary work that interests you, or that suits your research.**
2. **Read the literary text attentively.**
3. **Take notes every time you find something that needs further explanation, or that raises a certain question about the text.**
4. **Decide which literary theory you are going to use as your framework.**
5. **Closely reread the text and attempt to answer the questions posed by the literary theory you chose.**

Engaging the Text:

Regardless of the assignment you are given, practicing literary criticism requires more than a single effort or skill. Even answering a question in class requires that you think about your response before speaking. Written criticism requires still more care. Whether you are dealing with a long research paper or an essay question on an exam, the job calls on you to carry out several complex tasks, and the process can be overwhelming if you try to think about the various steps all at once.

As a result, the hard part for many people is getting started, as where to begin isn't always obvious. To gain some

control over the process, you can use several simple techniques to help make your initial approach. They take little time but can pay big dividends later. The techniques suggested as starting points here involve connecting reading and writing so that you can discover what you have to say. They include making marginal notations, keeping a reading log, and using prewriting strategies.

Adding Marginal Notations:

One reason that reading and writing seem to be two parts of a whole is that they sometimes take place at the same time. During the first reading of a work, for example, you may find yourself underlining sentences, putting question marks or checks in the margins, highlighting passages, or circling words that you don't understand.

You may not think of such cryptic markings as writing at all, but they are, in fact, representations of what you think and feel as you go through a text. And because nobody completely takes in a work the first time through, these markings can serve as starting points for the next reading. They will help you find those passages and ideas that you wanted to think about some more or perhaps didn't understand at all. You will be glad when you return to a work to find that you left some footprints to follow. Look at how a first-time reader responded to Robert Frost's poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay."

NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay. [2]

The advantage of marginal notations is that they don't interrupt your reading very much. They are, however, usually too terse and superficial to serve as the basis of a full-scale analysis. Several other techniques that will connect your reading with your writing in more substantive ways include keeping a reading log and using prewriting strategies.

Keeping a Reading Log:

If you do make marginal and textual notes while you read, you will have the rough beginnings of a reading log. A log amplifies the process and thus requires a separate notebook for your comments. You may even want to skip the marginal markings and use the notebook from the beginning. Several kinds of information, depending in part on how familiar you are with a work, will be appropriate for your reading log. When you

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(2) Dobie, Ann. *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2012, P.3.

read something for the first time, you are likely to make notes about relatively basic information.

If you are reading a narrative, for example, you may want to answer such questions as the following:

- **Where is the action happening?**
- **What are the relationships of the characters?**
- **Which character(s) do I find to be the most interesting?**
- **Which one(s) do I care for most?**
- **Which one(s) do I dislike the most?**

You might even want to pause in the middle of your reading to speculate about the following:

- **What do I want to happen?**
- **What am I afraid will happen? What do I think will happen?**
- **What have I read that prompted the answers to these questions?**

If you are reading a poem, you may want to record answers to questions like these:

- **Who is the speaker of the poem? (Remember, the speaker is not necessarily the poet.)**
- **What do I know about him or her?**
- **What is his or her occasion for saying it?**
- **Where does the poem take place?**
- **Who is listening?**
- **Which lines seem to be the most important?**
- **Which words resonate powerfully with me?**

■ **Do they give me insight into the poem as a whole?[3]**

Another way of beginning to think about a work is to jot down questions, memories it has called up, arguments with the ideas, or speculations about how the author came to write it. These considerations will help you connect with what you have read, not simply focus your attention on the text itself. They will make it more meaningful to you as an individual.

(3) Dobie, Ann. Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2012, Pp.4-5.

Chapter 2: Revision

Plato—Kicking out the Poets

Scope: Ironically, Plato is both the first literary critic and the first critic of literature. Though himself a great literary talent, Plato, when fashioning his ideal state (in the *Republic*, c. 373 B.C.), decided it would be best if the poets not be allowed to remain. In this lecture, we shall consider *why* Plato kicked out the poets, why he should *not* have kicked them out, and what his enduring legacy has been to all those theorists who have followed him.

Outline

I. Why Plato kicked the poets out of his republic.

A. Plato's concept of mimesis branded poetry as an unreliable source of truth.

1. For Plato, our physical World of Becoming is but a shadowy reflection or imitation (mimesis) of the unseen World of Being.
2. Thus, everything in our world, from objects to ideas, is but a pale copy of the perfect, unchanging originals (or Forms) of these objects and ideas that dwell above in the unseen world.
3. When a poet describes a chair or writes a poem about love, he is not imitating the Form of the chair ("chairness") or of love (Love), but the earthly imitation of this ideal Chair/Love.
4. Poetry, therefore, because it imitates what is already an imitation, is twice removed from reality (the Forms); as such, it is an unreliable source of truth and can only lead astray those who study it.

B. Poetry appeals to the weaker, inferior side of our mind/soul (or psyche).

1. Unlike philosophy or math, which we apprehend by way of our rational (Apollonian) powers, poetry, being fanciful, engages that part of our psyche that is both illogical and irrational (the Dionysiac side).
2. This irrational part of the soul is not only unreliable in matters of truth but is unstable, inducing us to partake in public displays of emotion.

C. Poetry is a kind of madness or contagion.

1. In *Ion* (c. 390 B.C.), Plato asserts that poets do not write nor *rhapsodes* (public reciters of poetry) speak by art or skill, but by possession.
2. Neither poet nor *rhapsode* understands (rationally) what he creates; he is, rather, carried away (irrationally) by divine inspiration.
3. This inspiration (which is really a kind of madness) passes down from poet to *rhapsode* to audience in the same way that a series of three metal rings attached to a magnet are held together by the force of magnetism.

D. Plato concludes that only hymns to the gods and praises of state heroes will be allowed; all other forms of poetry must be censored.

II. Why Plato should not have kicked out the poets.

A. Mimesis does not have to pull us farther away from truth.

1. Perhaps the poet does not imitate an imitation but captures in the physical form of the poem the invisible essence of the Forms.
2. We will return to this in our study of Aristotelian mimesis (in Lecture Three).

B. Rather than arouse the irrational side, might poetry not purge it?

1. Since our emotions are an essential part of our psyche, might it not be best to release those emotions in a controlled, public setting; might art not serve a therapeutic function to cleanse us of excess emotion?
2. We will return to this in our study of Aristotelian catharsis (in Lecture Four).

C. If poets are indeed possessed, might not the gods be trying to speak to us?

1. Plato, in his dialogues, used a method of question and answer (known as the dialectic, or Socratic method) to help uncover truths not readily perceived; might the divine madness of poetry not be another way to rip away the veil of ignorance and misperception in order to reveal truth?
2. Might not the poet be as much a prophet as the philosopher? Romantic poets and critics would adopt this idea with great fervor.

D. Plato was himself one of the greatest of poets.

1. His dialogues are themselves recognized as a unique literary genre.
2. Indeed, he is much easier to understand than Aristotle, precisely because his dialogues are filled with imaginative metaphors.
3. Often, he will consummate and concretize his philosophical points with a memorable myth or allegory: the myth of Er in *Republic*, the allegory of the horseman in *Phaedrus*, the personification of *eros* in *Symposium*, the creation narrative in *Timaeus*.
4. In *Republic* IX, he makes political science come alive by describing the natural progression from timarchy to oligarchy to democracy to tyranny in terms of the "Tragic Fall of a Great House" (cf., the House of Oedipus or the House of Atreus).

E. Plato's "ideal republic" is itself a giant poetic construct.

1. It does not exist nor was it ever meant to.
2. It is merely a parable writ large: a way to uncover the nature of justice.

III. Plato's enduring challenge to literary theory.

A. At the close of *Republic* X, Plato issues a serious challenge: he will allow the poets back into the republic if they can prove by means of some formal defense (written either in verse or prose) that poetry:

1. Has a useful function in a well-ordered state (i.e., that she can both delight *and* teach).
2. That she does not deceive but rather enhances our knowledge of truth.

B. This challenge is the very *raison d'être* for literary theory.

1. Nearly all critical theory mounts a defense, in one way or another, of the philosophical truth and/or moral status of poetry.
2. Nearly all theorists construct themselves and their systems in such a way as to either counter Plato (by creating a separate sphere for poetry) or to co-opt Plato (by presenting poetry as, in fact, the highest form of philosophy).

C. By putting literary theory on the defensive, Plato made it better by injecting philosophical rigor.

Essential Reading:

Plato, *Republic* X and *Ion*, in Adams.

Supplementary Reading:

Gerald F. Else, *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*, Part 1.

G. M. A. Grube. *Plato's Thought*, (Chapter 6); *The Greek and Roman Critics* (Chapter 4).

Richard McKeon, "The Concept of Imitation in Antiquity."

Plato, *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus*, and *Symposium* (Penguin).

———, *Republic* (Penguin; Norton).

Questions to Consider:

1. Is Plato the great enemy of poetry, or one of the greatest poets of antiquity?
2. Do humanities departments in general and professors of English in particular still feel a need to defend the usefulness and morality of poetry? Why?

Chapter Three

Aristotle's *Poetics*—Mimesis and Plot

Scope: In this, the first of two lectures on Aristotle's *Poetics* (c. 330 B.C.), we shall consider how Aristotle took Plato's negative understanding of mimesis and converted it into a powerful method for creating poetry (particularly tragedy) worthy of philosophical consideration. We shall analyze Aristotle's notion of plot as a unified whole that moves in accordance with necessity, probability, and inevitability and shall define and discuss the several elements that Aristotle believed worked together to form the perfect plot. Throughout our discussion, we shall illustrate the nature and elements of Aristotelian plot by reference to the play that is quoted most often in the *Poetics*, *Oedipus the King*.

Outline

I. A few prefatory remarks about Aristotle.

A. Aristotle was Plato's star pupil, as Plato was Socrates'. Aristotle was in turn the private tutor of Alexander the Great.

B. Aristotle brought philosophy back to earth: the essence and reality (the Form) of a thing now resides within, rather than above.

C. Aristotle was one of the most systematic thinkers who ever lived.

1. The western presupposition that all of knowledge can be broken up into discrete little packages called disciplines (college students call them "majors") comes directly from Aristotle.
2. Aristotle wrote a treatise on every facet of knowledge: from politics to astronomy, physics to ethics, rhetoric to poetry.
3. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle treats poetry as a separate discipline with its own specific laws, its own unique tools, and its own proper ends.

D. The works we have by Aristotle were not actually written by him; they are compilations of notes taken by his students (hence their "choppy" feel).

II. Aristotle radically redefined the Platonic notion of mimesis.

A. For Aristotle, mimesis is a positive and natural thing.

1. As children, we learn primarily from imitation.

2. Even as adults, we delight in recognizing and contemplating copies.

3. On a deeper level, we possess an instinctual desire for harmony.

B. In poetry in general and in the well-constructed plots of great tragedies in particular, Aristotle found the perfect food to feed our innate desire for order, balance, and unity.

C. It is precisely the imitative (or mimetic) process that allows the tragedian to construct a perfect, unified plot.

1. The mimetic process transforms an action or story (*praxis*) that is long, episodic, and haphazard into a plot (*muthos*) that is focused and unified.

2. That is to say: the mimesis of a *praxis* is a *muthos*.

3. The story (*praxis*) of a man begins with his birth and ends with his death and includes all the various incidents that occur in between.

4. But a plot (*muthos*) constructed around that biographical story would confine itself to a single day in that life span when all that is most essential to that life comes to a head.

5. Whereas the events in a story follow each other in simple chronological order, the events in a plot should move forward in accordance with necessity, probability, and inevitability.

6. The plot is life with all of life's contradictions purged out of it.

7. To imitate life is to present life not as it is, but as it should be, not as it manifests itself in an imperfect world, but how it would appear in a more perfect world where:

a. There is a necessary link between cause and effect.

b. The stable, meaningful laws of probability determine action.

c. A sense of inevitability, of a higher controlling fate, is felt.

D. How can one discern between an episodic play and an Aristotelian plot?

1. In an episodic play, there is no internal cohesion between the scenes; in an Aristotelian plot, there is a causal relationship between each scene that propels the reader forward toward the unstoppable conclusion.
2. That is to say, the scenes in an episodic play follow each other *post hoc* (Latin for "after this"), while those in an Aristotelian play follow *propter hoc* ("because of this").
3. When watching an episodic play, one feels he can leave the theater for 10 minutes and not miss anything; when watching an Aristotelian plot, one fears that if he steps out for even a minute, all will be lost.

E. Let us illustrate with examples from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.

1. The story of Oedipus the man is filled with long, boring stretches during which the tragic pieces of Oedipus' life slowly coalesce; the plot of *Oedipus the King* is concentrated into an intense, dramatic period of less than a day (actually about six hours) during which all the secrets of his life are revealed.
2. The story of Oedipus is a despicable tale about a man who kills his father and marries his mother; the plot of *Oedipus* is about a man who discovers late in life that he has killed his father and married his mother.
3. That is to say, whereas the story of Oedipus is about the committing of a taboo sin, the plot of *Oedipus* is about the triumph of self-discovery.
4. In terms of his overall story, Oedipus is one of the most pathetic of all men, a man trapped by a cruel and evil fate that he cannot escape; in the confines of the plot, however, he is a noble, courageous man who chooses to seek out the truth about himself no matter the consequences.
5. The story of Oedipus is the raw material for a vulgar made-for-TV movie; the plot of *Oedipus* is one of the great and noble works of all time.

III. Having defined the nature of the unified, "mimeticized" plot, Aristotle goes on to enumerate the many elements that work together to create the perfect plot.

A. A unified plot has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

B. It is shaped like an inverted "V": a series of complications (the rising action) draws the plot "upward" to its climax (the point of the "V"); after the climax comes the unraveling or *denouement* (the falling action).

C. In the best plots, the climax is marked by a reversal and/or a recognition.

1. The use of a reversal/recognition is what renders a simple plot complex.
2. A reversal (in Greek, *peripeteia*) occurs when the fortune of the hero moves suddenly from good to bad or bad to good.
3. In *Oedipus*, the messenger thinks he brings news that will free Oedipus from fear, but that very news leads to his destruction. This is the *peripeteia*.
4. A recognition (in Greek, *anagnorisis*) occurs when the hero moves suddenly from a state of ignorance to enlightenment. This is the *anagnorisis*.
5. In *Oedipus*, the messenger reveals to Oedipus his true Theban origins.
6. The best kinds of recognitions are accompanied by reversals; this is the case with the scene from *Oedipus* mentioned in items III.C.3 and III.C.5.

D. The best plots do not end with *a deus ex machina* ("god from the machine").

1. The *deus ex machina* was a crane-like device that allowed an actor to descend onto the stage in the guise of a god or goddess.
2. It was used by dramatists as a way of resolving "from above" all manner of difficulties and misunderstandings in the play.
3. Aristotle considered the use of this device an artificial way to end a plot.
4. The plot, he felt, should be strong enough to resolve itself in a manner consistent with necessity, probability, and inevitability.
5. *Oedipus* is so well-constructed that the final tragic revelation of Oedipus' parentage does not seem contrived; it arises naturally out of the plot.

6. Aristotle's prejudice against the *deus ex machina* reveals his strong commitment to a balanced, rational universe in which all makes sense. Interestingly, Eurypides used the *deus ex machina* effectively and even Sophocles employed it from time to time. In later days, Moliere used a *deus ex machina* in *Tartuffe*.

E. Finally, it should be noted that Aristotle argues forcefully that the plot is the central, most important element of a tragedy.

1. The plot, he says, is both the end and the soul of a tragedy.
2. Most modern people would disagree with Aristotle: we tend to place the characters (and the actors who play them) at the center of drama.

Essential Reading:

Aristotle, *Poetics*, in Adams.

Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Supplementary Reading:

S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art.*

Gerald F. Else, *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*, Part 2.

G. M. A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics*, Chapter 5.

Richard McKeon, "The Concept of Imitation in Antiquity."

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you, like Aristotle, favor plays/movies that are tightly constructed with no extraneous elements or contradictions, or do you prefer more realistic ones in which the plot rambles along in a looser, more natural way?
2. Do you, like Aristotle, hate plays/movies that end with a "miraculous" climax in which a sudden rescue or resolution comes from "out of the blue?" If, so, what does this reveal about your view of the universe?

Chapter Four

Aristotle's *Poetics*—Character and Catharsis

Scope: In this second of two lectures on Aristotle's *Poetics* we shall shift our focus from plot to character and catharsis. Continuing to illustrate with examples from *Oedipus*, we shall explore how the tragic character must be good, appropriate, consistent, and true to life and how he should be a moral man who yet possesses a flaw. We shall then explore the nature of Aristotelian catharsis and shall consider how this well-known word can be translated either as purgation, purification, or clarification. The lecture will conclude with a brief look at some other miscellaneous elements of Aristotle's *Poetics* that have continued to exert a marked influence on the history of literary theory.

Outline

I. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle carefully defines the proper nature of the tragic hero.

- **A.** The Aristotelian tragic hero must possess four qualities.
  - **1.** He must be a *good* man: he should be neither immoral nor vicious.
  - **2.** His character must be *appropriate* to his station in life.
  - **3.** He must possess a *likeness to human nature*: though heroic, he is a man.
  - **4.** His character must be *consistent*: even if he is inconsistent, says Aristotle, he should be consistent in his inconsistency.
  - **5.** Aristotle also advises that the hero be taken from one of the great tragic houses of ancient Greece (i.e., he should not be a commoner).
- **B.** The character of Oedipus possesses all four of these characteristics.
  - **1.** Though stubborn and a bit prideful, he is a good king who loves his people and is devoted to truth and justice.
  - **2.** His love and devotion, as well as his stubbornness and pride, are befitting the nature and role of a king.
  - **3.** Though "larger than life," Oedipus still possesses very human traits.

4. Both within the framework of the play and throughout his "off-stage life," Oedipus is supremely, and consistently, the solver of riddles.
5. Oedipus is a member of the royal house of Thebes.

C. This good hero should yet possess a flaw (in Greek, *hamartia*).

1. *Hamartia* is usually translated as tragic (or fatal) flaw, but it would be better to translate it merely as "error."
2. Aristotle clearly does not see this *hamartia* as a vice or moral flaw.
3. Though readers of *Oedipus*, generally blame the hero's misfortunes on his pride (in Greek, *hubris*), it is really his good qualities (his love of his people and his unswerving devotion to truth) that leads to the tragic revelation of his birth.
4. The full-blown concept of the tragic flaw as a single vice that leads the hero to his tragic downfall is really more indicative of Shakespearean tragedy (e.g., Hamlet's sloth, Lear's vanity, Othello's jealousy, Macbeth's avarice).
5. The desire on the part of so many readers (and English teachers) to identify tragic flaws in each of the heroes of Greek tragedy seems to mask an innate desire to "blame the victim," to gain control.

D. The best tragedies show a good man who, on account of this error, moves from good to bad fortune; such a movement elicits the proper pity and fear.

1. A bad man moving from good to bad fortune evokes neither pity nor fear: it merely makes us feel smugly satisfied.
2. A bad man moving from bad to good fortune merely arouses disgust.
3. A good man moving from bad to good fortune makes us feel happy, but it does not inspire either pity or fear.
4. Pity is evoked when we watch a good man suffer undeservedly; fear is evoked when we realize the same may happen to us.
5. Pity draws us toward the hero; fear drives us away.

II. The mention of pity and fear leads us to Aristotle's notion of the appropriate response to tragedy, what we might call the proper tragic pleasure.

A. According to Aristotle, the experience of a great tragedy so arouses in us the emotions of pity and fear as to lead to a catharsis of those emotions.

B. Catharsis may be translated in at least three different ways: as purgation, purification, or clarification. Each meaning has its own theory.

C. According to the purgation theory of catharsis, tragedy is a therapeutic experience that works on us like an enema or an emetic.

   1. It cleanses us of our emotions of pity and fear and thus leaves us more fit and able to face the rigors of life.

   2. This view of catharsis is one Plato *should* have adopted; it suggests tragedy can help wash away, on a group level, our baser emotions.

   3. When viewing *Oedipus*, the tragic end of the hero is so pitiful and fearful, so emotionally overwhelming, that we leave the theater feeling drained, as if our emotions have been swept away on a tide.

D. According to the (more spiritual) purification theory of catharsis, tragedy does not so much purge our emotions as purify them.

   1. Just as God uses suffering to strengthen our faith and resolve, so the hot furnace of tragedy tests and tries our emotions like gold in the fire.

   2. To experience *Oedipus*, to see that a man can so rise above himself as to put self-discovery ahead of all else, is to have one's emotions raised to a higher level; in the end, we are left with a strange sense of calm, not purged, but spiritually purified.

E. According to the clarification theory of catharsis, tragedy sparks in us an intellectual response, a searing moment of perfect clarity.

   1. In this almost mystical moment of enlightenment (this epiphany), our ill-defined emotions are carried up into a higher realm of balanced, harmonious rationality, a realm where the higher patterns and forces of the cosmos are made suddenly visible (the "aha!" experience).

   2. This is how we feel at the end of *Oedipus*, when we realize that Oedipus must suffer, for if he does not, the prophecy will have been proven untrue, and fate will have been exposed as

arbitrary and chaotic. The story of the Crucifixion of Christ is another example.

3. Catharsis as clarification is still used today in a psychoanalytical setting, to signify that moment when the connections between a patient's past experiences and present neuroses are suddenly revealed.

III. In addition to his views on plot, character, and catharsis, Aristotle set down a number of other mandates that have become linchpins of critical theory.

- **A.** From Aristotle comes the notion that a critic can inspire great art.
  1. Aristotle was not a contemporary of Sophocles; by his time, Athens had left her Golden Age far behind and was producing mediocre tragedies.
  2. It is clear that Aristotle hoped that by defining clearly the key qualities of Sophoclean tragedy, he might help usher in a new Golden Age.
  3. That is to say, the role of the critic is, in part, twofold: to assess and adumbrate the elements that make art successful; to establish, on the basis of these elements, fixed criteria for what constitutes great art. The French Neoclassical period, exemplified by Racine and others, is an example of a more recent "Golden Age."
- **B.** As we saw above, Aristotle advised that the hero be of kingly rank: from his day until the time of Ibsen (in Europe) and Miller (in America), tragedies have always revolved around heroes of noble rank.
- **C.** As we also saw above, Aristotle preferred tragedies with unhappy endings; though we take this for granted now, in Aristotle's day there *were* tragedies that had happy endings.
- **D.** Aristotle basically invented the notion of genre and genre studies.
  1. He not only divided poetry into different forms (epic, tragedy, lyric) but granted each form its own special criteria and mode of imitation.
  2. He believed there was a proper mode that was *natural* to each genre, a notion that is at the heart of all later theories of decorum (that is, of what is proper or is not proper for any given type of poem).

3. Indeed, he believed so strongly that each genre must follow its own natural, internal laws, that he (unplatonically) defended the presence in poetry of irrational elements if such were befitting the genre.
4. Coleridge would later call such criticism (i.e., criticism that judges a poem on it own internal merits) "genial" criticism. Ungenial criticism occurs when one judges a poem by standards outside its genre.
5. He initiated the aesthetic desire to rank genres in terms of refinement and based this ranking partly on the responses of a cultivated audience. This foreshadows pragmatic theory. The rankings were tragedy, epic, and lyric.

E. Aristotle initiated an organic theory of poetry later revived by Coleridge.

1. He treated tragedy as a living organism that must be true to its own laws.
2. He felt a perfect tragedy was one to which nothing could either be added or subtracted without affecting the work as a whole.
3. He privileged unified plots in which all parts were related organically.

F. Aristotle praises poetry as a synthesis of history and philosophy and held, in fact, that it was better than either one.

1. Like history, tragedy works with concrete particulars.
2. However, like philosophy, it expresses universal truths.
3. Tragedy is a concrete universal that fuses the general with the specific.
4. This notion profoundly influenced Kant, Coleridge, and the so-called new critics.

G. Aristotle includes a brief section on linguistics in his study of poetry.

H. Needless to say, critical theory would not have followed the same course had Aristotle never lived to write the *Poetics*.

Essential Reading:

Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Assignment: Literature Analysis Paper using Aristotle's *Poetics*

Purpose/Goals:

This formal paper assignment supports the following course goals:
- Define key literary, critical, and theoretical terms/concepts and implement these in oral/written discussion as well as in literary interpretation
- Recognize, compare, and evaluate major critical theories and apply them to works of literature
-Critique literature using both primary (a play) and secondary sources (Aristotle's *Poetics*)
-Apply writing and revision as tools for understanding literature and its interpretation

Assignment:

In 750 to 1000 words (3–4 pages), present an arguable thesis using textual evidence from your **primary source** and one **secondary source**. For this first formal paper, you're going to be reading either Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* or Ibsen's *A Doll's House* through an Aristotelian lens.

Your task:

1. Put the secondary text (*The Poetics*) into conversation with the primary text, essentially by answering the question:

• Which elements of Aristotelian tragedy that we have covered in class so far are present in the fictional work? Here are some ideas:

- Action-characterization - hero-protagonist-plot-setting-time- place-drama-comedy- catharsis- hamartia- tragic flaw- hubris- climax- prepetia- dialogue- three unities- tragedy- classical tragedy- - structure- form-coherence (unity)-completeness- medium-language- tragedy versus comedy- representation-imitation- tragic hero- Art vs History- deus ex-machina- mimetic theory- conflict-reconstructing material into a plot- tragedy as imitation of action- moral choices-serious action in tragedy- form- causality- magnitude- recognition/discovery/ angnorisis- change of fortune- practical good versus absolute good- dramatis personae- anti-hero – pity and fear- pathos- simple plot vs. complex plot.

2. Develop an Arguable Thesis Statement. An arguable thesis statement is one that makes a specific, arguable claim about a topic.

3. Remember that in an English Literature Analysis, the text is your evidence. To that end, your discussion should include a fair amount of close reading and analysis. A good rule of thumb: if you quote a sentence, discuss it for at least two

sentences. If you quote a paragraph (which is a lot!), discuss it for two paragraphs. You probably should avoid quoting more than a paragraph. If you feel the need to quote a lot of material, remember that you can always summarize or paraphrase.

4. At the beginning of your paper, you'll want to briefly put your fictional and non-fictional texts into a historical context. This is a standard maneuver for any English paper – the author, the date, and a very brief summary of the work are the basics, though you might want to also mention the reputation or field of the author, the reception of the work, and anything else that seems relevant. You can also add more context, as it becomes relevant, in the body of the paper.

Suggested Outline:

If you haven't written a formal literary analysis before, it can be a daunting task. Having an outline can help. Your paper might be broken down into the following sections:

I. Introduction (About 1 paragraph)

1. Explain the need for your interpretation: why does it seem valuable that we look at your chosen piece of literature (or section of this piece) through the theoretical lens you are adopting? Name your chosen theory explicitly.
2. Provide your argumentative thesis statement.

II. Theory Description/Definition (1 or 2 paragraphs, depending on how concise your writing is (1 is better here, aim for brevity and accuracy)

1. In your own words, what are the central premises of the theory (in this case, Aristotelian tragedy)?
2. What practices/methods of interpretation are associated with the theory?
3. What practice/method are you adopting for your interpretation?

III. Theory Application (the largest part of the paper)

1. Develop an argument over several well-developed paragraphs supporting your thesis.
2. Carefully choose literary evidence (from the primary and secondary sources) to back your point in each paragraph.
3. Carefully introduce and integrate literary evidence into your argument
4. Make sure that the logic connecting the evidence to the point of the paragraph (and by extension, the point of the essay) comes out clearly in your discussion

IV. Conclusion (1 paragraph)

1. Reiterate, in compressed form, the central points of your analysis.
2. Return to the question of need/importance that began the piece—what has your interpretive approach brought to our understanding of the literary work? What's the pay-off, in other words?

Oedipus the King

Cast of Characters in Order of Appearance

OEDIPUS, King of Thebes, son of Jocasta and King Laius
PRIEST of Zeus
CREON, brother of Jocasta
CHORUS of fifteen Theban elders
TEIRESIAS, a blind prophet
JOCASTA, wife and mother of Oedipus
CORINTHIAN MESSENGER, old man of Corinth, servant of King Polybus
SHEPHERD, slave of the royal house of Thebes
SECOND MESSENGER, servant within the house

Nonspeaking Parts

ANTIGONE, daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta
ISMENE, daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta
GUARDS and ATTENDANTS
YOUNG BOY who leads Teiresias

SCENE: *In front of the palace of Thebes. Double doors on the stage are the entrance to the palace, and an altar of the god Apollo is in the middle of the orchestra. One entrance, on the left side of the stage, represents the road to Corinth and Delphi. The entrance on the right side of the stage is the direction of the city of Thebes.*

TIME: *Two generations before the Trojan War. Oedipus has been king for many years since solving the riddle of the Sphinx. A plague has struck the city.*

(A procession of citizens and priests, carrying the signs of suppliants, enters. The double doors open and OEDIPUS *comes forward.)*

OEDIPUS
My children, new stock of old Cadmus, 1
why are you seated here before me
crowned by suppliants' wreaths,
and the air of the city dense with incense,
groans, paeans, and prayers? 5
It is not enough to learn such things
from others, and so I come myself.
I, Oedipus, whose fame is known to all.

Tell me, old man, you are the one
who should speak for the people—why are you here, 10
what do you want, and fear? I will help
however I can. It would be heartless
not to pity such desperate pleas.

PRIEST
O Oedipus, ruler of our country,
you see us gathered at the altar— 15
some not yet strong enough to fly the nest,
others crippled by age. I am a priest of Zeus.
The best of our youth stand here with me.
All your people, garlanded, wait in the marketplace
at the double shrines of Pallas Athena, 20
the mantic fire on the banks of Ismenus.

You can see that the city is in turmoil,
everything in confusion. Bloody plague
crashes over our heads like a tide of death,
blighting the fruits of the earth, 25

blighting the wombs of cattle and women.
A fiery fever god stalks among us,
the city is emptied, the house of Cadmus
is mortally weakened, and black
Hades fattens on groans and tears. 30
No man can be the equal of the gods.
We do not compare you to them. But,
as first among men, tempered by life,
you know how to deal with whatever the gods bring.
You came to Cadmus' city and freed us 35
from the tribute payment the Sphinx demanded—
that cruel singer! We could not tell you what
to do or how to do it—but we are sure
that the gods must have helped you to save our lives.

O Oedipus, most powerful of all, 40
as humble suppliants we beg for help.
Strengthen us now—either
through the inspiration of a god or
by human wisdom. I know that
the man who has lived most gives the best advice. 45
Come, noblest of men, rescue our city.
Come—act—because the whole country calls you
its hero since you first saved us.
Let your reign not be remembered
as starting in triumph but ending in disaster. 50
Save us again and rescue our city.
You brought good luck then and good omens—
bring equal fortune now.
You have power over this land—surely
it is better to rule living men. 55
An abandoned ship or the broken walls and towers
of an empty city are nothing.

Oedipus
Pitiful children, you come to me
wanting answers I cannot always give.
I already know how sick you are—but you 60
must know that I am stricken most of all.
The misery of each is for himself alone, none other.
But my soul groans for the whole city,

for each of you as well as for myself.
Do not think you woke me from sleep. 65
Sleepless I pace and weep and my mind
wanders all the roads of thought
in search of remedy. The only one I found
was this: to send my kinsman Creon,
Menoeceus' son, my wife Jocasta's brother, 70
to the Pythia at the shrine of Phoebus Apollo,
to ask the god what I could do or say to save my city.
But too much time has passed, and now
I wonder, what is he doing?—
he has been away so long. 75
Whatever message he brings,
I shall obey the god's command.

PRIEST
These are gracious and timely words—and look,
your servants wave and call that he approaches.

OEDIPUS
O lord Apollo, let it be your favored blessing on us 80
that shines from his eyes.

PRIEST
And all seems well—why else would his head
be garlanded with full-berried bay leaves?

OEDIPUS
Soon we shall know. He is close enough to hear.
Creon, welcome, my kinsman, son of Menoeceus. 85
What word do you bring from the shrine of Apollo?

(Enter CREON *from direction of Delphi.)*
CREON
Good news, I say, because if it ends well,
even what seems the worst would be good fortune.

OEDIPUS
What do you mean? As yet
I do not know whether to hope or fear. 90

CREON
Do you want these others to hear,
or should we go inside?

OEDIPUS
Speak to us all. I bear the pain
of everyone, not merely my own.

CREON
I shall tell what I heard from the god. 95
Lord Phoebus commands
that to drive this plague from our land, nourished by our land,
we must root it out, or it will be past cure.

OEDIPUS
What rite will expiate this crime?

CREON
Banishment or death for death—blood unavenged 100
menaces the city like a storm.

OEDIPUS
Does Apollo reveal the man who was killed?

CREON
Laius, O lord, was the ruler
of this city, before you saved it.

OEDIPUS
I have heard about him. But I never saw him. 105

CREON
He was killed, and the god clearly commands
vengeance upon his murderers.

OEDIPUS
Where can they be? Where
can we find the traces of this ancient crime?

CREON
He says it lies in this land. What is sought 110
is found; the ignored will disappear.

OEDIPUS
Was it in another place, or here
in his own house or fields, that Laius died?

CREON
He was traveling abroad, so he said, on pilgrimage to Delphi,
but never returned home. 115

OEDIPUS
Did no one survive, was there no one else on the road
who saw what happened and could tell us something?

CREON
Everyone died, except one, who fled in fear
and could remember only one thing—

OEDIPUS
What did he say? From one clue 120
much can be deduced. This gives me hope.

CREON
He said it was a band of robbers
that attacked and killed him, not one, but many hands.

OEDIPUS
How could a single robber, unless bribed
by some vile man from here, dare to kill him? 125

CREON
That was thought of then. But with Laius' death,
we had no defender against the many evils.

OEDIPUS
The king overthrown,
what evil was enough to stop the search?

CREON
The Sphinx's riddling demands 130
kept our thoughts on what was at our feet.

OEDIPUS
I shall go back to the start of it all—
I know the god's and your concern
for the one who has died.
You will see me as a true ally 135
avenging this land and Phoebus Apollo.
Not only for old friends but also for myself
must I drive away this defilement.
Whoever killed Laius now might choose
to murder me. To solve that crime 140
is to protect myself.
Come, children, hasten
from the altar steps, and raise your olive wreaths.
Let someone call the people of Cadmus
to join us. I vow to do all that I can. 145
With the god's help, either we triumph or fail.

PRIEST
Rise to your feet.
We have heard what we want: Oedipus agrees.
And may the sacred power of Phoebus Apollo,
and the oracles he sent, defeat this plague. 150

(The PRIEST *and suppliants leave through the right side, toward Thebes.* OEDIPUS *exits through the double doors.* CREON *exits on the right.)*

(The CHORUS *of fifteen elders of Thebes enters the orchestra from the right and sings the opening ode, the* parodos.)

CHORAL ENTRY SONG *(parodos)*

CHORUS Strophe A (151–57)
Is that the sweet-sounding voice of Zeus
from the gold-decked Pythian shrine
come to glorious Thebes?
My mind shudders with fear.
In awe we invoke you, healer-god of Delos.
What price will you exact, now or in the future,

for what we ask?
Speak, immortal child of golden Hope,
we crave your words.

Antistrophe A (158–67)

First we call on you, daughter of Zeus,
deathless Athena, and your sister Artemis,
queen of our earth, on her throne in the marketplace,
and on Phoebus the far-shooting archer—
O you three, with your threefold power
to defend us now from death, appear!
As you have saved us before from destruction
racing toward our city,
save us again from these new flames of woe.
Come to us here.

Strophe B (168–78)

Alas, our troubles are endless.
All the people are sick—
no one knows how we can defend ourselves,
even the hardest thought cannot forge spear or sword.
Our richest fields are sterile now.
Our women labor in stillbirth.
Wherever you look, like winged birds
or forest fire, crowds flee toward
the darkening west, to Hades' land.

Antistrophe B (179–89)

The city dies through these unnumbered deaths.
Its unmourned children rot on the plain
in pitiless contagion,
its wives and faded mothers wander
from one altar to another
groaning their woes and prayers.
The voices blend with the flutes in a paean to you,
O bright-faced, golden daughter of Zeus.
Send us your aid.

Strophe C (190–202)

We hear no clash of brazen arms,
but Ares' threats and war cries ring through the city,
torment us night and day.
Oh, drive him from the borders of our fatherland
out to the furthest reaches of the western sea
and Amphitrite's chamber,

or toward the rocky northern shores of Thrace
beyond the Hellespont,
for what night leaves unfinished, day completes—
you who wield the power of lightning stroke
to blast, and thunderbolt to crush him,
Great Father Zeus.

Antistrophe C (203–15)

And you, shining wolf-god Apollo,
let the adamantine shafts, our defenders,
fly from your plaited golden bowstring
like Artemis' fiery torches
when she hunts on the Lycian hills.
Let the gold-crowned god
named for this land, wine-faced Bacchus,
come with his troop of maenads
brandishing their pitchy torches
and crying *Euoi*!
to drive off Ares our enemy—
that god despised by every other god.

*(*OEDIPUS *enters through the double doors.)*

OEDIPUS

I hear what you ask. And if you heed my words,
and tend the plague, much might be done
to overcome these evils.
I speak as a stranger to the story
and commission of this crime, with no idea 220
where to hunt for clues and signs.
But now I am one of you, a citizen
of Thebes—and announce to all Cadmeans
that whoever knows the name of the killer
of Laius, son of Labdacus, 225
I command him to reveal it to me.
Even if he must confess the crime

* * * * * *

himself, he has nothing to fear but banishment.
Unharmed he may depart this land.
If someone knows the murderer, 230
be he citizen or stranger, he should speak now.
He will be rewarded and thanked.
But if no one will speak, and shielding a friend

or himself, ignores my words,
let him hear the punishment. 235

This man, whoever he is, will be forbidden
in any part of my realm,
nor may anyone give him aid
or shelter or greeting,
nor with him share the rites, libations, 240
and sacrifice to the gods, but should
thrust him from their house—being one accursed—
as the Pythian Oracle revealed to me.
Thus I honor my duty to the god
and to the dead man. 245
I pray that whoever did this—even if he has,
alone or with his murderous accomplices, escaped—
may his life always be wretched.
And I pray that if he should be one of my household—
and I know it—then let me suffer 250
every punishment I call down on others.
I ask you to make sure these things are done—
not only for my sake and for the sake of the god
but for our barren, god-forsaken land.
Even if it were not god-urged, 255
it would be wrong to allow this foulness to survive.
A noble man, a king, has died.
We must seek out the cause and avenge it.
Now that I rule with the same power he held,
become his kin, his wife and bed now mine— 260
and if he had been blessed with children as I have,
their birth from the same mother
would have bound us even closer.
But evil fortune came to that man.
Now, as if he were my own father, 265
I shall do everything I can to find the murderer
of the son of Labdacus, son of Polydorus,
of Cadmus before him, and ancient Agenor.
And whoever does not help me, I pray the gods
may blight their land and the wombs 270
of their wives, that their fate will be
to die an even worse death than his.
But for all loyal Cadmeans,

may their ally Justice,
and all the gods, be gracious and kind. 275

CHORUS *(The coryphaeus, the leader of the* CHORUS*, speaks.)*
Because of your curse, my lord, I must speak,
for I did not kill him nor can I say who did.
Phoebus set the task—it is for the god to tell
who did the deed.

OEDIPUS
You are right. But no one can force 280
the gods to speak if they do not wish.

CHORUS
The second thing I'll say—

OEDIPUS
And if you have one, give me your third reason also!

CHORUS
I know that the seer Teiresias sees most like Phoebus.
If you can know what he sees, 285
you will come closest to the truth.

OEDIPUS
But I have not been idle and done nothing.
After hearing Creon talk of him, I sent two messengers,
and it is strange that he is not yet here.

CHORUS
All those old reports are dull and stale— 290

OEDIPUS
What reports? Is there something I have not looked into?

CHORUS
They say he was attacked by a gang of thieves and killed on the road.

OEDIPUS
That's what I heard. But no one saw who did it.

CHORUS
If he knows what fear is, that man,
he will not linger, after your curses. 295

OEDIPUS
If he did not fear murder, he will not fear curses.

CHORUS
But here comes the one to find him—
Teiresias. They lead him in, the divine seer—he who,
alone among men, always knows the truth.

(Enter TEIRESIAS, *a blind seer, led by a* YOUNG BOY, *from the direction of Thebes.)*

OEDIPUS
O Teiresias, you who know and teach 300
Olympian secrets and mysteries here on the earth!
Though sightless, you perceive everything.
You know what sickness gnaws at the city.
Like a soldier in the front row of the phalanx
who takes the first onslaught, you alone can save us. 305
You must already know Phoebus' message—
that the end to this plague will only come
when we track down Laius' murderers
and kill them, or drive them from this land.
Whatever method you have to read the future— 310
from the flight of birds, or other ways of augury—
use it now to save yourself, your city, and me
from the pollution of unavenged murder.
We are all in your hands. For a man to use
his gifts to help others is the most noble labor. 315

TEIRESIAS
Alas, how awful it is to have wisdom, when such knowledge
is useless. I knew this already, but ignored it—
or else I would have known better than to come.

OEDIPUS
How is it that you are so reluctant?

TEIRESIAS
Let me go home. It will be better. 320
We shall each bear our fate easier if you obey me.

OEDIPUS
It is neither right nor kind to the city that bred you
if you deny it your prophetic powers.

TEIRESIAS
I see your words fall wide of the mark and miss their aim.
I don't want mine to do the same. 325

OEDIPUS
With the knowledge you have from the gods,
we bow at your feet and implore you to speak, not turn away.

TEIRESIAS
You cannot imagine what evil I know already—
though I will not reveal it.

OEDIPUS
Do I hear right—that you will not tell what you know? 330
Do you want to betray us and destroy the city?

TEIRESIAS
I do not want to harm you—or myself.
Do not interrogate me. I will say nothing.

OEDIPUS
O wicked, heartless man—you would madden
even a stone. Why will you not speak out 335
but insolent, stay stubbornly mute?

TEIRESIAS
You attack my anger and blame me,
unconscious of your own.

OEDIPUS
Who would not be angry, hearing how
you deny me and dishonor our city? 340

TEIRESIAS
These things will come, though I muffle them in silence.

OEDIPUS
What will come? You must tell me!

TEIRESIAS
I shall say nothing else, but stay silent,
no matter how you rage and storm.

OEDIPUS
And I shall not hold back what I know, my anger 345
will not allow it. Know that I think you
were part of the plot, and even, I say,
that you alone would have done the evil deed
with your own hands, if you were not a blind man.

TEIRESIAS
Is this so? Let me tell you— 350
you must abide by your own decree.
From this day forth, you must not speak to me or any man.
You yourself are the sacrilegious curse of this land.

OEDIPUS
Shameless to say such things!
Where do you think to escape now? 355

TEIRESIAS
No need to escape. My words are true.

OEDIPUS
Who taught you this? Not your prophetic skill!

TEIRESIAS
It was you; and made me speak against my will.

OEDIPUS
What did I say? Tell me once more, so I can try to take it in.

TEIRESIAS
Have you not yet understood? Do you want to test me? 360

OEDIPUS
Perhaps I did not comprehend—explain it again.

TEIRESIAS
I repeat that you yourself are the murderer you seek.

OEDIPUS
You will be sorry if you say that again—

TEIRESIAS
I'll tell you something else, which will anger you even more.

OEDIPUS
Spew out whatever you like—it will mean nothing to me. 365

TEIRESIAS
All unaware, you have done shameless things with
your closest and dearest, and do not yet see the full horror of your deeds.

OEDIPUS
Do you think you can say that and go unpunished?

TEIRESIAS
There is strength in truth.

OEDIPUS
In truth, yes. But this is not truth, 370
but the ravings of a deaf, witless, blind man—blind in all his senses.

TEIRESIAS
And you, poor wretch, will soon be the butt
of every insult you now direct at me.

OEDIPUS
You are a creature of night, and cannot
harm me, nor any other who can see the light. 375

TEIRESIAS
It is not I who has made your fate.
That was Apollo's task—that is his care.

OEDIPUS
Is it Creon, or another, who set you to this?

TEIRESIAS
Creon is not your enemy—it is yourself.

OEDIPUS
Power and wealth, kingship and skill 380
surpassing skill in every art of life—
how they all produce only envy!
And is it because of this power—which the city
granted of its own free will, unasked for—
that Creon, whom I trusted as a friend, 385
now tries to undermine and depose me
by sending this trickster, this wizard
who can see nothing but his own gain,
being blind in his supposed art?
Give me an example of your vision. 390
How is it that when the dog-haunched singer squatted here
you said nothing to save the city and its people?
The riddle should not have waited for a stranger
to solve it. There was need of a prophet—
but neither from birds nor gods did you learn 395
the answer. It was I, Oedipus,
the ignorant, who stopped her, who triumphed
through my own intelligence, not the help of gods or birds—
I, whom you call the curse, and think to depose, hoping
it will bring you closer to power in Creon's court. 400
Believe me, the two of you, your plotting
will end in tears. If you were not so old
I would punish you for such disloyal thoughts.

CHORUS
It seems to us that the words of both—his
and yours—are spoken in anger. Oedipus, 405
this is pointless, and will get us no further
toward obeying the words of the oracle.

TEIRESIAS
Even though you are the king, I am your equal
in this—the right to reply.

I am no man's slave. I serve Loxias. 410
Creon has no power over me.
But I say to you, who have taunted me in my blindness,
that though you have sight, you cannot see your own evil
nor the truth of where you live and whom you live with.
Do you know your origin, know that you are the enemy 415
of all your line, those below the earth and those still on it,
and that your mother's and father's double-edged curse
with deadly step will drive you from this land—
like a light revealing all, before it blinds you.

Every cave and shelter in Cithaeron will echo 420
with your cries, when you realize
the full meaning of the marriage
you thought would be your safe harbor.
You cannot yet see the throng of other evils
which will reduce you to the level of your children. 425
Say the worst that you can about me and about Creon—
pelt us with mud—but there is no mortal
who will be more befouled than you.

OEDIPUS
I will not suffer this! I refuse to listen!
Damn you—get out— 430
why have you not gone, why are you still here?

TEIRESIAS
I would not have come if you had not summoned me.

OEDIPUS
If I had known you would say such foolish things
I would not have ordered you here.

TEIRESIAS
I might seem a fool to you— 435
but your parents thought me wise.

OEDIPUS
My parents? Wait—you knew those who bore me?

Teiresias
This day bears your birth and destruction.

Oedipus
Riddling again!

Teiresias
You are good at riddles. 440

Oedipus
You mock my talent.

Teiresias
The same talent has destroyed you.

Oedipus
But if I saved the city—that is all I care about.

Teiresias
Good. I shall go. You, boy, lead me away.

Oedipus
Yes, let him lead you away. Your presence disturbs me. 445
I shall be glad when you have gone.

Teiresias
When I have said what I came to say, then I shall leave—
not because I fear you. You cannot do me harm.
I tell you—the man you have sought for so long,
threatened, and denounced as the murderer 450
of Laius—that man is here.
Now he is called a stranger, an alien, but soon
will be known as a native-born Theban—
which will bring him no joy.
A beggar not a rich man, blind who now has eyes, 455
hesitantly tapping his staff through a foreign land,
he will be exposed as brother and father
to his own children, son and husband
to the woman who bore him, sharer of the marriage bed
with the father he murdered. 460

You go inside, but think on this. If I have seen wrong,
then call me blind—a false prophet.

(Exit TEIRESIAS*, led by the* BOY*, toward Thebes, stage right.* OEDIPUS *exits through the double doors into the palace. The* CHORUS *sings the first* stasimon.)

FIRST *STASIMON*

CHORUS Strophe A (463–72)
Who is this man the oracular rocks of Delphi curse
for unspeakable deeds
too terrible to describe?
Whose blood-drenched hands have done such work?
The hour has come for him to flee
like a horse before the storm
from the wrath of leaping Apollo,
armed like his father Zeus with fire and lightning bolt,
and from the implacable Keres,
goddesses of death, who snap at his heels.

Antistrophe A (473–82)

See how the signal flashes
from snow-capped Parnassus
for all to hunt the fugitive
through the tangled forest
and the deepest caverns
where he lurks between boulders
like a mountain bull with a crippled foot,
wretched and solitary, desperate to hide
from the oracles of the Omphalos
who flutter and squeak around his head.

Strophe B (483–97)

What this wise old prophet reads
from the auguries, agitates me, agitates me.
I am torn, and cannot decide
if I should believe what he says, or deny it—
waver between hope and fear,
uncertain where to seek the truth.

Tell me, what was the quarrel
between the house of Labdacus
and Polybus' son?

I have never heard talk of one,
now or in the past,
which might serve as proof; without it
how can I go against the good name of Oedipus—
I who am defender of the house of Labdacus—
and blame him for this obscure death?

Antistrophe B (498–512)

Zeus and Apollo are wise,
see deep into the hearts of men.
But even the most famous seer
is only a man, in the end—
need be no wiser than me.
Until I am convinced
that what the auger says is true,
I shall not believe those who blame the king.
When he bested the Sphinx, the Winged Maiden,
and saved our city
everyone loved him—
that will be my touchstone.
Until his guilt is proved,
for me he will be innocent.

(Enter CREON *from the direction of Thebes, stage right.)*

CREON
Citizens, I am told
that King Oedipus makes vile accusations against me.
It is unbearable! 515
If in his present misfortunes
he thinks he has suffered at my hands,
his troubles caused by anything I've done
by word or deed, I would not want to live.
Such slander is not a simple thing to bear 520
but the worst of all—it taints me doubly
as an evil, both to my city and to my friends.

CHORUS *(The coryphaeus speaks.)*
He says it, yes—but perhaps
he speaks without thinking, in anger.

CREON
Does he claim that I persuaded the seer 525
to make these accusations and say these lying words?

CHORUS
That is what he said, but I do not know the reason.

CREON
Were his eyes clear, did he seem calm
when he laid this charge against me?

CHORUS
I cannot tell you, I am not witness of my master's acts. 530
But he himself now comes out of the house.

(Enter OEDIPUS *through the double doors of the palace.)*

OEDIPUS
You—wretch—how dare you show your face? Or
are you so shameless that you come to my house
openly, as an acknowledged murderer,
who schemes to rob me of my kingdom? 535
By the gods—do you regard me
as such a fool and coward that you can do these things,
or think I would not guess your most secret
plans and then protect myself?
And what a stupid plan—without 540
the backing of party and fortune and friends—
to think that you could track and seize the crown.

CREON
Do you have a better idea? Listen to me,
I will speak calmly, and you can judge.

OEDIPUS
You are good at making excuses, but I am bad 545
at believing them. To me, they sound like threats.

CREON
At least, hear what I have to say.

OEDIPUS
As long as you do not claim you are not evil.

CREON
If you think this mindless bluster
is something to be proud of, you think wrong. 550

OEDIPUS
And if you think you can do evil against your kinsman
and not be punished, you think wrong.

CREON
I admit your words are just. But tell me,
what harm have I done you?

OEDIPUS
Did you, or did you not, insist I must 555
send for that man, that famous prophet?

CREON
And I would still give the same advice—

OEDIPUS
And how long is it since Laius—

CREON
Since Laius did what? What do you mean?

OEDIPUS
Vanished. Was murdered. 560

CREON
It was a very long time ago.

OEDIPUS
And was this seer as famous then?

CREON
Yes, and just as honored.

OEDIPUS
Did he mention my name then?

CREON
Not as far as I know. 565

OEDIPUS
But you searched for the killer?

CREON
Of course we did. But we discovered nothing.

OEDIPUS
And if he was so wise, why could he not find out these things?

CREON
I do not know, and so can give no answer.

OEDIPUS
You know very well—so say what you know. 570

CREON
What do I know? I would speak if I had something to say.

OEDIPUS
Because—if he were not in league with you,
he would never have said I killed Laius!

CREON
If he does say that, then you know why—
I am learning as much from you as you from me. 575

OEDIPUS
Learn then that I will not be named a murderer.

CREON
Yet, did you not take my sister for wife?

OEDIPUS
How can I deny it?

CREON
And rule with equal power, you and she, over this land?

OEDIPUS
She has an equal share in everything. 580

CREON
And therefore am I not also equal to you both, one third of three?

OEDIPUS
Now you show your true thoughts—treacherous friend!

CREON
Not if you think about it coolly, as I have.
Consider this first: would anyone
choose to rule with all the fear that brings, rather 585
than sleep in peace, yet with the same power?
It is not in my nature to crave
the name of king—I'd rather do what a king does,
like anyone with good judgment.

Now, I have everything—except the fear. 590
If I were king, I would be forced into actions I hated.
How much sweeter to have the power
but not the grief of being king.
I am not such a fool that I need
more than the privilege and profit. 595

Now, I greet everyone equally, and they all praise me.
Now, whoever wants a favor from you, shows favor to me,
hoping it will help them gain what they wish.
Why would I give up all this?
A man who sees the world clearly does not plot treason. 600
No, I would never think like that,
nor fraternize with those who did.
And for proof, to test my words, go to the Pythia at Delphi,
question the oracle whether what I say is true.
If you should catch me out, plotting 605
with the seer, then sentence and slay me, not only
with your one vote, but with two—both mine and yours.

But if you are not sure, do not accuse me.
It is not justice to believe without proof
in the virtue of bad men, or that good men are evil. 610
To reject a true friend
is like casting away your own life.
In time you will understand such things,
for time alone reveals the just man—
but the evil-doer is recognized at once. 615

CHORUS
What he says makes sense—safer to heed it
than to act in haste, stumble, and fall.

OEDIPUS
If he plots swift and secret
I must be as quick.
Otherwise, he will act while I wait 620
and all my aims miss their targets.

CREON
What do you want? To banish me?

OEDIPUS
Exile is not enough. I want your death.
* * * * * * *

CREON
That's what envy leads to!
* * * * *

OEDIPUS
Stubborn wretch! Why don't you believe me? 625

CREON: Because it's clear your mind is in chaos.
OEDIPUS: —about myself?

CREON: Certainly about me.
OEDIPUS: You are treacherous!

CREON: And you understand nothing—
OEDIPUS: Except that I am king, and rule.

CREON: —rule badly.
 OEDIPUS: O city, my city!

CREON
My city also, not only yours! 630

CHORUS
Stop, lords! Here, just in time
I see Jocasta come from the house.
She will make peace between you.

(Enter JOCASTA, *through the double doors.)*
JOCASTA
You foolish men, why have you begun
to quarrel? Aren't you ashamed, 635
the whole land sick, to flaunt your petty discontents?
Go home, the two of you. You—and you also, Creon.
You are making much of nothing.

CREON
Sister, your husband thinks he can do
what he likes to me—either drive me 640
out of my home and land, or kill me.

OEDIPUS
Yes wife, it's true, exactly that—for I caught him
plotting evil against me.

CREON
May I never prosper and let me die accursed
if I have done any of this! 645

JOCASTA
If he swears by the gods it is true,
then by the gods, trust him, Oedipus—
do this for me, and all these others.

FIRST *KOMMOS*

CHORUS Strophe (649–78)
Think carefully, then yield,
I beg you, my lord.

OEDIPUS
What exactly do you want me to do?

CHORUS
Accept his word. He is no fool,
and swears before the gods.

OEDIPUS
Do you know what you are asking?

CHORUS *(The coryphaeus speaks):* I know— 655
OEDIPUS: Say it again—make it absolutely clear.

CHORUS
That you should not believe an unproved charge
against a friend who swears his innocence.

OEDIPUS
Can you not understand that what you ask
signifies my banishment and destruction?

CHORUS
Never! not even by the greatest of the gods, 660
Helios. Let me die godless,
friendless and desperate,
before I think such things.
My grief is the fate of this blighted land, 665
and my heart will be torn in two
if to this evil is added
such hatred between you both.

OEDIPUS
Let him go, then—even if it means I must die,
or be forced into exile, dishonored. 670
It is not his words that move me, but yours.
Wherever he is, I shall always hate him.

CREON
How hard it is for you to yield!
The weight of your own nature
is heavier for you to bear than any other. 675

OEDIPUS
Get away from me—leave me alone!

CREON
I am going. You are vicious—
but these others have saved me.

(Exit CREON *toward Thebes, stage right.)*

CHORUS — Antistrophe (679–96)
Why so slow, O wife of Oedipus,
to lead this man into the house? 680

JOCASTA
When I know what's happened—

CHORUS
Unjust suspicions, ignorant accusations
gnaw at the heart.

JOCASTA
From each of them?

CHORUS: Yes. 685
JOCASTA: But what was said?

CHORUS
Already we suffer enough through our land's misfortunes.
We need no other cause of grief.

OEDIPUS
Good man that you are—yet
you see what it leads to, your effort to soothe my anger.

CHORUS
Dear lord, I say it again— 690
that I would be quite mad, an idiot,
to turn from you now, you
who carried our land to safety,
like a ship before a fair wind,

from its time of woes. 695
Now once again may you be our good pilot.

JOCASTA
By the gods, tell me the truth,
my lord—what it was
that caused such anger?

OEDIPUS
Wife whom I respect more than these men, 700
I say it is Creon who has plotted against me.

JOCASTA
But can you tell me clearly the cause of the quarrel?

OEDIPUS
He dares to say that it was I who murdered Laius.

JOCASTA
Is this his own accusation, or is he repeating another's?

OEDIPUS
He sent his charlatan-wizard to speak for him, 705
so he is free of blame.

JOCASTA
My dear, forget all that.
Listen to what I have to say, and learn
that no mortal can prophesy the future—
and I can prove it. 710
Long ago, an oracle came here to Laius—
I will not claim from Phoebus himself, but one of his priests—
who told him it was his fate to die by the hand
of any child born to me and him.
But you know the story—it was foreign robbers 715
who killed him at the crossroad where three roads meet.
And three days after the birth of our boy
Laius pinned the infant's feet together
and gave the order to expose him on the pathless mountainside.
So Apollo's prophecy was not accomplished: 720
that child could never murder his father,

nor Laius suffer the fate he feared.
Such predictions can be ignored;
they mean nothing. Whatever a god wants,
he can tell us himself. 725

OEDIPUS
What agitation grips my mind and spirit
as I hear you, wife.

JOCASTA
But why does this make you so anxious?

OEDIPUS
I seemed to hear you say that Laius
was butchered where three roads meet. 730

JOCASTA
That was the story then, and still is now.

OEDIPUS
Where did this awful thing happen?

JOCASTA
Phocis the place is called,
where the roads from Daulis and Delphi join.

OEDIPUS
And how long ago was it? 735

JOCASTA
It was just before you appeared and took power in this land,
that the news came to the city.

OEDIPUS
O Zeus, what are your plans for me?

JOCASTA
Tell me what troubles your heart, Oedipus.

Oedipus
Don't ask yet. Just say—what did he look like, 740
how old was Laius then?

Jocasta
Tall enough, and beginning to go grey.
Very much as you look now.

Oedipus
Woe is me! How wretched I am, self-cursed
through my own ignorance. 745

Jocasta
I don't want to understand what you mean.

Oedipus
I dread that seer saw right.
But you will help me most if you can tell me one more thing.

Jocasta
I shrink with dread also, but if I can, I'll answer your question.

Oedipus
Was he alone, or did he have armed men with him, 750
the proper escort of a leader?

Jocasta
There were five of them, including a herald,
and Laius rode in the carriage.

Oedipus
Alas, it all comes clear. Who was it
who told this to you, wife? 755

Jocasta
A servant who returned alone, the only survivor.

Oedipus
Is he still here in the house now?

Jocasta
No. Because when he arrived from that place and saw
that you were lord now Laius had perished,
he knelt, taking my hand, and begged me 760
to send him away to the fields to be my shepherd,
far from all sight of this city.
And I agreed. He was the sort, though a slave,
who deserved even greater favor.

Oedipus
Can he be brought here, quickly? 765

Jocasta
Yes, it can be done. But why do you ask?

Oedipus
I am afraid, Jocasta. I have said too much already.
That is why I must see him.

Jocasta
Then he will come. But surely I deserve to be told
what is tormenting you, lord. 770

Oedipus
I shall not hold back from telling you
my worst fears. Who else is dearer to me, or better
to share these things than you?

My father was Polybus of Corinth,
my mother, Merope, a Dorian. And I 775
was thought the first among our citizens
until, one night, something unexpected happened—
which I would have done better to ignore.
A drunken guest at a banquet called out
that I was a bastard, not my father's son. 780
I managed to hold my tongue then, but it rankled,
and the next day went to my parents, repeated
what he had said and demanded the truth.
They were furious and denied it absolutely.
I believed them, but was still angry. 785
And the story spread—the way they always do.

Not saying a word to my parents,
I presented myself to the Pythian oracle,
but Phoebus refused my question—
instead, made terrible forecasts 790
that I was doomed to sleep with my mother
and engender a monstrous brood; become
the murderer of my own father.
Hearing such awful things, I fled,
using the stars as guides to make sure 795
I always moved away from Corinth,
so the evil oracle would never be accomplished,
and at last arrived at the place
where you say your old king died.

Wife, to you I can tell the truth. 800
As I came near to where the three roads join
I met a herald, and a horse-drawn carriage
like those you describe—
and the herald, and the man in the carriage,
forced me off the road. 805
It was the driver, as he tried to turn me aside,
I struck out at first in my anger.
Then, as I pushed past, the old man
jabbed from above at my head with his double goad.
But he paid for this—for now, 810
with the staff in my hand, I tumbled him out of the cart
and onto his back in the road
and slaughtered them all. If that stranger
had any connection with Laius,
what man is more wretched than I? 815
Who could be more hated by the gods than he
whom no stranger or citizen must allow into their house
nor speak to, but must cast out
and turn away—and it is I alone
who laid these curses on myself! 820
The very bed of the murdered man
is polluted by the same hands that killed him.
O awful! Totally evil, I must seek even further
exile, to make sure I'll never meet one of my own kin
nor tread the soil of my birth, or else I am doomed 825
to mate with my own mother and slay Polybus,

the father who begot and raised me.
How could someone, judging such a fate,
not think me the plaything of a savage god?
No, let me vanish and die first, 830
before my name is stained forever by such shame.
Never, never, believe me, shall I allow
such things to happen, or commit such acts.

CHORUS
We shrink from such knowledge, O lord,
but until he has spoken, you can have hope. 835

OEDIPUS
Indeed, this is my only hope—
to wait for the shepherd.

JOCASTA
And when he comes, what is it you want to hear?

OEDIPUS
I shall tell you. If his story confirms yours,
my suffering will be over. 840

JOCASTA
What did I say that seemed so important?

OEDIPUS
You insisted he said that robber men
had killed him. Men—not a man. If he still
says that, I could not have done it,
because one is not the same as many. 845
But if he is sure it was one man alone,
then the scales of justice tilt and make me guilty.

JOCASTA
That is what he said at first
and he cannot deny it.
Everyone heard, not only me. 850
And even if he should say something different now
it still will prove nothing
about the murder of Laius, whom Loxias said

would be killed by my son.
That wretched child could never 855
have done it—he was already dead.
I pay no heed to prophecies—look neither
to right nor left, but on the road ahead.

OEDIPUS
That may be so. Still, do not neglect
to send someone to bring that man here. 860

JOCASTA
It shall be done at once. Now come into the house.
I wish only to please you.

(Exit OEDIPUS *and* JOCASTA *into the palace, through the double doors.)*

Second *STASIMON*

CHORUS Strophe A (863–72)
Let me fulfill my fate
through the holy purity
of all my words and deeds
and follow the heavenly laws,
engendered in the bright ether
by their father Olympus,
laws we humans could not have framed;
they will never be forgotten
nor blotted out by sleep—the god lives
in them, eternal and mighty.

Antistrophe A (873–82)

Pride breeds tyrants, arrogant,
glutted on folly.
Pride blindly mounts the heights
then tumbles down the precipice
to the utmost depths,
losing its footing.
I pray the god will not revoke the need
for that healthy rivalry
which strengthens the city,
that he will always be our champion.

Strophe B (883–896)

The man who struts through life
vicious and arrogant in word and act,
who does not fear Justice
nor honors the gods—
may evil befall him
for such insolent impiety.
But if he profits fairly, shuns all outrage
nor lays profaning hands on holy things,
and still is punished,
then how can any mortal man evade
the angry arrows aimed from Olympus,
or the threat of heavenly vengeance?
If evil deeds like his are honored,
who would dance before god's altar?

Antistrophe B (897–910)

No longer shall I go
in reverence to Delphi,
Omphalos of Earth.
I shall not visit the oracle at Abae
nor that of Olympia
because their words
no longer ring true,
though every mortal still wants to believe them.
O Zeus, as you are indeed called, ruler of all,
do not be unaware of this.
For the old prophecies about Laius
are already dismissed, and Apollo's glory dimmed;
the gods grow weak and feeble. 910

(Enter JOCASTA *from the palace, through the double doors. She is carrying wreaths and incense.)*

JOCASTA
Lords of the land, I have decided to go
on pilgrimage to the temples,
bearing wreathes and incense-offerings to the gods,
for Oedipus torments himself with fear of the future
as much as dread of the past. 915
Whatever he's told he believes.
He pays no heed to what I say.
I can do no more, but turn to you,

*(*JOCASTA *makes an offering at the altar.)*
shining wolf-god Apollo, closest and dearest of all gods,
entreating your aid with these prayers— 920
that you release us from this curse.
For now we are all dismayed, to see
the pilot of our vessel himself disoriented.

(Enter CORINTHIAN MESSENGER *from the direction of Corinth, stage left. He is elderly.)*

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Strangers, can you tell me where
Is the house of King Oedipus? 925
Better still—tell me if you know where he is?

CHORUS
Here is his house, stranger, and he himself inside,
and this his fruitful wife, mother of his children.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
May she be blessed, and all her kind—
the legitimate wife. 930

JOCASTA
And blessings on you, stranger. You deserve them,
for your good words. But tell me,
why have you come, what news do you bring?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Good news for your house and your husband, woman.

JOCASTA
What is it—and who sent you? 935

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
I come from Corinth, and what I have to say
will surely give you pleasure—how not?—yet will grieve you as much.

JOCASTA
Tell me—how can it have this double power?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
The people of Isthmian Corinth
want him for king—that is what they say. 940

JOCASTA
Why? Isn't old Polybus still king?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
No—not since Death took him to his kingdom.

JOCASTA
You say that Oedipus' father is dead?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
May I die, if I'm not telling the truth.

JOCASTA
Maid, hurry, go to your master, and tell him 945
at once. So much for prophecies!

(Maid exits through the double doors into the palace.)
Where are they now? How many years is it
since Oedipus fled his land, fearing he must kill his father—
who now has died quite naturally, not by a son's hand!

(Enter OEDIPUS *from the palace, through the double doors.)*
OEDIPUS
Jocasta, my dearest, 950
why did you send for me to come from the house?

JOCASTA
Hear what this man says—then tell me
where they have gone, those prophecies of the gods?

OEDIPUS
Who is he, and what does he have to tell me?

JOCASTA
He's from Corinth, come to inform you 955
that your father Polybus has died.

OEDIPUS
What! Stranger, let me hear it from you.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
If you want to hear it clearly again,
then know that he is dead and gone.

OEDIPUS
How did he die? Was it treachery? Sickness? 960

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
The least tilt of the scales puts an old man to rest—

OEDIPUS
Poor man, to die of sickness.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
—and the many years he'd lived.

OEDIPUS
Ah, wife, why would anyone go
to the shrine of the Pythian seer, or look for auguries 965
from the screeching birds above, who prophesied
that I would kill my father. Now he is dead,
rests beneath the earth, and I am here, innocent,
with sword untouched—unless you could say
that it was longing for me that killed him. 970
Those useless oracles now rot in Hades,
taken there by Polybus.

JOCASTA
Isn't that just what I always said?

OEDIPUS
Yes, but I was frightened and did not believe you.

JOCASTA
Now you know not to take any of it to heart. 975

OEDIPUS
But surely I must still fear the bed of my mother—

JOCASTA
Why be afraid?
Chance rules us all.
No one can foresee the future.
Best to live in the present, making no plans. 980
And why should you fear the bed of your mother?
Many a man has slept with his mother in dreams.
He who dismisses such thoughts lives easiest.

OEDIPUS
All that you say might be true,
if she who bore me were not still alive. But she is, 985
and so I have every reason to fear.

JOCASTA
Yet your father's funeral is a cause to rejoice.

OEDIPUS
Yes—but she is still alive.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Who is this woman you fear?

OEDIPUS
Merope, old man—who lived with Polybus. 990

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Why be frightened of her?

OEDIPUS
A dreadful prophecy from a god.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Can you tell it to me, or is that forbidden?

OEDIPUS
It was Loxias who said
I was doomed to couple with my mother 995
and kill my father with my own hands.
Because of this dreadful prophecy, many years ago

I quit Corinth. Since then, my life has been fortunate—yet
to look into the eyes of one's parents is the greatest joy.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
And this is the reason you fled the city? 1000

OEDIPUS
I had no wish to be my father's murderer!

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
I can so easily free you of these fears, my lord,
since I am well-disposed toward you.

OEDIPUS
What a favor you would grant me!

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
And I came especially for this— 1005
to bring you home, and reap the benefit.

OEDIPUS
I can never go near there.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
My child, you don't know what you are doing.

OEDIPUS
How, old man? For the gods' sake, tell me!

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
So you won't go back because of this story? 1010

OEDIPUS
I dread that Phoebus' curse will come true.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Or that pollution would come from your parents?

OEDIPUS
Exactly that is what most terrifies me.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Well, you can be sure that you have nothing to fear.

OEDIPUS
How could that be, if they begot me? 1015

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
There is no kinship of blood between you and Polybus.

OEDIPUS
What do you say? Polybus not my father?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
No more than I am. In that we were equal.

OEDIPUS
A nothing like you the equal of he who sired me!

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
He did not sire you, neither he nor I. 1020

OEDIPUS
Then why did he name me his child?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
I gave you to him as a gift—he received you from my hands.

OEDIPUS
Yet strange, that from another's hands, he loved me dearly.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
It was the years of childlessness won him over.

OEDIPUS
Had you bought me somewhere, or did you find me? 1025

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
I found you on the wooded slopes of Cithaeron.

OEDIPUS
Did you have some reason to be there?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
It was on that mountain I kept my flocks.

OEDIPUS
Ah—a wandering shepherd—

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
—and your savior, then. 1030

OEDIPUS
Was I crying, when you took me up?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Crying with pain—your ankles still bear witness.

OEDIPUS
Why must I be reminded of that old story?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Your feet were pierced and pinned together, and I freed them.

OEDIPUS
This fearful scar I've borne since my cradle. 1035

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
And so you are called "swollen foot."

OEDIPUS
But tell me, for the gods' sake, was this done by my mother or my
father?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
That I cannot. The one who gave you to me knows better than I.

OEDIPUS
So you did not find me yourself?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
No, another shepherd handed you over. 1040

OEDIPUS
But who was he? Can you tell me?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
They said he was one of Laius' men.

OEDIPUS
You mean the old king of this land?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Yes, a shepherd of Laius.

OEDIPUS
And is he still alive? Can I see him? 1045

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
Your local people can answer that best.

OEDIPUS *(addressing the* CHORUS)
Do any of you know if he is still alive,
the shepherd of whom he speaks,
or has seen him out in the fields or here in the city?
Speak at once!—the time has come to learn these things. 1050

CHORUS *(The coryphaeus speaks.)*
I think he must be the countryman
you wanted to see. But here's Jocasta—
she can tell you better than I.

OEDIPUS
Wife, do you know if the man we sent for
is the same person this shepherd mentions? 1055

JOCASTA
Why even try to find out? Pay no attention
to all that nonsense.

OEDIPUS
Having come so far, do you think I can hold myself back
from trying to learn the truth of my birth?

JOCASTA
Stop, in the name of the gods—if you value your life— 1060
from going further. I have been plagued enough!

OEDIPUS
Be brave, woman! Even if I am proved three times a slave,
from three generations of slaves, that will not make you base-born.

JOCASTA
I beg you to heed me. Do not do this.

OEDIPUS
You cannot stop me from learning the truth. 1065

JOCASTA
Believe me, I only want the best for you.

OEDIPUS
Your "best," it seems, is what can grieve me most.

JOCASTA
Unlucky man, may you never learn who you are.

OEDIPUS
Someone go—bring her shepherd to me—
And leave her to gloat over her own noble birth! 1070

JOCASTA
Oh, poor doomed man! That is all I can say—
my final words.

(JOCASTA rushes off stage through the double doors.)

CHORUS
Why has she fled, your wife,
in such wild pain? Oedipus, I fear this silence
will be torn apart by evil. 1075

OEDIPUS
Whatever may come, let it burst forth! Even
if I spring from lowly stock, I must know.

Being a woman, she might have grand ideas
and feel ashamed of my base birth.
But I am a child of Fortune— 1080
who has treated me well—and cannot be dishonored.
She is my mother, and the months, my brothers,
have marked me out to wax and wane like them from slave to king.
Such is my nature, I have no wish
to change it—nor not seek out the truth of my birth. 1085

(OEDIPUS *and* CORINTHIAN MESSENGER *remain on stage.*)

THIRD *STASIMON*

CHORUS Strophe A (1086–97)
If I am a seer,
gifted by Olympus to speak the truth,
I prophesy, Mount Cithaeron, that you will know,
at tomorrow's full moon,
how Oedipus exalts you as his native land,
his nurse and mother.
And we shall praise you
with wild cries, song and dance,
because you honor our king,
and make him glad.
Phoebus Apollo,
may these things please you!

Antistrophe A (1098–1109)

Oedipus, who was your mother?
Was she a long-lived nymph,
consort of goat-legged father Pan,
roamer of mountains,
or some mistress of Loxias,
who loves the empty pastures?
Maybe the Lord of Cyllene, or Bacchus himself,
god of the stormy peaks,
found you—a present left there
by one of his favorite playmates,
those almost-immortal
Helicon girls!

(Enter elderly SHEPHERD *with* OEDIPUS*' men from Thebes, stage right.)*

OEDIPUS
Though I have never met him, 1110
yet, Elders, I can guess this is the shepherd
we have looked for—he is old enough
to be that man.
I also recognize the ones who lead him as servants of mine.
But having seen the shepherd before, 1115
you must know better than I.

CHORUS
I know him well—he was Laius' man,
one of his trusty shepherds.

OEDIPUS
Tell me, Corinthian stranger,
is this the one you mean? 1120

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
The very man before your eyes.

OEDIPUS *(addressing the* SHEPHERD*)*
You there, old fellow—look at me, answer
my questions. Were you one of Laius' men?

SHEPHERD
Yes, a slave—not bought though, but born into the household.

OEDIPUS
What sort of work did you do?

SHEPHERD
I followed the flocks for most of my life. 1125

OEDIPUS
Where did you usually camp when you were out with the flocks?

SHEPHERD
Sometimes in Cithaeron, or else nearby.

OEDIPUS
Then you must know this man—maybe you met him there?

SHEPHERD
What has he done—who do you mean?

OEDIPUS
This man here. Have you ever had anything to do with him? 1130

SHEPHERD
I can't remember just like that!

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
And no wonder, my master! But
I'll jog his memory—then I'm sure
he'll remember when we both were at Cithaeron.
He with his two flocks, I with my one, 1135
* * * * * * *
three seasons we stayed together up there,
the six months from spring to the rising of Arcturus.
When winter came, I would drive
my herd to its fold, and he went back to Laius' barns.
He can't deny that all this happened. 1140

SHEPHERD
It's true—though it was long ago.

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
And do you remember that child you gave me
to rear as my own?

SHEPHERD
What's it to you—why do you talk of it?

CORINTHIAN MESSENGER
And here, my friend, is the one who was that child. 1145

SHEPHERD
May you be cursed! Why won't you be quiet?

OEDIPUS
Do not attack him, old man. It is you
who should be punished.

SHEPHERD
What have I done wrong, O best of masters?

OEDIPUS
You would not describe the child he asks about. 1150

SHEPHERD
He doesn't know what he's saying—he wastes his breath.

OEDIPUS
If you won't speak willingly, I'll make you talk.

SHEPHERD
For the gods' sake, don't put an old man to the torture.

OEDIPUS
Quickly, someone, twist back his arms.

(OEDIPUS' men grab the SHEPHERD and twist back his arms.)

SHEPHERD
Wretched me! What do you want to know? 1155

OEDIPUS
Did you give the child he asks about to this very man?

SHEPHERD
I did. I wish I had died on that day.

OEDIPUS
You'll come to it now, if you don't speak the truth.

SHEPHERD
It will be worse for me, if I do speak.

OEDIPUS
This man, it seems, is determined to waste my time. 1160

SHEPHERD
No, no, I've already said I gave him the child.

OEDIPUS
Where did he come from? Your own house, or somewhere else?

SHEPHERD
Not mine. Someone gave him to me.

OEDIPUS
Which of the citizens here—which house?

SHEPHERD
For the gods' sake, do not ask me more, master! 1165

OEDIPUS
You're dead already if I have to ask again.

SHEPHERD
Then—if I must speak—it was someone from the house of Laius.

OEDIPUS
Slave—or kin?

SHEPHERD
Now it comes—the terrible thing I must say—

OEDIPUS
—and I to hear. Whatever must be heard. 1170

SHEPHERD
They said the child was his. She—she, the one inside—
your wife—she can best tell it all.

OEDIPUS: It was she who gave the child to you?
SHEPHERD: Yes, master.

OEDIPUS: Why?
SHEPHERD: So I would kill it.

OEDIPUS The poor woman—her own child. Why? Why? 1175
SHEPHERD Because of the evil prophecies.

OEDIPUS: What prophecies?
SHEPHERD: That he would kill his parents.

OEDIPUS
Then why did you not obey—but give him to this man?

SHEPHERD
I felt so sorry for him, master, and thought
he would take the child away to his own land.
But instead, he saved him for an awful fate. 1180
For if you are who he says you are, you were doomed from birth.

OEDIPUS
Alas, alas, it all comes clear!
O light of day, this is the last time I see you!
I am exposed as cursed—in my birth
and my marriage bed, and by those I should never have slain. 1185

*(*OEDIPUS *rushes off through the double doors.* SHEPHERD *and* ATTENDANTS *exit toward Thebes, stage right, and the* CORINTHIAN MESSENGER *toward Corinth, stage left.)*

FOURTH *STASIMON*

CHORUS Strophe A (1186–96)
O mortal generations,
lives passing so quickly and
equaling nothing. Show me
a man who thinks he is happy
and I will show you a man deluded—
his life means nothing.
Your fate, O wretched Oedipus,
is the example I take,
to prove the gods bless nothing.

Antistrophe A (1197–1203)

You it was who drew back your bow
beyond mortal limit, and gained the blessing of wealth.
By Zeus, it was you who destroyed the Sphinx,
the oracle singer, with her crooked-taloned claws,

and stood like a tower
against the death that threatened our land.
Since then, we have called you our king
and crowned you with grand honors,
ruler of mighty Thebes.

Strophe B (1204–12)

And now, whose story is more wretched?
Who has suffered a worse agony or more painful
fate than you, your life in chaos.
O famous Oedipus, how could the same deep harbor
serve for son and father,
sharing the same marriage bed and chamber;
how could the furrows your father ploughed first
be strong enough to bear you in silence?

Antistrophe B (1213–22)

Against your will, all-seeing Time has found you out
and judged your marriage an abomination
of begetting and begotten,
parent and child as one.
O son of Laius,
would I never had seen you.
Lamentations pour from my mouth.
I must say this—for it was you
who gave me the courage to live,
but now bring darkness down into my eyes.

(Enter SECOND MESSENGER *from the palace, through the double doors.)*

SECOND MESSENGER

Honored nobles of this land
what dreadful thing you are about to hear, and see
with your minds' eye; what great woe will overcome you, 1225
if you feel kinship to the house of Labdacus!
Not even the mighty rivers, not Ister nor Phasis,
could scour this house clean from pollution.
So much hidden evil exposed,
will it or no. The worst woes 1230
seem those we bring upon ourselves.

CHORUS
What we know already
is bad enough. What more will you say?

SECOND MESSENGER
The shortest tale to tell and to hear—
our royal lady, Jocasta, is dead. 1235

CHORUS
Poor wretched woman—how?

SECOND MESSENGER
By her own hand.
But you are spared the worst—you did not see it all.
I'll tell you, though, what I can drag from my mind—
where it's already buried—of her pitiful end.

Frantic, she rushed into her rooms, 1240
to the marriage chamber, slammed the door behind her,
and threw herself onto the bed,
tearing her hair with desperate fingers
and calling on Laius as if he were not dead
to remember the night they lay together 1245
and made the one who would kill him—
and then left her to be a mother to polluted children.
Weeping, she cursed her evil double fate:
to bear a husband from a husband,
and children from her own son. 1250

I cannot tell you more about her death,
for then, Oedipus, roaring with grief,
burst into the hall and I could only watch him,
raging around the walls, begging one after another
to give him a sword—and tell him where 1255
to find it, that double-ploughed field:
his wife not a wife, his mother the mother to his children.
One of the gods must have shown him the way—
it was none of us who were near—we were too frightened,
because shouting in frenzy, he threw himself 1260
at the great double doors,
tore the hinges from their sockets, and fell into her room—

and we saw, O horrid spectacle, the woman hanging,
her neck entangled in a noose of coiled rope.

Then, with what a ghastly roar he leapt 1265
to loosen the cord and lay her gently on the ground.
Poor suffering man—and the horror,
to watch him tear away the beaten golden brooches
from each shoulder of her robe, lift them high
and plunge them into the sockets of his eyes, 1270
crying out that they should never see him again,
nor what he suffered nor the evil he did,
nor look on those they should not—
but only darkness, forever.
Like a dirge, over and over he chanted, 1275
lifting the pins, striking through his eyelids
until bloody matter spurted down his cheeks and beard—
not drops, but a gush like black rain
or hail drenching him.

All this was their doom, 1280
husband and wife—evils doubled between them.
The old happiness was finished,
but it had been real. Now,
anguish and despair, madness, dishonor and death—
every evil assailed them; no curse forgotten. 1285

CHORUS
And has he no relief from this agony?

SECOND MESSENGER
Hear how he shouts for someone to swing back the doors
and let all the people of Cadmus see the father-killer,
the mother–. . . ;—no, I will not speak that sinful word!—
that he will banish himself from his house and land, 1290
the curse invoked by his own mouth.
But he is feeble now, and needs a guide.
The shock and pain are more than he can bear.
Look—he is showing us—the gates are opening.
Soon you will see such a sight 1295
that would move to pity even those who hate him.
(Exit SECOND MESSENGER *toward Thebes, stage right.)*

(Enter OEDIPUS *from the palace, through the double doors, wearing a mask that shows he is blind.)*

CHORUS
Terrible, to witness how men suffer.
I have never seen worse suffering.
What frenzy possessed you,
O ill-fated one? What god, leaping 1300
from the furthest peaks, forced you
to the depths of ill-fortune?
Poor wretch!
I can hardly bear to watch you, though
there is so much I want to ask, 1305
so many things I want to learn and understand—
but even the sight of you makes me shudder.

OEDIPUS
Woe, woe, wretched I am indeed.
To what place am I being driven?
Where is my voice flying, carried before me? 1310
O fates, where are you rushing?

CHORUS
To a terrible place—silent, invisible.

SECOND *KOMMOS*

OEDIPUS Strophe A (1313–20)
A cloud of darkness
overwhelms me—nameless
it conquers, driven
by a resistless wind.
Ah woe is me—the gadfly-goads
of memory torment me cruelly!

CHORUS
Who can wonder that you suffer doubly
these present evils and remembered ones.

OEDIPUS Antistrophe A (1321–28)
Friends—
you are still here for me,
stay to take care of me

though I am blind—still loyal.
I sense you there and recognize your voices
though I am in darkness.

CHORUS
How could you dare such a dreadful thing—
to blind yourself? Which god drove you to it?

OEDIPUS Strophe B (1329–49)
Apollo, my friends, it was Apollo
who made me do these acts which caused such suffering.
But it was my own hands, no one else's, that blinded me.
What need for eyes
when there was nothing I could see that gave me joy?

CHORUS
That is what happened—just as you say.

OEDIPUS
There was nothing worth seeing
or loving or hearing. Friends,
are there still joyful sounds to hear?
Take me away from this place
as fast as you can.
O friends, lead away this evil,
murderous man,
the most accursed,
the most hated of mortals—
even to the gods.

CHORUS
Equally wretched in your thoughts and fate—
better never to have known you!

OEDIPUS Antistrophe B (1349–69)
Let him die, whoever he was, the one
who cut the fetters from my ankles
and saved me from death.
That was no favor.
If I had died then,

how much pain would have been kept
from my dear ones, and me.

CHORUS
If only it had been that way!

OEDIPUS
Then I would not have become the murderer
of my father nor be called
the defiler of the mother who bore me.
Now I am rejected by the gods—an unholy child—
the one who shared the bed of his engenderer.
If there are worse things yet
to be said or done,
be sure they are the lot of Oedipus.

CHORUS
You have not planned this well—better,
it seems to me, to be a dead man than a blind one.

OEDIPUS
Do not tell me how things are best done nor try to give
me advice. 1370
What sort of eyes would I need, to look
at my father when I meet him in Hades,
and at my poor mother? What I have done
to the two of them deserves worse than hanging.
And the sight of my children, conceived 1375
as they were, should I want to see them?
Far better not to have eyes.
And the city with its high towers, sacred statues, and temples
of the gods, from all of this—
Thebes, the city that nourished me— 1380
I, wretched creature, have banished myself, I myself insisting
that the impious one should be thrust out. Now, I am
the one revealed by the gods as defiled—of Laius' lineage.
My sinfulness exposed,
how could I face the people with open eyes? 1385
Never. And if it were possible
to block the stream of sound from entering my ears,
I would not have held back from sealing off my wretched body,

not only blind but able to hear nothing.
It would be good to be beyond the reach of dreadful thoughts. 1390

O Cithaeron, why did you accept me—why
did you not kill me at once, so that I could never
reveal my origins to any human?
O Polybus, and Corinth—my so-called
ancestor and home, what sort of creature, 1395
beautiful to see but foul underneath, you nurtured.
Now evil I am revealed, evil from birth.

Those three roads, the deep valley
and woods, the narrow place where they crossed
which drank my father's blood 1400
spilled by my hands—how can I forget,
having done this, how I arrived here, and what I did next?
Oh, marriages, marriages,
one after another: first to give me life
and then for me to sow my own seed in the same field 1405
and bring forth confusion of fathers, brothers, sons,
sisters, daughters, mothers, and wives—every
atrocious thing a human can do, I have done.

But it is wrong to talk of wrongful acts.
Quickly, for the gods' sake, hide me somewhere 1410
far from this land; kill me or throw me
into the sea so you will never have to look at me again.
Come, don't be frightened to touch such a wretched creature.
Don't flinch away—my sins are not contagious.
No mortal can bear them but me. 1415

CHORUS
For that which you ask, Creon is here
and will do whatever is necessary.
He alone remains to be the guardian of this land.

OEDIPUS
What can I say to him?
How can he trust me? Everything 1420
I've said and done to him was wrong.

(Enter CREON *from Thebes, stage right.)*

CREON
I do not come to mock you, Oedipus,
nor to reproach you for past crimes.
And you—*(he turns to* CHORUS *and* ATTENDANTS)
—if you have no regard
for human feelings, still you should respect 1425
the sun, Lord Helios, whose fire feeds all life, and not display
such an ill-fated being, which neither the earth,
the rain, nor the light of day can bear to see,
but hurry him into the house.
Only the closest kin should witness 1430
the shame of one of their own.

OEDIPUS
This is not what I expected, that you, the best of men,
would be so generous to the worst of men; so with the gods' help,
let me persuade you, for your sake more than mine—

CREON
What is it you wish to persuade me to do? 1435

OEDIPUS
Expel me from this land, as soon as you can, to some place
far from the sight of man, where I cannot hear another human voice.

CREON
I would already have done it—but first
I must learn if that is the god's will.

OEDIPUS
Everything cries out in his voice 1440
that I, the parricide and sinner, must die!

CREON
So it is said. Nevertheless, when unsure,
better to ask for a clear message.

OEDIPUS
You would consult the god for such a miserable creature?

CREON
And you must trust what he says. 1445

OEDIPUS
I charge you, I implore you,
to arrange her burial—she inside the house—
however you think fit. It is your right as her kin.
And as for me—never let this city
of my fathers be cursed by my presence again. 1450
I'll go to the peak of Cithaeron—
that is the name of the place my mother
and father chose for me to die—
so that I can fulfill their wish at last.
Yet I am sure that nothing can destroy me, neither sickness 1455
nor anything else. I have been saved for another fate—
strange and terrible.
I must let what is destined happen.
As for my sons, Creon,
no need to worry about them. They are grown men, 1460
and can look after themselves, wherever they go.
But my two daughters—pity the poor young creatures
who always were close to me, ate at my table,
shared all that I touched.
Take care of them—even let me 1465
touch them with these hands
and for a moment break the evil spell.
Please, my lord,
noble one—if I could feel them with my hands,
it would be as it was before, when I could see. 1470

*(*ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE, *weeping, enter with* ATTENDANT *from the palace, through the double doors.)*
What am I saying?
By the gods—can I really hear my two darlings
weeping; has Creon, taking pity,
sent for my two dear children?
Am I right? 1475

CREON
You are right—I did arrange it, remembering
the joy they gave you in the past.

OEDIPUS
I wish you all good fortune—that a god
will guard you and guide you along a better road than mine.
Children, where are you? Come, 1480
come to these brotherly hands
which destroyed the shining eyes
of one who never saw nor learned nor understood
that he fathered you, O sister-children,
in the same furrow where he himself was sown. 1485
All I can do is weep for you both—I cannot bear to contemplate
the bitterness of the rest of your lives
and all you will suffer at the hands of men.
If you ever should dare to join the people's celebrations
you will go back home in tears 1490
long before seeing the festival's ending.
When the time for marriage comes,
what sort of man would risk
the scorn and reproaches, the insults
and hints about your lineage, 1495
yours and mine alike.
Such an evil heritage: your father his father's killer,
who ploughed where he was sown—the mother of his children—
and you two come from the same place.
Taunted with this, who would marry you? 1500
No one, dear children—it is clear
you must die virgin and barren.

O son of Menoeceus, you are the only father
left to them—their natural parents
no longer exist. Now, their only kin, 1505
do not let them wander like beggars,
husbandless, punished for my evils.
Have pity on them, so young
and vulnerable except for your protection.
Noble Creon, I'll know you'll do it, by the touch of your hand. 1510
And daughters, if you were old enough to understand
I would give you much advice. But promise me this,
wherever your future—to live a better life
than the father who sired you.

CREON
Enough of weeping. Go now into the house. 1515

OEDIPUS: Though it's hard, I shall obey.
CREON: What must be done, in time will seem good.

OEDIPUS: You know my terms?
CREON: State them and I shall hear and know.

OEDIPUS: That you banish me from Thebes into exile.
CREON: You ask of me what only the gods can give.

OEDIPUS: But the gods hate me.
CREON: Then your wish will soon be granted.

OEDIPUS: Does that mean you consent? 1520
CREON: I don't equivocate, I only say what I mean.

OEDIPUS: I am ready, lead me inside.
CREON: The time has come—let go of the children.

OEDIPUS: Oh no, no—do not take them from me as well!
CREON: You cannot control everything.
All your former power is ended.

(Exit CREON, ANTIGONE, *and* ISMENE *to the palace, through the double doors. Exit* OEDIPUS *through the double doors into the palace.)*

CHORUS
Fellow Thebans, look on Oedipus—
he who solved the famous riddles, the man of power 1525
whom every citizen envied. See
what a wave of terrible misfortune has submerged him.

Before that final day when one can say
his life has reached its end with no distress or grief,
no man should be called happy. 1530
(Exit CHORUS *toward Thebes, stage right.)*

Oedipus the King

Throughout this mythic story of patricide and incest, Sophocles emphasizes the irony of a man determined to track down, expose, and punish an assassin, who turns out to be himself. As the play opens, the citizens of Thebes beg their king, Oedipus, to lift the plague that threatens to destroy the city. Oedipus has already sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to the oracle to learn what to do.

On his return, Creon announces that the oracle instructs them to find the murderer of Laius, the king who ruled Thebes before Oedipus. The discovery and punishment of the murderer will end the plague. At once, Oedipus sets about to solve the murder. Summoned by the king, the blind prophet Tiresias at first refuses to speak, but finally accuses Oedipus himself of killing Laius.

Oedipus mocks and rejects the prophet angrily, ordering him to leave, but not before Tiresias hints darkly of an incestuous marriage and a future of blindness, infamy, and wandering. Oedipus attempts to gain advice from Jocasta, the queen; she encourages him to ignore prophecies, explaining that a prophet once told her that Laius, her husband, would die at the hands of their son.

According to Jocasta, the prophecy did not come true because the baby died, abandoned, and Laius himself was killed by a band of robbers at a crossroads. Oedipus becomes distressed by Jocasta's remarks because just before he came to Thebes he killed a man who resembled Laius at a crossroads. To learn the truth, Oedipus sends for the only living witness to the murder, a shepherd.

Another worry haunts Oedipus. As a young man, he learned from an oracle that he was fated to kill his father and marry his mother. Fear of the prophecy drove him from his home in Corinth

and brought him ultimately to Thebes. Again, Jocasta advises him not to worry about prophecies.

Oedipus finds out from a messenger that Polybus, king of Corinth, Oedipus' father, has died of old age. Jocasta rejoices—surely this is proof that the prophecy Oedipus heard is worthless. Still, Oedipus worries about fulfilling the prophecy with his mother, Merope, a concern Jocasta dismisses.

Overhearing, the messenger offers what he believes will be cheering news. Polybus and Merope are not Oedipus' real parents. In fact, the messenger himself gave Oedipus to the royal couple when a shepherd offered him an abandoned baby from the house of Laius.

Oedipus becomes determined to track down the shepherd and learn the truth of his birth. Suddenly terrified, Jocasta begs him to stop, and then runs off to the palace, wild with grief. Confident that the worst he can hear is a tale of his lowly birth, Oedipus eagerly awaits the shepherd. At first the shepherd refuses to speak, but under threat of death he tells what he knows—Oedipus is actually the son of Laius and Jocasta.

And so, despite his precautions, the prophecy that Oedipus dreaded has actually come true. Realizing that he has killed his father and married his mother, Oedipus is agonized by his fate.

Rushing into the palace, Oedipus finds that the queen has killed herself. Tortured, frenzied, Oedipus takes the pins from her gown and rakes out his eyes, so that he can no longer look upon the misery he has caused. Now blinded and disgraced, Oedipus begs Creon to kill him, but as the play concludes, he quietly submits to Creon's leadership, and humbly awaits the oracle that will determine whether he will stay in Thebes or be cast out forever.

The Original Oedipus Myth

Like other dramatists of his time, Sophocles wrote his plays as theatrical interpretations of the well-known myths of Greek culture—an imaginative national history that grew through centuries. Sophocles and his contemporaries particularly celebrated the mythic heroes of the Trojan War, characters who appear in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

The myth of Oedipus—which also appears briefly in Homer—represents the story of a man's doomed attempt to outwit fate. Sophocles' tragedy dramatizes Oedipus' painful discovery of his true identity, and the despairing violence the truth unleashes in him. Warned by the oracle at Delphi that their son will kill his father, King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes try to prevent this tragic destiny. Laius pierces his son's feet and gives him to a shepherd with instructions to leave the baby in the mountains to die. But pitying the child, the shepherd gives him to a herdsman, who takes the baby far from Thebes to Corinth. There, the herdsman presents the child to his own king and queen, who are childless. Without knowing the baby's identity, the royal couple adopts the child and names him Oedipus ("swollen foot").

Oedipus grows up as a prince of Corinth, but hears troubling stories that the king is not his real father. When he travels to Delphi to consult the oracle, Oedipus learns the prophecy of his fate, that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Horrified, he determines to avoid his terrible destiny by never returning home. Near Thebes, Oedipus encounters an old man in a chariot with his attendants. When the old man insults and strikes him in anger, Oedipus kills the man and his servants.

Outside Thebes, Oedipus meets the monstrous Sphinx, who has been terrorizing the countryside. The Sphinx challenges Oedipus with her riddle: "What goes on four feet at dawn, two at noon, and three at evening?" Oedipus responds with the right answer ("A man") and kills the monster. The Theban people proclaim him a hero, and when they learn that Laius has been killed, apparently by a band of robbers, they accept Oedipus as their king. Oedipus marries Jocasta, and they have four children. Thus, despite all his efforts to prevent it, Oedipus fulfills the dreadful prophecy.

Since everyone knew the myth, Sophocles' play contained no plot surprises for his audience. Instead, the tragedy held their interest through new interpretation, poetic language, and, most especially, dramatic irony. Dramatic irony arises from the difference between what an audience knows and what the characters on stage know. In *Oedipus the King*, for example, everyone in the audience knows from the beginning that Oedipus has killed his father and married his mother.

The tension of the play, then, develops from Oedipus' slow but inevitable progress toward this terrible self-knowledge. Watching Oedipus' fate unfold, the audience identifies with the hero, sharing vicariously in the horror of the reversal he suffers and acknowledging the power of destiny. By connecting with the audience, Sophocles has achieved the catharsis that Aristotle thought was so important. In accomplishing this dramatic feat, Aristotle declares, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* stands as the greatest tragedy ever written.

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Chapter Five

Psychological Criticism

Novelists who go to psychiatrists are paying for what they should be paid for.
UNKNOWN SOURCE

Human beings are fascinating creatures. Readers can be said to take a psychological approach when they try to understand them. The questions readers ask about characters are the same ones we might ask about a friend or family member. "Why would he want to do something dumb like that?" one might say. Another might shake her head and comment, "I knew that wasn't going to work. I don't see why she had to try it." People never seem to run out of speculations about others' motives, relationships, and conversations or, for that matter, their own. They also speculate about dreams, puzzling as to their source. Bizarre in their form and ambiguous in their meaning, dreams are yet powerful enough to frighten, please, and intrigue us.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Aristotle knew that human beings are endlessly interesting. As far back as the fourth century BC, Aristotle commented on the effects of tragedy on an audience, saying that by evoking pity and fear, tragedy creates a catharsis of those emotions. He was the earliest of many writers and critics down through the centuries to question why we are drawn to writing stories and poems and why we like reading them. Does literature make us better individuals? Matthew Arnold believed it could. Poetry, he said, could "inspirit and rejoice the reader." Where does the impulse to write come from? William Wordsworth said poetry springs from "emotion recollected in tranquillity." What is creativity? Samuel Taylor Coleridge thought there were two types of creativity: the primary

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imagination, which he described as "the living power and prime agent of all human perception," and the secondary one, which was capable of re-creating the world of sense through its power to fuse and shape experience. As Coleridge explained it, "[Creativity] dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate." Even Friedrich Nietzsche spoke of personalities as being Apollonian, by which he meant they were guided by the use of critical reasoning, or Dionysian, referring to personalities ruled by creative-intuitive power.

All such questions and theories are psychological. They are efforts to explain the growth, development, and structure of the human personality. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, such speculation lacked the broad theoretical basis that would support those early attempts at understanding ourselves. It was then that Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) advanced his startling theories about the workings of the human psyche, its formation, its organization, and its maladies. His students and followers, such as Alfred Adler, Otto Rank, and Carl Jung, later built on Freud's ideas of probing the workings of the human psyche to understand why people act as they do. Of particular interest to literary critics is Jung, who provided the concepts of the **collective unconscious**, **myths**, and **archetypes**, which have helped readers see literature as an expression of the experience of the entire human species. Later, in the 1950s, Northrop Frye developed Jung's ideas in ways that were more directly applicable to literature. More recently, Jacques Lacan has received serious attention for his efforts to build on Freud's work, turning to linguistic theories to assert that language shapes our unconscious and our conscious minds, thereby giving us our identity.

Preceding the significant contributions of Jung, Lacan, and others, however, Freud began the quest for understanding by providing new ways of looking at ourselves. The power of his theories is evident in the number and variety of fields they have affected, fields as disparate as philosophy, medicine, sociology, and literary criticism. Although they do not provide an aesthetic theory of literature, which would explain how literature is beautiful or why it is meaningful in and of itself, their value lies in giving readers a way to deepen their understanding of themes that have always been present in Western literature—themes of family, authority, and guilt, for example. In addition, they provide a framework for making more perceptive character analyses. With Freudian theory it is possible to discover what is not said directly, perhaps even what the author did not realize he was saying, and to read between (or perhaps beneath) the lines.

The absence of an aesthetic theory makes psychoanalytic criticism both more and less useful to a reader. On the one hand, because it does not contradict other schools of criticism, it can be used as a complement to them. That is, instead of ruling out other perspectives on a text, it can exist alongside them, even enrich and extend them. The French feminist critics, a case in point, have made good use of Lacan's ideas in forming their own critical approaches. On the other hand, the lack of an aesthetic theory means that psychoanalytic criticism can never account for the beauty of a poem or the artistry that has created it. The reader must turn to other types of analysis to explore those other dimensions of literature.

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PRACTICING PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM

To understand the discussion that follows, you should read the short story "Young Goodman Brown," by Nathaniel Hawthorne, which begins on page 307.

Today the psychological literary critic can base his inferences on the works of numerous important theorists, but it is Freud's ideas that have provided the basis for this approach, and his ideas are still fundamental to it. To work as a psychological critic, whether you are directly applying Freudian theory or working with the ideas of his followers, it is necessary to understand some of his concepts about the human psyche.

Freudian Principles

As a neurologist practicing in Vienna in the late nineteenth century, Freud was troubled that he could not account for the complaints of many of his patients by citing any physical cause. Diagnosing his patients as hysterics, he entered upon analyses of them (and himself) that led him to infer that their distress was caused by factors of which perhaps even they were unaware. He became convinced that fantasies and desires too bizarre and unacceptable to admit had been suppressed, buried so deeply in the unconscious part of their being that, although the desires did not have to be confronted directly, they led to neuroses that caused his patients' illnesses. He concluded that the unconscious plays a major role in what we do, feel, and say, although we are not aware of its presence or operations.

Freud did not come by these ideas easily or quickly. As early as 1895, he published, with Joseph Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria,* an important work asserting that symptoms of hysteria are the result of unresolved but forgotten traumas from childhood. Five years later, he wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams,* in which he addressed the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, a treatment in which a patient talks to an analyst about dreams, childhood, and relationships with parents and authority figures. Using free association, slips of language, and dreams, Freud found ways for an analyst to help a patient uncover the painful or threatening events that have been repressed in the unconscious and thus made inaccessible to the conscious mind. In psychoanalytic criticism, the same topics and techniques form the basis for analyzing literary texts.

Just after the turn of the century, Freud himself began to apply his theories to the interpretation of religion, mythology, art, and literature. His first piece of psychoanalytic criticism was a review of a novel by the German writer William Jensen, "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*" (1907). In it he psychoanalyzed the novel's central character, noting the Oedipal effects behind the plot. (Freud was not alone in asserting the close relationship between dreams and art. In 1923 Wilhelm Stekel published a book on dreams, saying that no essential difference exists between them and poetry. Around that same time, F. C. Prescott, in *Poetry and Dreams,* argued for a definite correspondence between the two in both form and content.) The concern with literature soon turned to the writers themselves and to artists in general, as Freud questioned why art exists and why people create it. In that search, he wrote monographs on Dostoyevsky,

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Shakespeare, Leonardo da Vinci, Goethe, and others. Freud's sense of the artist, finally, was that he is an unstable personality who writes out of his own neuroses, with the result that his work provides therapeutic insights into the nature of life not only for himself but also for those who read. As Freud commented in *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis,* "The artist has also an introverted disposition and has not far to go to become a neurotic."

In 1910 the depth that Freud's approach could add to literary analysis was made apparent in a (now classic) essay on *Hamlet* by Ernest Jones, in which Jones argued that Hamlet's delay in taking revenge on Claudius is a result of the protagonist's own "disordered mind." More specifically, Jones saw Hamlet as the victim of an Oedipal complex that manifests itself in manic-depressive feelings, misogynistic attitudes, and a disgust for things sexual. According to Jones, Hamlet delays his revenge because he unconsciously wants to kill the man who married his mother, but if he punishes Claudius for doing what he himself wished to do, that would, in a sense, mean that he was killing himself. Also derived from his Oedipal neurosis, his repressed desire for Gertrude, who is overtly affectionate toward him, causes him to treat Ophelia with cruelty far out of proportion to anything she deserves. When he orders her to a nunnery, the slang meaning of *brothel* makes it clear that he sees all women, even a guiltless one, as repugnant. Throughout the play, his disgust toward sexual matters is apparent in the anger evoked in him by the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude as well as in his repulsion of Ophelia.

Since Freud's era, and since Jones's landmark essay appeared, psychoanalytic criticism has continued to grow and develop, generating, for example, the related genre of psychobiography, which applies psychoanalytic approaches to a writer's own life. Today psychoanalytic criticism shows few signs of slowing down. Nevertheless, Freud's work continues to provide the foundation of this approach. Although not all of his explanations of how the mind operates are applicable to literary criticism, the six concepts that follow have had enormous impact on the way we understand what we read. They have even affected the way writers construct their works.

The Unconscious Probably the most significant aspect of Freudian theory is the primacy of the unconscious. Hidden from the conscious mind, which Freud compared to that small portion of an iceberg that is visible above the surface of the water, the unconscious is like the powerful unseen mass below it. Because the conscious mind is not aware of its submerged counterpart, it may mistake the real causes of behavior. An individual may be unable to tell the difference between what is happening and what she thinks is happening. In short, our actions are the result of forces we do not recognize and therefore cannot control.

In Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown," for example, Brown finds himself in just such a dilemma. Even well past the events of his night in the forest, he is not sure of what was real and what was a dream. His journey is psychological, as well as physical, for he moves from the security of consciousness to the unknown territory of the unconscious, a powerful force that directs him in ways he neither expects nor understands. He leaves the village of Salem,

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where social as well as spiritual order prevails, to go into the forest, where the daylight, and the clarity of vision and understanding it seems to confer, gives way to darkness and frightful confusion of perceptions. In the end, Brown can no longer tell reality from dreams, good from evil.

The Tripartite Psyche In an effort to describe the conscious and unconscious mind, Freud divided the human psyche into three parts: the **id**, the **superego**, and the **ego**. They are, for the most part, unconscious. The id, for example, is completely unconscious; only small parts of the ego and the superego are conscious. Each operates according to different, even contrasting, principles.

The id, which is the repository of the **libido**, the source of our psychic energy and our psychosexual desires, gives us our vitality. Because the id is always trying to satisfy its hunger for pleasure, it operates without any thought of consequences, anxiety, ethics, logic, precaution, or morality. Demanding swift satisfaction and fulfillment of biological desires, it is lawless, asocial, amoral. As Freud described it, the id strives "to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle."

Obviously the id can be a socially destructive force. Unrestrained, it will aggressively seek to gratify its desires without any concern for law, customs, or values. It can even be self-destructive in its drive to have what it wants. In many ways, it resembles the devil figure that appears in some theological and literary texts, because it offers strong temptation to take what we want without heeding normal restraints, taboos, or consequences. Certainly the id appears in that form in "Young Goodman Brown." It is presented in the person of Brown's fellow traveler, who appears to Brown immediately after he thinks to himself, "What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!" The narrator suggests the embodiment of Brown's id in the figure by describing him as "bearing a considerable resemblance" to the young man. Even before the older man's appearance, from the very outset of the journey, Brown recognizes that he is challenging acceptable behavior by leaving the highly regulated life of Salem; the pull of the id to disregard the usual restrictions and to participate in acts normally forbidden in the village intensifies as he walks deeper into the forest. As Hawthorne points out, Brown becomes "himself the chief horror of the scene."

To prevent the chaos that would result if the id were to go untamed, other parts of the psyche must balance its passions. The ego, which operates according to the reality principle, is one such regulating agency. Its function is to make the id's energies nondestructive by postponing them or diverting them into socially acceptable actions, sometimes by finding an appropriate time for gratifying them. Although it is for the most part unconscious, the ego is the closest of the three parts of the psyche to what we think of as consciousness, for it mediates between our inner selves and the outer world. Nevertheless, it is not directly approachable. We come closest to knowing it when it is relaxed by hypnosis, sleep, or unintentional slips of the tongue. Dreams, then, become an important means of knowing what is hidden about ourselves from ourselves.

The third part of the psyche, the superego, provides additional balance to the id. Similar to what is commonly known as one's conscience, it operates

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according to the morality principle, for it provides the sense of moral and ethical wrongdoing. Parents, who enforce their values through punishments and rewards, are the chief source of the superego, which furnishes a sense of guilt for behavior that breaks the rules given by parents to the young child. Later in life, the superegois expanded by institutions and other influences. Consequently, the superego works against the drive of the id and represses socially unacceptable desires back into the unconscious. Balance between the license of the id and the restrictions of the superego produces the healthy personality. But when unconscious guilt becomes overwhelming, the individual can be said to be suffering from a guilt complex. When the superego is too strong, it can lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction with the self.

For Goodman Brown, the descent into the unconscious (the night in the forest) presents a conflict between the superego (the highly regulated life he has known in Salem) and the id (the wild, unrestrained passions of the people in the forest). Lacking a viable ego of his own, he turns to Faith, his wife, for help. Unfortunately, she wears pink ribbons, a mixture of white (purity) and red (passion), which indicates the ambiguity of goodness and Brown's clouded belief in the possibility of goodness throughout the remainder of his life.

The Significance of Sexuality Prior to Freud, children were thought to be asexual beings, innocent of the biological drives that would beset them later. Freud, however, recognized that it is during childhood that the id is formed, shaping the behavior of the adult to come. In fact, Freud believed that infancy and childhood are periods of intense sexual experience during which it is necessary to go through three phases of development that serve specific physical needs, then provide pleasure, if we are to become healthy, functioning adults. The first phase is called the oral phase, because it is characterized by sucking—first to be fed from our mother's breast, then to enjoy our thumbs or, later, even kissing. The second is the anal stage, a period that recognizes not only the need for elimination but also the presence of another erogenous zone, a part of the body that provides sexual pleasure. In the final phase, the phallic stage, the child discovers the pleasure of genital stimulation, connected, of course, to reproduction. If these three overlapping stages are successfully negotiated, the adult personality emerges sound and intact. If, however, these childhood needs are not met, the adult is likely to suffer arrested development. The mature person may become fixated on a behavior that serves to fulfill what was not satisfied at an early age. The early years, therefore, encompass critical stages of development because repressions formed at that time may surface as problems later.

Around the time the child reaches the genital stage, about the age of five, he or she is ready to develop a sense of maleness or femaleness. To explain the process by which the child makes that step, Freud turned to literature. Referring to the plot of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex,* Freud pointed out that the experience of Oedipus is that of all male children. That is, just as Oedipus unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother, a young boy forms an erotic attachment to his mother and unconsciously grows to desire her. He consequently resents his father because of his relationship with the mother. Fearing castration by the

father, the male child represses his sexual desires, identifies with his father, and anticipates his own sexual union. Such a step is a necessary one in his growth toward manhood. The boy who fails to make that step will suffer from an Oedipal complex, with ongoing fear of castration evident in his hostility to authority in general.

In the case of girls, the passage from childhood to womanhood requires successful negotiation of the Electra complex. In Freudian theory, the girl child, too, has a strong attraction for her mother and sees her father as a rival, but because she realizes that she has already been castrated, she develops an attraction for her father, who has the penis she desires. When she fails to garner his attentions, she identifies with her mother and awaits her own male partner, who will provide what her female physiognomy lacks.

In "Young Goodman Brown," Hawthorne clearly implies that Brown's troubling impulses are sexual and that they are not his alone. The sermon of the devil figure promises Brown and Faith that they will henceforth know the secret sins of the people of Salem: "how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; . . . 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." The catalog leaves no doubt that sexual passion is part of the human condition, and left unrestrained, it leads to grave offenses. Freud explains that as both boys and girls make the transition to normal adulthood, they become aware of their place in a moral system of behavior. They move from operating according to the pleasure principle, which dictates that they want immediate gratification of all desires, to an acceptance of the reality principle, in which the ego and superego recognize rules, restraint, and responsibility. Goodman Brown, unable to discern reality or define moral behavior, remains outside the adult world. We are told, "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, he cannot bear to listen to the singing of the psalms nor hear the words of the minister's sermon. He lives separate and apart from his society.

The Importance of Dreams The vast unconscious that exists beneath the surface of our awareness seems closest to revelation when we sleep. Our dreams, according to Freud, are the language of the unconscious, full of unfulfilled desires that the conscious mind has buried there. Their content is rarely clear, however, for even in sleep the ego censors unacceptable wishes. Through the use of symbols that make repressed material more acceptable, if not readily understandable to us, the ego veils the meaning of our dreams from direct apprehension that would produce painful recognition. As in literature, the process may take place through **condensation**. For example, two desires of the psyche might be articulated by a single word or image in a dream, just as they are in a poem. Condensation can also take place through **displacement**—moving one's feeling for a particular person to an object related to him or her, much as metonymy uses the name of one object to replace another with which it is closely related or of which it is a part. When dreams become too direct and their meanings too

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apparent, we awaken or, unconsciously, change the symbology. As noted, Young Goodman Brown is never certain whether he has dreamed his experience or lived it. Indeed, the ambiguity and uncertainty about the other villagers and their part in the satanic communion haunt him for the rest of his life. He returns to the village and the light of day, but what is real and what is fantasy elude him. The meanings of the symbols remain unrevealed to him.

As a window into the unconscious, dreams become valuable tools for psychoanalysts in determining unresolved conflicts in the psyche, conflicts that a person may suspect only because of physical ailments, such as headaches, or psychological discomfort, such as claustrophobia. When dreams appear in literature, they offer rich insights into characters that the characters' outer actions, or even their spoken words, might never suggest. Because dreams are meaningful symbolic presentations that take the reader beyond the external narrative, they are valuable tools for critics using a psychoanalytic approach.

Symbols Freud's recognition of the often subtle and always complex workings of sexuality in human beings and in literature led to a new awareness of what symbols mean in literature as well as in life. If dreams are a symbolic expression of repressed desires, most of them sexual in nature, then the images through which they operate are themselves sexual ones. Their sexuality is initially indicated by shape. That is, physical objects that are concave in shape, such as lakes, tunnels, and cups, are assumed to be female, or **yonic**, symbols, and those that are convex, or whose length exceeds their diameter, such as trees, towers, and spires, are assumed to be male, or **phallic**.

Although Freud objected to a general interpretation of dream symbols, insisting that they are personal and individual in nature, such readings are not uncommon. Although this approach to understanding symbols has sometimes been pushed to ridiculous extremes, it undeniably has the capacity to enrich our reading and understanding in ways that we would not otherwise discover.

The symbols in "Young Goodman Brown" are replete with sexual suggestion that is rarely made explicit in the story. Many of those that play a part in Brown's initiation, such as the devil's staff, which is described as "a great black snake … a living serpent," are male images, suggesting the nature of Brown's temptation. The satanic communion is depicted as being lighted by blazing fires, with the implication of intense emotion, especially sexual passion. The burning pine trees surrounding the altar, again masculine references, underscore that the repressions of nature exercised in the village give way to obsessions in the forest. There are female symbols, too. For example, entering the forest suggests returning to the dark, womblike unknown. What if Young Goodman Brown had not actually undergone the experience and had only dreamed it? The event is still significant, because dreams can function as symbolic forms of wish fulfillment.

Brown's nighttime journey, the nature of which is powerfully deepened by the symbolic imagery, leaves its mark on him. He is thereafter a dark and brooding man, leading Richard Adams in his essay "Hawthorne's Provincial Tales" to argue that Brown fails to mature because he fails to learn to know, control, and use his sexual feelings. That is, he cannot love or hate; he can only fear moral

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maturity. He never manages to emerge from his uncertainty and consequent despair. He has been required to acknowledge evil in himself and others, including his wife, so that he can recognize goodness, but having failed the test, he is left in a state of moral uncertainty. The result is moral and social isolation.

Creativity The connection between creative expression and the stuff of dreams was not lost on Freud. His curiosity about the sources and nature of creativity is reflected in the monographs he wrote on creative artists from various times and cultures, including Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare, and Michelangelo. Freud recognized that the artist consciously expresses fantasy, illusion, and wishes through symbols, just as dreams from the unconscious do. To write a story or a poem, then, is to reveal the unconscious, to give a neurosis socially acceptable expression. Such a view makes the writer a conflicted individual working out his or her problems. Freud explained the idea this way in *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis:*

> The artist has also an introverted disposition and has not far to go to become a neurotic. He is one who is urged on by instinctual needs which are too clamorous. He longs to attain to honor, power, riches, fame, and the love of women; but he lacks the means of achieving these gratifications. So, like any other with an unsatisfied longing, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and all his libido too, to the creation of his wishes in the life of fantasy, from which the way might readily lead to neurosis.

In the process of engaging in his or her own therapy, said Freud, the artist achieves insights and understanding that can be represented to others who are less likely to have found them.

Such views have led some critics to focus their attention not on a text but on the writer behind it. They see a work as an expression of the writer's unconscious mind, an artifact that can be used to psychoanalyze the writer, producing psychobiography. (A good example of this genre is Edmund Wilson's *The Wound and the Bow*.) Of course, to do such a study, one needs access to verifiable biographical information, as well as expertise in making a psychological analysis. Most literary critics, though they may be able to find the former, usually lack the latter. Indeed, one might ask whether such an undertaking is literary criticism at all.

Summing Up In the end, when you make a Freudian (psychoanalytical) reading of a text, you will probably limit yourself to a consideration of the work itself, looking at its conflicts, characters, dream sequences, and symbols. You will use the language Freud provided to discuss what before him did not have names, and you will have an awareness that outward behavior may not be consonant with inner drives. You will avoid oversimplification of your analysis, exaggerated interpretations of symbolism, and excessive use of psychological jargon. If you do all this, you will have the means to explore not only what is apparent on the surface but what is below it as well. As Lionel Trilling pointed out in *The*

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Liberal Imagination, Freud has provided us with "the perception of the hidden element of human nature and of the opposition between the hidden and the visible."

Carl Jung and Mythological Criticism

Once a favored pupil of Freud, Carl Jung (1875–1961), a Swiss physician, psychiatrist, and philosopher, eventually broke from his mentor, then built on his teacher's ideas in ways that made Jung an important figure in the new field of psychoanalysis. His insights have had significant bearing on literature as well.

Like his teacher, Jung believed that our unconscious mind powerfully directs much of our behavior. However, where Freud conceived of each individual unconscious as separate and distinct from that of others, Jung asserted that some of our unconscious is shared with all other members of the human species. He described the human psyche as having three parts: a **personal conscious**, a state of awareness of the present moment that, once it is past, becomes part of the individual's unique **personal unconscious**. Beneath both of these is the **collective unconscious**, a storehouse of knowledge, experiences, and images of the human race. It is an ancestral memory—shared and primeval—often expressed outwardly in myth and ritual. Young Goodman Brown's presence at the forest gathering, for example, can be described as participation in a ritual binding the past to the present. As Jung explained it, "This psychic life is the mind of our ancient ancestors, the way in which they thought and felt, the way in which they conceived of life and the world, of gods and human beings." Its contents, because they have never been in consciousness, are not individually acquired. They are inherited.

Literary scholars began to understand the relevance of these ideas to literature as they found correspondences in plots and characters in works by writers in disparate circumstances who could not have been known to each other. Gilbert Murray, for example, was so struck by the similarities he found between Orestes and Hamlet that he concluded they were the result of memories we carry deep within us, "the memory of the race, stamped … upon our physical organism." That is why such criticism is sometimes called a mythological, archetypal, totemic, or ritualistic approach, with each name pointing to the universality of literary patterns and images that recur throughout diverse cultures and periods. Because these images elicit perennially powerful responses from readers the world over, they suggest a shared commonality, even a world order. As a result, archetypal criticism often requires knowledge and use of nonliterary fields, such as anthropology and folklore, to provide information and insights about cultural histories and practice.

Although the collective unconscious is not directly approachable, it can be found in archetypes, which Jung defined as "universal images that have existed since the remotest times." More specifically, he described an archetype as "a figure … that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested." It is recognizable by the appearance of nearly identical images and patterns—found in rituals, characters, or entire narratives—that predispose

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individuals from wholly different cultures and backgrounds to respond in a particular way, regardless of when or where they live.

Although archetypes may have originated in the unchanging situations of human beings, such as the rotating seasons or the mysteries of death, they are not intentionally created or culturally acquired. Instead, they come to us instinctually as impulses and knowledge, hidden somewhere in our biological, psychological, and social natures. As critic John Sanford explained it, archetypes "form the basis for instinctive unlearned behavior patterns common to all mankind and assert themselves in certain typical ways." In literature we recognize them and respond to them again and again in new characters or situations that have the same essential forms we have met before and have always known. For example, when we meet Huckleberry Finn or the Ancient Mariner (as Maud Bodkin pointed out in *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*), we are connecting with archetypes, re-creations of basic patterns or types that are already in our unconscious, making us respond just as someone halfway around the world from us might.

Archetypes appear in our dreams and religious rituals, as well as in our art and literature. They are media for the telling of our myths, which, according to Jung, are the "natural and indispensable intermediate stage between unconscious and conscious cognition." By becoming conscious of what is generally unconscious, we integrate our lives and formulate answers for things that are unknowable, such as why we exist, why we suffer, and how we are to live. By uniting the conscious and unconscious, archetypes make us whole and complete.

Living fully, Jung believed, means living harmoniously with the fundamental elements of human nature. In particular, we must deal with three powerful archetypes that compose the self. They are the **shadow**, the **anima**, and the **persona**. All three are represented in literature.

The shadow is our darker side, the part of ourselves we would prefer not to confront, those aspects that we dislike. It is seen in films as the villain, in medieval mystery plays as the devil, and in powerful literary figures like Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Young Goodman Brown clearly confronts (and rejects) his shadow in the figure of his nocturnal traveling companion. The anima, according to Jung, is the "soul-image," the life force that causes one to act. It is given a feminine designation in men (like Brown's Faith), and a masculine one (animus) in women, indicating that the psyche has both male and female characteristics, though we may be made aware of them only in our dreams or when we recognize them in someone else (a process Jung referred to as *projection*). The persona is the image that we show to others. It is the mask that we put on for the external world; it may not be at all what we think ourselves to be inside. The persona and anima can be thought of as two contrasting parts of the ego, our conscious personality. The former mediates between the ego and the outside world, the latter between the ego and the inner one.

To become a psychologically healthy, well-balanced adult—or, as Jung put it, for **individuation** to occur—we must discover and accept the different sides of ourselves, even those we dislike and resist. If we reject some part of the self, we are likely to project that element onto others—that is, we transfer it to something or someone else, thereby making us incapable of seeing ourselves as wrong

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or guilty. Instead, we see another person or institution to be at fault. In these terms, Young Goodman Brown's despondency can be seen as the result of his failure to achieve individuation. He projects his shadow on the forest companion and later on the entire community. He fails to nurture his anima, leaving Faith behind and, in the end, suspecting her of the faithlessness he has committed. And, finally, his persona, the face that he shows to the world, is a false one. He is not the "good man," the pious Puritan, he claims to be. The healthy individual develops a persona that exists comfortably and easily with the rest of his personality. Young Goodman Brown, unable to integrate all parts of his personality, dies an unhappy neurotic, or as Hawthorne puts it, "They carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone, for his dying hour was gloom."

There are, of course, many different archetypes, with some more commonly met than others. Some of the characters, images, and situations that frequently elicit similar psychological responses from diverse groups of people can be found in the lists that follow. Whenever you meet them, it is possible that they carry with them more power to evoke a response than their literal meanings would suggest.

Characters

- **The hero**. Heroes, according to Lord Raglan in *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama,* are distinguished by several uncommon events, including a birth that has unusual circumstances (such as a virgin mother); an early escape from attempts to murder him; or a return to his homeland, where, after a victory over some antagonist, he marries a princess, assumes the throne, and only later falls victim to a fate that may include being banished from the kingdom only to die a mysterious death and have an ambiguous burial. The archetype is exemplified by such characters as Oedipus, Jason, and Jesus Christ. Sometimes the story may involve only a journey during which the hero must answer complex riddles, retrieve a sacred or powerful artifact, or do battle with superhuman creatures to save someone else, perhaps a whole people. The quests of some of the knights in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King,* such as those made by Gawain and Galahad, are examples.
- **The scapegoat**. Sometimes the hero himself becomes the sacrificial victim who is put to death by the community in order to remove the guilt of the people and restore their welfare and health. On occasion, an animal suffices as the scapegoat, but in literature, the scapegoat is more likely to be a human being. Again, Jesus Christ is an example, but a more recent retelling of the story is found in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery."
- **The outcast**. The outcast is a character who is thrown out of the community as punishment for a crime against it. The fate of the outcast, as can be seen in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* is to wander throughout eternity. Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown also finds himself separated from his community following his refusal to join in the forest communion. He cannot listen to the hymns of the assembled congregation on the Sabbath, kneel

with his family at prayer, or trust in the virtue of Faith, his wife. He is lonely and alone.

- **The devil**. The figure of the devil personifies the principle of evil that intrudes in the life of a character to tempt and destroy him or her, often by promising wealth, fame, or knowledge in exchange for his or her soul. Mephistopheles in the legend of Faust is such a figure, as is the old man whom Young Goodman Brown meets in the forest. The latter, with his snakelike staff, purports to have been present at ancient evil deeds. Brown even refers to him as "the devil."
- **Female figures**. Women are depicted in several well-known archetypes. The good mother, such as Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath,* is associated with fertility, abundance, and nurturance of those around her. The temptress, on the other hand, destroys the men who are attracted to her sensuality and beauty. Like Delilah, who robs Samson of his strength, she causes their downfall. The female who inspires the mind and soul of men is a spiritual (or platonic) ideal. She has no physical attractions but, like Dante's Beatrice, guides, directs, and fulfills her male counterpart. Finally, women are seen as the unfaithful wife. As she appears in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary,* the unfaithful wife, married to a dull, insensitive husband, turns to a more desirable man as a lover, with unhappy consequences.
- **The trickster**. A figure often appearing in African American and American Indian narratives, the trickster is mischievous, disorderly, and amoral. He disrupts the rigidity of rule-bound cultures, bringing them reminders of their less strict beginnings. For example, in the tales of Till Eulenspiegel, which date back to the sixteenth century, Till, a shrewd rural peasant, outwits the arrogant townspeople and satirizes their social practices.

Images

- **Colors**. Colors have a variety of archetypal dimensions. Red, because of its association with blood, easily suggests passion, sacrifice, or violence. Green, on the other hand, makes one think of fertility and the fullness of life, even hope. Blue is often associated with holiness or sanctity, as in the depiction of the Virgin Mary. Light and darkness call up opposed responses: hope, inspiration, enlightenment, and rebirth in contrast with ignorance, hopelessness, and death.
- **Numbers**. Like colors, numbers are invested with different meanings. The number three points to things spiritual, as in the Holy Trinity; four is associated with the four seasons (and, by extension, with the cycle of life) and the four elements (earth, air, fire, and water). When three and four are combined to make seven, the union produces a powerful product that is perfect and whole and complete.
- **Water**. Another common image, water is often used as a creation, birth, or rebirth symbol, as in Christian baptism. Flowing water can refer to the passage of time. In contrast, the desert or lack of water suggests a spiritually barren state, as it does in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

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- **Gardens**. Images of natural abundance, such as gardens, often indicate a paradise or a state of innocence. The best-known, of course, is the Garden of Eden.
- **Circles**. Circles can be presented simply or in complex relationships with other geometric figures. By their lack of beginnings and endings, circles commonly suggest a state of wholeness and union. A wedding ring, for example, brings to mind the unending union of two people.
- **The sun**. Like the seasons, the sun makes one think of the passage of time. At its rising, it calls to mind the beginning of a phase of life or of life itself; at its setting, it points to death and other endings. At full presence, it might suggest enlightenment or radiant knowledge.

Situations

- **The quest**. Pursued by the hero, mentioned earlier, the quest usually involves a difficult search for a magical or holy item that will return fertility and abundance to a desolate state. Certainly, the boy in James Joyce's "Araby" goes to the bazaar in search of a fitting offering for the sister of his friend Mangan, whom he has sanctified with his young love. It is both a holy quest and a romantic one. A related pattern is that of the need to perform a nearly impossible task so that all will be well. Arthur, for example, must pull the sword from the stone if he is to become king. Often found as part of both these situations is the journey, suggesting a psychological, as well as physical, movement from one place, or state of being, to another. The journey, like the travels of Ulysses, may involve a descent into hell.
- **Death and rebirth**. Already mentioned in connection with the cycle of the seasons, death and rebirth are the most common of all archetypes in literature. Rebirth may take the form of natural regeneration, that is, of submission to the cycles of nature, or of escape from this troubled life to an endless paradise, such as that enjoyed before the fall into the sufferings that are part of mortality. For example, in "Kubla Khan," Coleridge presents a landscape that is both savage and holy, a landscape of heaven and hell, ending with a vision of a transcendent experience in which the speaker/holy man has "drunk the milk of Paradise."
- **Initiation**. Stories of initiation deal with the progression from one stage of life to another, usually that of an adolescent moving from childhood to maturity, from innocence to understanding. The experience is rarely without problems, although it may involve comedy. In its classic form, the protagonist goes through the initiation alone, experiencing tests and ordeals that change him so that he can return to the family or larger group as an adult member.

Northrop Frye and Mythological Criticism

In 1957, Northrop Frye advanced the study of archetypes, at least as they apply to literature, with the publication of *Anatomy of Criticism,* in which he presented a highly structured model of how myths are at the basis of all texts. Although he

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did not accept Jung's theories in their entirety, he used many of them as the basis of his efforts to understand the functions of archetypes in literature. He spoke of a "theory of myths," by which he really referred to a theory of genres as a way of understanding narrative structures. All texts, he concluded, are part of "a central unifying myth," exemplified in four types of literature, or four **mythoi**, that are analogous to the seasons. Together they compose the entire body of literature, which he called the **monomyth**.

The mythos of summer, for example, is the romance. It is analogous to the birth and adventures of innocent youth. It is a happy myth that indulges what we want to happen—that is, the triumph of good over evil and problems resolved in satisfying ways. Autumn, in contrast, is tragic. In the autumn myth, the hero does not triumph but instead meets death or defeat. Classic tragic figures, like Antigone or Oedipus, are stripped of power and set apart from their world to suffer alone. In the winter myth, what is normal and what is hoped for are inverted. The depicted world is hopeless, fearful, frustrated, even dead. There is no hero to bring salvation, no happy endings to innocent adventures. Spring, however, brings comedy: rebirth and renewal, hope and success, freedom and happiness. The forces that would defeat the hero are thwarted, and the world regains its order. According to Frye, every work of literature has its place in this schema.

Currently the mythic or archetypal approach is less frequently used than it was in earlier decades. Some readers complain that it overlooks the qualities of individual works by its focus on how any given text fits a general pattern. When a novel is seen as but one of many instances of death and rebirth, for example, its uniqueness is ignored and its value diminished. However, the process of relating a single work to literature in general and to human experience as a whole gives the work of literature stature and importance in the eyes of other readers. It relates literature to other areas of intellectual activity in a reasoned, significant manner. Certainly the archetypal approach is worth knowing and sometimes using, for it yields insights about both literature and human nature that other approaches fail to provide. It considers a work in terms of its psychological, aesthetic, and cultural aspects, making such an analysis a powerful union of three perspectives.

Jacques Lacan: An Update on Freud

Since the 1960s, the Freudian approach, which had waned in popularity, has experienced a renaissance due to the ideas of a French psychoanalyst named Jacques Lacan. His work has been described as a reinterpretation of Freud in light of the ideas of structuralist and poststructuralist theories (see Chapter 8). Looking at Freudian theory with the influence of the ideas of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and linguists Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobsen, Lacan's work is far-ranging and complex, innovative, and not easily understood. Some would even call it obscure.

In the mid-1950s, Lacan startled the world of psychoanalysis by calling for a new emphasis on the unconscious but with significant differences from the Freudian approach. His ideas and practices were at such odds with those of

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many other psychoanalysts that he was expelled from the International Psychoanalytical Association, leading him to form a new professional organization with colleagues and followers of like mind. From that point on, Lacan set himself on a course of developing new theories independent of the established profession. He explained these theories in publications called *Écrits,* which were actually lectures for graduate-level students.

Lacan's remarks upset his colleagues not because he was interested in understanding the behavior of the conscious personality by analyzing the unconscious, as the Freudians tried to do, but because he was interested in defining the unconscious as the core of one's being. Freud's concept of the unconscious as a force that determines our actions and beliefs shook the long-held ideal that we are beings who can control our own destinies; Lacan further weakened the Western humanist concept of a stable self by denying the possibility of bringing the contents of the unconscious into consciousness. Whereas Freud wanted to make hidden drives and desires conscious so they could be managed, Lacan claimed that the ego can never replace the unconscious or possess its contents for the simple reason that the ego, the "I" self, is only an illusion produced by the unconscious. It was a monumental challenge to our sense of who we are.

Lacan's concept of adult psychology also set him apart from Freud, who believed that the healthy psyche was characterized by unity. In contrast, Lacan recognized that it is always fraught with fragmentation, absence, and lack. This stance has, of course, made Lacan's ideas particularly attractive to the poststructuralists (see Chapter 8).

Another difference from the Freudians was Lacan's notion that the unconscious, "the nucleus of our being," is orderly and structured, not chaotic and jumbled and full of repressed desires and wishes, as Freud conceived of it. In fact, Lacan asserted that the unconscious is structured like a language. He expanded such ideas by turning to Saussure, though with a few significant modifications. Saussure (see Chapter 8) pointed out that the relationship between a word and a physical object is arbitrary, not inherent, and that it is maintained by convention. We know one signifier from another not because of meanings they naturally carry but because of the differences signifiers have from one another. Unlike Saussure, who saw a **signifier** and a **signified** as two parts of a **sign**, Lacan saw in the unconscious only signifiers that refer to other signifiers. Each has meaning only because it differs from some other signifier. It does not ultimately refer to anything outside itself, and the absence of any signified robs the entire system of stability. In these terms, the unconscious is a constantly moving chain of signifiers, with nothing to stop their shifting and sliding. The elements of the unconscious are all signifiers, but they have no reference beyond themselves, making them unstable. The signified that seems to be "the real thing" is actually beyond our grasp, because, according to Lacan, all we can have is a conceptualized reality. Language becomes independent of what is external to it, and we cannot go outside it. Nevertheless, we spend our lives trying to stabilize this system so that meaning and self become possible.

As evidence for his argument that the unconscious is structured like language, Lacan pointed out that analysts routinely study language as a means of

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understanding the unconscious. He states in particular that two elements identified by Freud as part of dreams, condensation and displacement, are similar to metaphor and metonymy. More specifically, condensation, like metaphor, carries several meanings in one image. Likewise, displacement, like metonymy, uses an element of a person or experience to refer to the whole. In addition, the importance that Freud attributed to other linguistic devices, such as slips, allusions, and puns, to provide insight into the unconscious is, according to Lacan, further evidence of the linguistic basis of the unconscious. Thus, the unconscious, the very essence of the self, is a linguistic effect that exists before the individual enters into it, leaving it open to analysis. If the linguistic system is extant before one enters into it, however, there can be no individual, unique self, a concept that is profoundly disturbing to many.

To the reader coming to Lacan's theories for the first time, they may seem to be more philosophical than literary. They have a bearing on literary analysis, however, in several important ways.

Character Analysis First of all, Lacan's rejection of the unique self changes our way of examining characters. Rejecting the traditional view of the human self as a whole, integrated being and accepting Lacan's view of it as a collection of signifiers that point to no signified, leaving one fragmented, means changing the way we think and talk about characters. If the psychologically complete personality is not possible, how is the reader to view the figures found in narratives?

Lacan's description of how the psyche evolves is helpful in developing new ways of reading to accommodate his views of the self. As he explained it, our movement toward adulthood occurs as several parts of our personality develop in search of a unified and psychologically complete self, which, though it can never be achieved, can be approached by stabilizing the sliding of signifiers. Consequently, we move through three stages, or orders as Lacan calls them—the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic, corresponding to the experience of need, demand, and desire. It should be noted that this evolution is not entirely sequential, as the orders sometimes overlap each other. Underlying the process, so the assumption goes, is language as the shaper of our unconscious, our conscious minds, and our sense of self.

It should be noted that disagreement exists among scholars about the nature and significance of Lacan's orders, due partly to the complexities of the concepts that underlie them and also because he revised his thinking from time to time. (He is also accused by some of being a bad writer.) Consequently, the explanations provided here may not entirely concur with explanations provided in other texts.

The new infant exists in a state of nature, a psychological place characterized by wholeness and fullness. It does not recognize itself as an individual that is complete and distinguishable from other people or objects. It knows only that it has needs (food, for example) and does not distinguish itself from the mother or any object that satisfies them. It exists in the **Real Order**, a psychological state characterized by unity and completeness.

Somewhere between six and eighteen months of age, the baby sees its own reflection and begins to perceive a state of separation between itself and the

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surrounding world, an experience known as the **mirror stage**, which is part of the **Imaginary Order**. In a preverbal state, the baby becomes aware of its body only in bits and pieces—whatever is visible at any given moment—but does not yet conceive of itself as whole, although it can recognize other people as such. The mirror stage introduces a sense of possible wholeness, because the image looks like other objects with discrete boundaries. However, to have boundaries means recognizing that the child is separate from the mother, not one with her. It is an awareness that is accompanied by a sense of loss. The sense of unity with others and with other objects has been lost and, along with it, the sense of security that it provided.

The infant thinks the reflection is real and uses what it sees to create the ego, the sense of "I." It is only an illusion, however, and she is, in actuality, not whole and complete. Thus the "self" is always manufactured by the mistaken acceptance of an external image for an internal identity. Lacan refers to it as the "**other**" because it is not the actual self, only an image outside of the self. He spelled it with a small "o" to distinguish it from the "**Other**," or those remaining elements that exist outside the self, objects and people that the infant comes to know before becoming aware of its own "other." It is known as an "ideal ego," because it is whole and nonfragmented and has no lack or absence. In other words, the individual makes up for the union that has been lost by misconceiving the self as whole and sufficient; but such an assumption is illusory and, hence, referred to as the Imaginary.

When the awareness of being separate comes, as it must if the individual is to move from nature to culture, the baby desires to return to that earlier period of oneness with the mother. Its needs at this point turn into demands, specifically demands for attention and love from another that will erase the separation that the baby knows, but such a reunion is not possible. One can never return.

When the infant realizes it is not connected to that which serves its needs, when it recognizes the Other and its own other, it begins to enter the **Symbolic Order**. (During that process it overlaps to some degree with the Imaginary.) The symbolic introduces language that takes the place of what is now lacking. It names what is missing and substitutes a sign for it, stopping the play and movement of signifiers so that they can have some stable meaning. Because a person must enter language to become a speaker and thereby name the self as "I," it masters the individual and shapes one's identity as a separate being. In the Symbolic Order everything is separate; thus, to negotiate it successfully, a person must master the concept of difference, difference that makes language possible (that is, we know a word such as *light* because it is not the word *fight*) and difference that makes genders recognizable.

The Symbolic also initiates socialization by setting up rules of behavior and putting limits on desire. Whereas the Imaginary Order is centered in the mother, the Symbolic Order is ruled by what Lacan calls the Law of the Father, because it is the father who enforces cultural norms and laws. According to Lacan, there are biological sexual differences, but gender is culturally created. This means that because the power of the word and being male are associated, the boy child must identify with the father as rule giver, and the girl must acknowledge that, as such,

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the father is her superior. Both male and female experience a symbolic castration, or a loss of wholeness that comes with the acceptance of society's rules.

Actually, Lacan refers to the ultimate center of power by several names. He calls it the **phallus**, referring not to a biological organ but to a privileged signifier, the symbol of power that gives meaning to other objects. Neither males nor females can possess the phallus totally, though males have a stronger claim to it. Instead, human beings go through life longing for a return to the state of wholeness when we were one with our mother, manifested in our desire for pleasure and things. But wholeness will always elude us.

He also calls it the Other, all that world beyond the self. To be the Other would be to bridge the separation that exists between the self and the center of language, the center of the Symbolic. Because such an act is not possible, the human being experiences an ongoing "lack," which Lacan calls "desire," an unsatisfiable yearning to merge with the Other and rule all.

Not surprisingly, Lacan has met with some criticism about his description of the Symbolic Order, with its emphasis on the superiority of the father that the girl must acknowledge. Positive outcomes of the challenge that his ideas present have been found in the adaptations and extensions of his theories by such feminist critics as Julia Kristeva Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. On the other hand, there are those who share Francois Roustag's opinion that Lacan's work is an "incoherent system of pseudo-scientific gibberish."

Obviously Lacan's ideas are interesting to the literary critic because they provide more ways of understanding and analyzing characters. A reader can look for symbolic representations of the Real Order, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic to demonstrate how the text depicts the human being as a fragmented, incomplete being. In "Young Goodman Brown," for example, evidence of the three orders points to lack and absence that make wholeness impossible. The protagonist longs for the wholeness provided by the Real, but it eludes him. He does not know and can never know the true "self," and he resists the acceptance of society's rules, the power of the group. Clearly suffering from a loss that he can never recover, he exemplifies the fragmented being who is unable to achieve the completeness he desires.

Antirealism In addition to changing the way characters are analyzed, Lacan's theories of language, in particular his assertion that language is detached from physical reality, also affect literary analysis. For example, his theories make it difficult to read a narrative as being realistic. The traditional assumption that a fictive world exists as a real one is no longer valid if language is not connected to referents outside of it. Instead, the reader must accept that a narrative is likely to be broken and interrupted. It may, like other signifiers, refer to other narratives. Lacan's early association with surrealist writers and painters is evident in the tendency of his followers to favor bizarre and nonlinear narratives.

Jouissance Lacan's ideas are also germane to the work of the critic, because he acknowledged that literature offers access to the Imaginary Order and a chance to reexperience the joy of being whole, as we once were with our mother. The

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word Lacan used, ***jouissance***, means "enjoyment," but it also carries a sexual reference ("orgasm") that the English word lacks. As Lacan used it, it is essentially phallic, although he admitted that there is a feminine *jouissance*.

WRITING PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM

Prewriting

Once you are accustomed to taking a Freudian, mythological, or Lacanian approach, you will begin to notice meaningful symbols and will pay close attention to dream sequences as a matter of course. If you are not used to reading from these perspectives, however, you may want to be intentional about noting aspects of a work during prewriting that could be significant.

If you are interested in using Freudian theory, you can begin by making notes about a selected character, then writing a descriptive paragraph about him or her. The following questions can help to get you started:

- What do you see as the character's main traits?
- By what acts, dialogue, and attitudes are those traits revealed?
- What does the narrator reveal about the character?
- In the course of the narrative, does the character change? If so, how and why?
- Where do you find evidence of the id, superego, and ego at work?
- Does the character come to understand something not understood at the outset?
- How does the character view him- or herself?
- How is he or she viewed by other characters?
- Do the two views agree?
- What images are associated with the character?
- What principal symbols enrich your understanding of the characters?
- Which symbols are connected with forces that affect the characters?
- Does the character have any interior monologues or dreams? If so, what do you learn from them about the character that is not revealed by outward behavior or conversation?
- Are there conflicts between what is observable and what is going on inside the character? Are there any revealing symbols in them?
- Are there suggestions that the character's childhood experiences have led to problems in maturity, such as uncompleted sexual stages or unresolved dilemmas?
- Where do the characters act in ways that are inconsistent with the way they are described by the narrator or perceived by other characters?

- Who is telling the story, and why does the narrator feel constrained to tell it? How can you explain a character's irrational behavior? What causes do you find? What motivation?

An archetypal approach can start with these questions:

- What similarities do you find among the characters, situations, and settings of the text under consideration and those in other works that you have read?
- What commonly encountered archetypes do you recognize?
- Is the narrative like any classic myths you know?
- Where do you find evidence of the protagonist's persona? Anima/animus? Shadow?
- Does the protagonist at any point reject some part of his or her personality and project it onto someone or something else?
- Would you describe the protagonist as individuated, as having a realistic and accurate sense of self?

You can begin a Lacanian approach by considering the following questions:

- Where do you recognize the appearance of the Real, Imaginary, and/or Symbolic Orders?
- How do they demonstrate the fragmented nature of the self?
- Are there instances where the Imaginary interrupts the Symbolic Order?
- Is the character aware of the lack or absence of something significant in the self?
- Are there objects that symbolize what is missing or lacking?
- Do you find examples of the mirror stage of the developing psyche?
- Is the text an antirealist one that subverts traditional storytelling?

Drafting and Revising

The Introduction When you write an analysis of a work of literature from any of these three forms of psychological criticism—Freudian, mythological, or Lacanian—your reader will find it helpful if you announce at the outset what your primary focus will be. Because such studies can look at a single character, the relationships among characters, meaningful symbolism, narrative patterns, or even the life of the author, an indication of the direction your paper will take makes it easier for others to follow the development of your discussion.

Another approach is to comment on similarities and differences between the work with which you are dealing and other works by the same author. If you have determined that the elements of the poem or story you are analyzing are typical of a given writer—for example, that the conflicts faced by a particular character are similar to those that have been developed in some of the author's other works—noting those correspondences in the introduction can help convince the

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reader that what you say is valid. However, if the work under analysis is atypical of what one anticipates from a given writer, then revealing at the beginning that this work is a departure from the expected can garner attention as well.

If you have discovered parallels between the text you are writing about and others that you have read, you may want to mention the similarities you have discovered. If the situations or relationships among the characters have reminded you of those found in classic myths, fairy tales, Greek drama, or even more modern works, mentioning those correspondences will turn your discussion toward a mythic perspective.

The Body Because of the number and diversity of topics you have to choose from when doing psychoanalytic (and related) criticism, there is no formula for the organization of the body of the paper. There are only suggestions that may help you structure the way you report your ideas.

As always, you cannot expect your audience to accept your analysis simply as stated. You will have to prove your case by using tenets of psychological or critical theory to explain, for example, that a certain character cannot keep a job because he is resistant to authority because he has unresolved issues with his father, or that another is projecting an undesirable part of her personality when she blames a good friend for provoking a quarrel that she herself began. You do not have to refer to all the principles explained in this chapter, but you should incorporate all the points that help support your position.

If you have chosen to take a character as the principal topic of a Freudian analysis, you may have already discovered what you want to reveal about him or her when you prewrote. If not, it may be necessary to return to those notes to expand and deepen them so that you eventually arrive at an understanding of some struggle the character is living through, an epiphany he or she experiences, or the motivation behind some particular behavior. You will address that understanding in the body of your discussion. You may find the following strategies helpful:

- Reveal what is happening in the character's unconscious as suggested by images, symbols, or interior monologues.
- Identify the nature of the character's conflicts; look for indications of whether he or she has the attitudes of a healthy adult male or female. If not, then the neurosis needs to be identified and its source examined.
- Because any changes in the outlook or behavior of a character signal that some struggle has been resolved, for good or ill, assess their meaning.
- Examine whether a character operates according to the pleasure principle, the morality principle, or the reality principle.
- Explain a character's typical behavior by determining whether the personality is "balanced" or dominated by the id or the superego.
- Look carefully at any dreams that are recounted or alluded to. What repressed material are these dreams putting into symbolic form? What are they really about?

- Probe the meanings of symbols by thinking about them in terms of their maleness and femaleness.
- Find some particular behavior that a character is fixated on, then trace it to some need or issue from childhood that went unsatisfied or unresolved.
- Note any conflicts or events in the author's life that are reflected in the text.

Using a mythological approach, you can explore one or several of the following topics:

- Show how characters follow (or vary from) well-established patterns of behavior or re-create well-known figures from literary history—for example, from Greek mythology.
- Look at similarities and contrasts in the personal conscious and personal unconscious of a character to determine whether they reflect the same desires and impulses or are in conflict.
- Locate any instances in which the collective unconscious of a character is revealed, perhaps through a dream or vision.
- Identify archetypal images and situations, and explain how they work together to create meaning.
- Examine instances in which the persona, anima/animus, and shadow of a character are revealed, including instances of rejection and projection.

To use Lacan's ideas as the basis of your discussion, you can apply the following analytical strategies:

- Identify the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic Orders in the narrative, and explain the position of a character in relation to each.
- Note instances where a character's fragmentation or lack is evident.
- Locate those occasions on which a character recognizes that he or she is a fragmented being yearning for wholeness, and explain the causes of those occasions.
- Explain how certain objects symbolize that which is lacking in a character's life.
- Note those occasions on which the unconscious controls and shapes a character.
- Pay attention to characters' needs, demands, and desires, noting how they indicate the characters movement towards adulthood.
- Examine familial interactions of a character's childhood and adolescence in an effort to understand adult behaviors.
- Point out antirealistic elements of a narrative, noting what those elements suggest about the inaccessibility of a whole, integrated self.
- Identify any mirror-stage experiences and explain how they demonstrate Lacan's ideas about the developing psyche.

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Some questions psychoanalytic critics ask about literary texts include:

1. How do the operations of repression structure or inform the work? That is, what unconscious motives are operating in the main characters; what core issues are thereby illustrated; and how do these core issues structure or inform the piece? (Remember, the unconscious consists of repressed wounds, fears, unresolved conflicts, and guilty desires)

2. What are the family dynamics present here? That is, is it possible to relate a character's patterns of adult behavior to early experiences in the family as represented in the story? How do these patterns of behavior and family dynamics operate and what do they reveal?

3. How can a character's behavior be explained in terms of psychoanalytic concepts of any kind (for example, regression, projection, fear of death, sexuality - as a primary indicator of psychological identity, or the operations of id, ego, superego?)

Literary text for practice: *The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes*, by Hassan Blasim

In Irag his name was Salim Abdul Husain, he worked for the municipality in the cleaning department, part of a group assigned by the manager to clear up in the aftermath of explosions. He died in Holland in 2009 under another name: Carlos Fuentes.

Bored and disgusted as on every miserable day, Salim and his colleagues were sweeping a street market after an oil tanker had exploded nearby, incinerating chickens, fruit and vegetables, and some people. They were sweeping the market slowly and cautiously for fear they might sweep up with the debris any human body parts left over. But they were always looking for an intact wallet or perhaps a gold chain, a ring, or a watch that could still tell the time. Salim was not as lucky as his colleagues in finding the valuables left over from death. He needed money to buy a visa to go to Holland and escape this hell of fire and death. His only lucky find was a man's finger with a valuable silver ring of great beauty. Salim put his foot over the finger, bent down carefully, and with disgust pulled the silver ring off. He picked up the finger and put it in a black bag where they collected all the body parts. The ring ended up on Salim's finger; he would contemplate the gemstone in surprise and wonder, and in the end he abandoned the idea of selling it. Might one say that he felt a secret spiritual relationship with the ring?

When he applied for asylum in Holland he also applied to change his name: from Salim Abdul Husain to Carlos Fuentes. He explained his request to the official in the immigration department on the grounds that he was frightened of the fanatical Islamist groups, because his request for asylum was based on his work as a translator for the U.S. forces, and his fear that someone might assassinate him as a traitor to his country. Salim had consulted his cousin who lived in France about changing his name. He called him on his cell phone from the immigration department because Salim had no clear idea of a new foreign name that would suit him. In his apartment in France his cousin was taking a deep drag on a joint when

Salim called. Suppressing a laugh, his cousin said, “You’re quite right. It’s a hundred times better to be from Senegal or China than it is to have an Arab name in Europe. But you couldn’t possibly have a name like Jack or Stephen—I mean, a European name. Perhaps you should choose a brown name—a Cuban or Argentine name would suit your complexion, which is the color of burnt barley bread.” His cousin was looking through a pile of newspapers in the kitchen as he continued the conversation on the phone, and he remembered that two days earlier he had read a name, perhaps a Spanish name, in a literary article of which he did not understand much. Salim thanked his cousin warmly for the help he had given him and wished him a happy life in the great country of France.

Carlos Fuentes was very happy with his new name, and the beauty of Amsterdam made him happy too. Fuentes wasted no time. He joined classes to learn Dutch and promised himself he would not speak Arabic from then on, or mix with Arabs or Iraqis, whatever happened in life. “Had enough of misery, backwardness, death, [illegible], [illegible], and camels,” he said to himself. In the first year of his new life Fuentes let nothing pass without comparing it with the state of affairs in his original country, sometimes in the form of a question, sometimes as an exclamation. He would walk down the street muttering to himself sulkily and enviously, “Look how clean the streets are! Look at the toilet seat; it’s sparkling clean! Why can’t we eat like them? We gobble down our food as though it’s about to disappear. If this girl wearing a short skirt and showing her legs were now walking across Eastern Gate Square, she would disappear in an instant. She would only have to walk ten yards and the ground would swallow her up. Why are the trees so green and beautiful, as though they’re washed with water every day? Why can’t we be peaceful like them? We live in houses like pigsties while their houses are warm, safe, and colorful. Why do they respect dogs as much as humans? [illegible]
government like theirs?” Everything Carlos Fuentes saw amazed him and humiliated him at the same time, from the softness of the toilet paper in Holland to the parliament building protected only by security cameras.

Carlos Fuentes’s life went on as he had planned it. Every day he made progress in burying his identity and his past. He always scoffed at the immigrants and other foreigners who did not respect the rules of Dutch life and who complained all the time. He called them “retarded gerbils.” They

work in restaurants illegally, they don't pay taxes, and they don't respect any law. They are Stone Age savages. They hate the Dutch, who have fed and housed them. He felt he was the only one who deserved to be adopted by this compassionate and tolerant country, and that the Dutch government should expel all those who did not learn the language properly and anyone who committed the slightest misdemeanor, even crossing the street in violation of the safety code. Let them go shit there in their shitty countries.

After learning Dutch in record time, to the surprise of everyone who knew him, Carlos Fuentes worked nonstop, paid his taxes, and refused to live on welfare. The highlight of his efforts to integrate his mind and spirit into Dutch society came when he acquired a good-hearted Dutch girlfriend who loved and respected him. She weighed two hundred pounds and had childlike features, like a cartoon character. Fuentes tried hard to treat her as a sensitive and liberated man would, like a Western man, in fact a little more so. Of course, he always introduced himself as someone of Mexican origin whose father had left his country and settled in Iraq to work as an engineer with the oil companies. Carlos liked to describe the Iraqi people as an uncivilized and backward people who did not know what humanity means. "They are just savage clans," he would say.

Because of his marriage to a Dutch woman, his proficiency in Dutch, his enrollment in numerous courses on Dutch culture and history, and the fact that he had no legal problems or criminal record in his file, he was able to obtain Dutch citizenship sooner than other immigrants could even dream of, and Carlos Fuentes decided to celebrate every year the anniversary of the day he became a Dutch national. Fuentes felt that his skin and blood had changed forever and that his lungs were now breathing real life. To strengthen his determination he would always repeat, "Yes, give me a country that treats me with respect, so that I can worship it all my life and pray for it."

That's how things were until the dream problem began and everything fell to pieces, or as they say: Proverbs and old adages do not wear out; it's only man that wears out. The wind did not blow fair for Fuentes. The first of the dreams was grim and distressing. In the dream he was unable to speak Dutch. He was standing in front of his Dutch boss and speaking to him in an Iraqi dialect, which caused him great concern and a horrible pain in his head. He would wake up soaked in sweat, then burst into tears. At

first he thought they were just fleeting dreams that would inevitably pass. But the dreams continued to assail him without mercy. In his dreams he saw a group of children in the poor district where he was born, running after him and making fun of his new name. They were shouting after him and clapping: “Carlos the coward, Carlos the sissy, Carlos the silly billy.” These irritating dreams evolved night after night into terrifying nightmares. One night he dreamt that he had planted a car bomb in the center of Amsterdam. He was standing in the courtroom, ashamed and embarrassed. The judges were strict and would not let him speak Dutch, with the intent to humiliate and degrade him. They fetched him an Iraqi translator, who asked him not to speak in his incomprehensible rustic accent, which added to his agony and distress.

Fuentes began to sit in the library for hours looking through books about dreams. On his first visit he came across a book called *The Forgotten Language*, by Erich Fromm. He did not understand much of it, and he did not like the opinions of the writer, which he could not fully grasp because he had not even graduated from middle school. “This is pure bullshit,” Fuentes said as he read Fromm’s book: “We are free when we are asleep, in fact freer than we are when awake. . . . We may resemble angels in that we are not subject to the laws of reality. During sleep the realm of necessity recedes and gives way to the realm of freedom. The existence of the ego becomes the only reference point for thoughts and feelings.”

Feeling a headache, Fuentes put the book back. How can we be free when we cannot control our dreams? What nonsense! Fuentes asked the librarian if there were any simple books on dreams. The librarian did not understand his question properly, or else she wanted to show off how cultured and well read she was on the subject. She told him of a book about the connection between dreams and food and how one sleeps, then she started to give him more information and advice. She also directed him to a library that had specialist magazines on the mysteries of the world of dreams.

Fuentes’s wife had noticed her husband’s strange behavior, as well as the changes in his eating and sleeping habits and in when he went into and came out of the bathroom. Fuentes no longer, for example, ate sweet potato, having previously liked it in all its forms. He was always buying poultry, which was usually expensive. Of course, his wife did not know he had read

that eating any root vegetable would probably be the cause of dreams related to a person's past and roots. Eating the roots of plants has an effect different from that of eating fish, which live in water, or eating the fruits of trees. Fuentes would sit at the table chewing each piece of food like a camel, because he had read that chewing it well helps to get rid of nightmares. He had read nothing about poultry, for example, but he just guessed that eating the fowl of the air might bring about dreams that were happier and more liberated.

In all his attempts to better integrate his dreams with his new life, he would veer between what he imagined and the information he found in books. In the end he came to this idea: His ambition went beyond getting rid of troublesome dreams; he had to control the dreams, to modify them, purge them of all their foul air, and integrate them with the salubrious rules of life in Holland. The dreams must learn the new language of the country so that they could incorporate new images and ideas. All the old gloomy and miserable faces had to go. So Fuentes read more and more books and magazines about the mysteries of sleep and dreams according to a variety of approaches and philosophies.

In bed he began to wear a thick woolen overcoat, which gave rise to arguments with his wife, and so he had to go to the sitting room and sleep on the sofa. Nakedness attracts the sleeper to the zone of childhood; that's what he read too. Every day at 12:05 exactly he would go and take a bath, and after coming out of the bathroom he would sit at the kitchen table and take some drops of jasmine oil. Before going to bed at night he would write down on a piece of paper the main sedative foods, which he would buy the following day. This state of affairs went on for more than a month, and Fuentes did not achieve good results. But he was patient and his will was invincible. As the days passed he started to perform mysterious secret rituals: He would dye his hair and his toenails green and sleep on his stomach repeating obscure words. One night he painted his face like an American Indian, slept wearing diaphanous orange pajamas, and put under his pillow three feathers taken from various birds.

Fuentes's dignity did not permit him to tell his wife what was happening to him. He believed it was his problem and he could overcome it, since in the past he had survived the most trying and miserable conditions. In return his wife was more indulgent of his eccentric behavior, because she

had not forgotten how kind and generous he was. She decided to give him another chance before intervening and putting an end to what was happening.

On one beautiful summer night Carlos Fuentes was sleeping in a military uniform with a toy plastic rifle by his side. As soon as he began to dream, a wish he had long awaited came true for the first time: He realized in his dream that he was dreaming. This was exactly what he had been seeking, to activate his conscious mind inside the dream so that he could sweep out all the rubbish of the unconscious. In the dream he was standing in front of the door to an old building that looked as though it had been ravaged by fire in its previous life. The building was in central Baghdad. What annoyed him was seeing things through the telescopic sights of the rifle he was holding in his hands. Fuentes broke through the door of the building and went into one flat after another, mercilessly wiping out everyone inside. Even the children did not survive the bursts of bullets. There was screaming, panic, and chaos. But Fuentes had strong nerves and picked off his victims with skill and precision. He was worried he might wake up before he had completed his mission, and he thought, “If I had some hand grenades I could very soon finish the job in this building and move on to somewhere else.” But on the sixth floor a surprise hit him when he stormed the first apartment and found himself face-to-face with Salim Abdul Husain! Salim was standing [illegible] next to the window, holding a broom stained with blood. With a trembling hand Fuentes aimed his rifle at Salim’s head. Salim began to smile and repeated in derision, “Salim the Dutchman, Salim the Mexican, Salim the Iraqi, Salim the Frenchman, Salim the Indian, Salim the Pakistani, Salim the Nigerian . . .”

Fuentes’s nerves snapped and he panicked. He let out a resounding scream and started to spray Salim Abdul Husain with bullets, but Salim jumped out the window and not a single bullet hit him.

When Fuentes’s wife woke up to the scream and stuck her head out the window, Carlos Fuentes was dead on the pavement, and a pool of blood was spreading slowly under his head. Perhaps Fuentes would have forgiven the Dutch newspapers, which wrote that an Iraqi man had committed suicide at night by jumping from a sixth-floor window, instead of writing that a Dutch national had committed suicide. But he will never forgive his brothers, who had his body taken back to Iraq and buried in the cemetery in Najaf. The

most beautiful part of the Carlos Fuentes story, however, is the image captured by an amateur photographer who lived close to the scene of the incident. The young man took the picture from a low angle. The police had covered the body; the only part that protruded from under the blue sheet was his outstretched right hand. The picture was in black and white, but the stone in the ring on Carlos Fuentes's finger glowed red in the foreground, like a sun in hell.

Source: Blasim, Hassa. T*he Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq*. Trans. by Jonathan Wright. Comma Press, 2013.

Chapter Six

Post-Colonialism

Source: Cain, William E., et.al. eds. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 3rd.ed. London: Norton& Co. 2018, pp. 1536-1547.

CHINUA ACHEBE
1930–2013

In the wake of global realignments after World War II, many African, Asian, and other countries sought political independence from European colonial rule. The struggle for cultural recognition was an important part of this political process, and the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a profusion of writing from formerly colonial cultures. Arguably the most prominent African writer of his generation, Chinua Achebe brought to the English-speaking world highly regarded novelistic portraits of Nigeria. Alongside his fiction, he also published influential criticism exposing colonialist biases in English fiction and criticism and arguing for an indigenous African literature. Indicting the view of Africa in Joseph Conrad's classic *Heart of Darkness* (1902) as a reflection of European racist assumptions of the "darkness" or inferiority of Africans, Achebe's "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (1977) is a touchstone of anticolonialist—or what has come to be called postcolonial—criticism.

Born in the village of Ogidi in eastern Nigeria, Achebe experienced the world of colonialism firsthand. Nigeria was a construction of European colonial powers; its disparate African tribes and territories were placed under British control from 1906 until 1960, when it achieved independence. His father was a churchman in an evangelical Protestant mission, but as a boy Achebe was also exposed to traditional Igbo culture. He was selected to attend a prestigious colonial secondary school, the Government College at Umuahia, and in 1948 went on to receive his undergraduate training at the newly formed University College in Ibadan, then an affiliate of the University of London. After graduating in 1953, he worked as a producer for the Nigerian Broadcasting Company, later founding and directing the Voice of Nigeria from 1961 to 1966.

Achebe caught the attention of the literary world with the publication of his first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Depicting traditional Igbo culture and its clash with European culture, it has been an international success, translated into nearly fifty languages and selling millions of copies. Achebe became a senior research fellow at the University of Nigeria in 1967, a professor of English in 1976, and professor emeritus in 1985. He taught at various U.S. schools, including the University of Massachusetts, the University of Virginia, UCLA, and Bard College, and he won numerous prizes and honors. He was also actively involved in publishing ventures to promote African writing; most notably, from 1962 through 1987 he was founding editor of the British publisher Heinemann's African Writers Series, which has issued several hundred titles. In addition, Achebe was an outspoken public figure, especially during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70), when he supported the independence of Biafra from the Nigerian federation.

Achebe's fiction and criticism present, as one African critic notes, "exemplary texts of nationalist contestation of colonialist myths and distortions of Africans and Africa." Achebe himself, in his influential essay "Colonialist Criticism" (1975), shows how colonialist biases permeate even sophisticated critical commentary on fiction representing Africa. This is the theme of "An Image of Africa," our selection, in which Achebe argues that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, however critical of the European imperialist mission, presents Africans as savage, subhuman, and incapable of speech. While allowing for the novel's artistry, he unequivocally condemns this view as "offensive and deplorable." Significantly, he focuses much of his attack not on Conrad but on the critical position of Conrad's text in the Western canon as a masterpiece, a position largely forgiving of or blind to its racism. Thus its critical reception—up to the present day—unthinkingly perpetuates racist stereotypes.

Although focused on the racism inherent in the specific case of *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe's argument broaches large theoretical debates about the canon and about the moral and social values of art. It poses a difficult question: how should we respond to classic works that exhibit racist or other condemnable views? Achebe answers with an emphatic ethical judgment. In dismissing the aestheticist view that art is solely for art's sake or that we should merely appreciate and analyze the aesthetic or linguistic skill of a work, Achebe presupposes a social theory of art, holding that art reflects and propagates social views and values. He does not fully justify this position in "An Image of Africa," but in a central early statement of his views, "The Novelist as Teacher" (1965), he underscores literature's pedagogical mission and its ethical and political responsibilities.

Since its publication, "An Image of Africa" has set the terms of debate about one of the most read and taught books in the English curriculum. Some scholars maintain that Conrad disdainfully opposes European imperialism, which was at its height in 1900, and exhibits sympathy for the plight of Africans. Others argue that *Heart of Darkness* represents not a real Africa but an allegory of an individual psychological descent or of a decontextualized battle between good and evil. Critics heeding Achebe's angry battle cry find texts such as *Heart of Darkness* irretrievably flawed in their racism and limited in that they depict Africa only through Western eyes. More moderate historicist critics have tried to mend fences; while agreeing that *Heart of Darkness* exhibits racist views, they point out that it represents relatively progressive views for its time and conclude that Conrad is not particularly blameworthy, noting that any condemnation would be unfairly based on anachronistic criteria.

Beyond its impact on Conrad criticism, Achebe's denunciation of Conrad assumed a larger significance in the so-called culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Traditionalists have taken it as a prime example of "political correctness," an attempt to impose moralistic and political standards on classic works of literature. They claim that canonical works exhibit high aesthetic value, proven by the test of time, and thus should be esteemed. On the other side, a range of theorists—postcolonial, African American, feminist, queer, and so on—contest a literary canon that carries racist, orientalist, sexist, homophobic, and other negative values. This debate seems intractable, in part because both groups argue at cross-purposes; it is doubtful that a traditionalist critic would advocate racism, or that a progressive critic would dispense with aesthetic appreciation. Rather, their disagreement rests on their differing theories of art: traditionalist critics claim priority for formal aesthetic properties, while progressive critics claim priority for art's social—or in Achebe's terms, pedagogical—value.

Along with the Kenyan novelist and critic NGUGI WĂ THIONG'O and others, Achebe called for representations of imperialism to shift from European perspectives to the perspectives of those colonized. As he remarked in a 1989 interview, "The moment I realized in reading *Heart of Darkness* that I was not supposed to be part of Marlow's crew sailing down the Congo to a bend in the river, but I was one of those on the shore, jumping and clapping and making faces and so on, then I realized that was not

me, and that that story had to be told again." This call, advocating a distinctive indigenous voice to represent its own experience, has been influential for the developing field of postcolonial studies, as well as for African American literature and criticism. Achebe's analysis of the West's imagination of Africa as a negative projection of itself draws on the psychoanalytic model of colonialism proposed by FRANTZ FANON, which argues that European depictions of colonies as the "Other" are symptomatic of the West's own cultural neuroses. This analysis of the literary and cultural representation of non-Western cultures has received its fullest treatment in the work of EDWARD W. SAID, who labels Western projections onto the Eastern Other "Orientalism" (see below). In "An Image of Africa," Achebe simply calls it racism.

"An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" Keywords: The Canon/Tradition, Ethics, The Novel, Postcolonial Criticism, Race and Ethnicity Studies, Representation

An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*[1]

In the fall of 1974 I was walking one day from the English Department at the University of Massachusetts to a parking lot. It was a fine autumn morning such as encouraged friendliness to passing strangers. Brisk youngsters were hurrying in all directions, many of them obviously freshmen in their first flush of enthusiasm. An older man going the same way as I turned and remarked to me how very young they came these days. I agreed. Then he asked me if I was a student too. I said no, I was a teacher. What did I teach? African literature. Now that was funny, he said, because he knew a fellow who taught the same thing, or perhaps it was African *history*, in a certain community college not far from here. It always surprised him, he went on to say, because he never had thought of Africa as having that kind of stuff, you know. By this time I was walking much faster. "Oh well," I heard him say finally, behind me: "I guess I have to take your course to find out."

A few weeks later I received two very touching letters from high school children in Yonkers, New York, who—bless their teacher—had just read *Things Fall Apart*.[2] One of them was particularly happy to learn about the customs and superstitions of an African tribe.

I propose to draw from these rather trivial encounters rather heavy conclusions which at first sight might seem somewhat out of proportion to them. But only, I hope, at first sight.

The young fellow from Yonkers, perhaps partly on account of his age, but I believe also for much deeper and more serious reasons, is obviously unaware that the life of his own tribesmen in Yonkers, New York, is full of odd customs and superstitions and, like everybody else in his culture, imagines that he needs a trip to Africa to encounter those things.

The other person being fully my own age could not be excused on the grounds of his years. Ignorance might be a more likely reason; but here again I believe that something more wilful than a mere lack of information was at

1. This is an amended version of the second Chancellor's Lecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, February 1975 [Achebe's note].

2. Achebe's first and best-known novel (published 1958); it depicts a traditional Nigerian society from an African rather than European perspective.

work. For did not that erudite British historian and Regius Professor at Oxford, Hugh Trevor-Roper,[3] also pronounce that African history did not exist?

If there is something in these utterances more than youthful inexperience, more than a lack of factual knowledge, what is it? Quite simply it is the desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest.

This need is not new; which should relieve us all of considerable responsibility and perhaps make us even willing to look at this phenomenon dispassionately. I have neither the wish nor the competence to embark on the exercise with the tools of the social and biological sciences but do so more simply in the manner of a novelist responding to one famous book of European fiction: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*,[4] which better than any other work that I know displays that Western desire and need which I have just referred to. Of course there are whole libraries of books devoted to the same purpose but most of them are so obvious and so crude that few people worry about them today. Conrad, on the other hand, is undoubtedly one of the great stylists of modern fiction and a good story-teller into the bargain. His contribution therefore falls automatically into a different class—permanent literature—read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics. *Heart of Darkness* is indeed so secure today that a leading Conrad scholar has numbered it "among the half-dozen greatest short novels in the English language."[5] I will return to this critical opinion in due course because it may seriously modify my earlier suppositions about who may or may not be guilty in some of the matters I will now raise.

Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as "the other world," the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. The book opens on the River Thames, tranquil, resting peacefully "at the decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks."[6] But the actual story will take place on the River Congo, the very antithesis of the Thames. The River Congo is quite decidedly not a River Emeritus. It has rendered no service and enjoys no old-age pension. We are told that "going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world."

Is Conrad saying then that these two rivers are very different, one good, the other bad? Yes, but that is not the real point. It is not the differentness that worries Conrad but the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry. For the Thames too "has been one of the dark places of the earth." It conquered its darkness, of course, and is now in daylight and at peace. But if it were to visit its primordial relative, the Congo, it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings.

3. English historian (1914–2003) known for his studies of World War II and the Elizabethan period; Regius Professor of Modern History (1957–80). He made this comment in a lecture delivered in 1963, reprinted in *The Rise of Christian Europe* (1965).

4. The best-known work (1902) of Conrad (1857–1924), the Polish-born English novelist. In it, a ship captain named Marlow retells his journey down the Congo River on behalf of a Belgian company in search of their chief ivory agent, Kurtz.

5. Albert J. Guerard, introduction to *Heart of Darkness and the Secret Sharer*, by Joseph Conrad (New York: New American Library, 1950), p. 9 [Achebe's note].

6. Conrad, p. 66 [Achebe's note].

These suggestive echoes comprise Conrad's famed evocation of the African atmosphere in *Heart of Darkness*. In the final consideration, his method amounts to no more than a steady, ponderous, fake-ritualistic repetition of two antithetical sentences, one about silence and the other about frenzy. We can inspect samples of this on pages 103 and 105 of the New American Library edition: (a) "It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention" and (b) "The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy." Of course, there is a judicious change of adjective from time to time, so that instead of "inscrutable," for example, you might have "unspeakable," even plain "mysterious," etc., etc.

The eagle-eyed English critic F. R. Leavis[7] drew attention long ago to Conrad's "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensive mystery." That insistence must not be dismissed lightly, as many Conrad critics have tended to do, as a mere stylistic flaw; for it raises serious questions of artistic good faith. When a writer while pretending to record scenes, incidents, and their impact is in reality engaged in inducing hypnotic stupor in his readers through a bombardment of emotive words and other forms of trickery, much more has to be at stake than stylistic felicity. Generally, normal readers are well armed to detect and resist such underhand activity. But Conrad chose his subject well—one which was guaranteed not to put him in conflict with the psychological predisposition of his readers or raise the need for him to contend with their resistance. He chose the role of purveyor of comforting myths.

The most interesting and revealing passages in *Heart of Darkness* are, however, about people. I must crave the indulgence of my reader to quote almost a whole page from about the middle of the story when representatives of Europe in a steamer going down the Congo encounter the denizens of Africa:

> We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of the black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories.
>
> The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look

7. Influential modern literary critic (1895–1978; see above); the following quotation is from *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad* (1948; reprint, New York: New York University Press, 1960), p. 177.

> at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend.[8]

Herein lies the meaning of *Heart of Darkness* and the fascination it holds over the Western mind: "What thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours . . . Ugly."

Having shown us Africa in the mass, Conrad then zeros in, half a page later, on a specific example, giving us one of his rare descriptions of an African who is not just limbs or rolling eyes:

> And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs.[9] A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam gauge and at the water gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity—and he had filed his teeth, too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge.[1]

As everybody knows, Conrad is a romantic on the side. He might not exactly admire savages clapping their hands and stamping their feet but they have at least the merit of being in their place, unlike this dog in a parody of breeches. For Conrad, things being in their place is of the utmost importance.

"Fine fellows—cannibals—in their place," he tells us pointedly. Tragedy begins when things leave their accustomed place, like Europe leaving its safe stronghold between the policeman and the baker to take a peep into the heart of darkness.

Before the story takes us into the Congo basin proper we are given this nice little vignette as an example of things in their place:

> Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of

8. Conrad, pp. 105–6 [Achebe's note].
9. An allusion to a famous remark of Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), who described a woman's preaching as "like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all" (quoted by James Boswell in his *Life of Johnson*, 1791).
1. Conrad, p. 106 [Achebe's note].

> movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at.[2]

Towards the end of the story Conrad lavishes a whole page quite unexpectedly on an African woman who has obviously been some kind of mistress to Mr. Kurtz and now presides (if I may be permitted a little liberty) like a formidable mystery over the inexorable imminence of his departure:

> She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent. . . . She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose.[3]

This Amazon is drawn in considerable detail, albeit of a predictable nature, for two reasons. First, she is in her place and so can win Conrad's special brand of approval; and second, she fulfils a structural requirement of the story; a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman who will step forth to end the story:

> She came forward, all in black with a pale head, floating toward me in the dusk. She was in mourning. . . . She took both my hands in hers and murmured, "I had heard you were coming" . . . She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering.[4]

The difference in the attitude of the novelist to these two women is conveyed in too many direct and subtle ways to need elaboration. But perhaps the most significant difference is the one implied in the author's bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other. It is clearly not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the "rudimentary souls" of Africa. In place of speech they made "a violent babble of uncouth sounds." They "exchanged short grunting phrases" even among themselves. But most of the time they were too busy with their frenzy. There are two occasions in the book, however, when Conrad departs somewhat from his practice and confers speech, even English speech, on the savages. The first occurs when cannibalism gets the better of them:

> "Catch 'im," he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp white teeth—"catch 'im. Give 'im to us." "To you, eh?" I asked; "what would you do with them?" "Eat 'im!" he said curtly.[5]

The other occasion was the famous announcement: "Mistah Kurtz—he dead."[6]

At first sight these instances might be mistaken for unexpected acts of generosity from Conrad. In reality they constitute some of his best assaults. In the case of the cannibals the incomprehensible grunts that had thus far served them for speech suddenly proved inadequate for Conrad's purpose of letting the European glimpse the unspeakable craving in their hearts. Weighing the necessity for consistency in the portrayal of the dumb brutes against the sensational advantages of securing their conviction by clear, unambiguous evidence issuing out of their own mouths, Conrad chose the

2. Ibid., p. 78 [Achebe's note].
3. Ibid., pp. 136–37.
4. Ibid., p. 153.
5. Ibid., p. 111.
6. Ibid., p. 148.

latter. As for the announcement of Mr. Kurtz's death by the "insolent black head in the doorway," what better or more appropriate *finis* could be written to the horror story of that wayward child of civilization who willfully had given his soul to the powers of darkness and "taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land" than the proclamation of his physical death by the forces he had joined?

It might be contended, of course, that the attitude to the African in *Heart of Darkness* is not Conrad's but that of his fictional narrator, Marlow, and that far from endorsing it Conrad might indeed be holding it up to irony and criticism. Certainly, Conrad appears to go to considerable pains to set up layers of insulation between himself and the moral universe of his story. He has, for example, a narrator behind a narrator. The primary narrator is Marlow, but his account is given to us through the filter of a second, shadowy person. But if Conrad's intention is to draw a cordon sanitaire between himself and the moral and psychological *malaise* of his narrator, his care seems to me totally wasted because he neglects to hint, clearly and adequately, at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters. It would not have been beyond Conrad's power to make that provision if he had thought it necessary. Conrad seems to me to approve of Marlow, with only minor reservations—a fact reinforced by the similarities between their two careers.

Marlow comes through to us not only as a witness of truth, but one holding those advanced and humane views appropriate to the English liberal tradition which required all Englishmen of decency to be deeply shocked by atrocities in Bulgaria or the Congo of King Leopold[7] of the Belgians or wherever.

Thus, Marlow is able to toss out such bleeding-heart sentiments as these:

> They were all dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest.[8]

The kind of liberalism espoused here by Marlow/Conrad touched all the best minds of the age in England, Europe and America. It took different forms in the minds of different people but almost always managed to sidestep the ultimate question of equality between white people and black people. That extraordinary missionary Albert Schweitzer,[9] who sacrificed brilliant careers in music and theology in Europe for a life of service to Africans in much the same area as Conrad writes about, epitomizes the ambivalence. In a comment which has often been quoted Schweitzer says: "The African is

7. Leopold II (1835–1909; reigned 1865–1909), an ardent imperialist advocating the colonial development of the Congo region, which was then the private holding of a group of investors headed by Leopold and later (1908–60) a colonial possession of Belgium. "Atrocities in Bulgaria": after an unsuccessful Bulgarian rebellion against Turkish rule, in 1876 the Ottomans massacred some 30,000 Bulgarian men, women, and children.

8. Conrad, p. 82 [Achebe's note].

9. Alsatian theologian, philosopher, and physician (1875–1965), who in 1913 founded a hospital in Lambaréné, a city in the Gabon province of French Equatorial Africa. In 1952 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his humanitarian efforts in Africa.

indeed my brother but my junior brother." And so he proceeded to build a hospital appropriate to the needs of junior brothers with standards of hygiene reminiscent of medical practice in the days before the germ theory of disease came into being. Naturally he became a sensation in Europe and America. Pilgrims flocked, and I believed still flock even after he has passed on, to witness the prodigious miracle in Lambaréné, on the edge of the primeval forest.

Conrad's liberalism would not take him quite as far as Schweitzer's, though. He would not use the word "brother" however qualified; the farthest he would go was "kinship." When Marlow's African helmsman falls down with a spear in his heart he gives his white master one final disquieting look:

> And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory—like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.[1]

It is important to note that Conrad, careful as ever with his words, is concerned not so much about "distant kinship" as about someone *laying a claim* on it. The black man lays a claim on the white man which is well-nigh intolerable. It is the laying of this claim which frightens and at the same time fascinates Conrad, "the thought of their humanity—like yours . . . Ugly."

The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked. Students of *Heart of Darkness* will often tell you that Conrad is concerned not so much with Africa as with the deterioration of one European mind caused by solitude and sickness. They will point out to you that Conrad is, if anything, less charitable to the Europeans in the story than he is to the natives, that the point of the story is to ridicule Europe's civilizing mission in Africa. A Conrad student informed me in Scotland that Africa is merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr. Kurtz.

Which is partly the point. Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind? But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot. I do not doubt Conrad's great talents. Even *Heart of Darkness* has its memorably good passages and moments:

> The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return.[2]

Its exploration of the minds of the European characters is often penetrating and full of insight. But all that has been more than fully discussed in the last fifty years. His obvious racism has, however, not been addressed. And it is high time it was!

1. Conrad, p. 124 [Achebe's note].
2. Ibid., pp. 104–5.

Conrad was born in 1857, the very year in which the first Anglican missionaries were arriving among my own people in Nigeria. It was certainly not his fault that he lived his life at a time when the reputation of the black man was at a particularly low level. But even after due allowances have been made for all the influences of contemporary prejudice on his sensibility, there remains still in Conrad's attitude a residue of antipathy to black people which his peculiar psychology alone can explain. His own account of his first encounter with a black man is very revealing:

> A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards.[3]

Certainly Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts. Sometimes his fixation on blackness is equally interesting, as when he gives us this brief description: "A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms"[4]—as though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs to wave white arms! But so unrelenting is Conrad's obsession.

As a matter of interest, Conrad gives us in *A Personal Record* what amounts to a companion piece to the buck nigger of Haiti. At the age of sixteen Conrad encountered his first Englishman in Europe. He calls him "my unforgettable Englishman" and describes him in the following manner:

> [his] calves exposed to the public gaze . . . dazzled the beholder by the splendour of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory . . . The light of a headlong, exalted satisfaction with the world of men . . . illumined his face . . . and triumphant eyes. In passing he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth . . . his white calves twinkled sturdily.[5]

Irrational love and irrational hate jostling together in the heart of that talented, tormented man. But whereas irrational love may at worst engender foolish acts of indiscretion, irrational hate can endanger the life of the community. Naturally, Conrad is a dream for psychoanalytic critics. Perhaps the most detailed study of him in this direction is by Bernard C. Meyer, M.D. In his lengthy book, Dr. Meyer follows every conceivable lead (and sometimes inconceivable ones) to explain Conrad. As an example, he gives us long disquisitions on the significance of hair and hair-cutting in Conrad. And yet not even one word is spared for his attitude to black people. Not even the discussion of Conrad's antisemitism was enough to spark off in Dr. Meyer's mind those other dark and explosive thoughts. Which only leads one to surmise that Western psychoanalysts must regard the kind of racism displayed by Conrad as absolutely normal despite the profoundly important work done by Frantz Fanon[6] in the psychiatric hospitals of French Algeria.

3. Qtd. in Jonah Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 143 [Achebe's note].
4. Conrad, p. 142 [Achebe's note].
5. Qtd. in Bernard C. Meyer, *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 30 [Achebe's note]. Meyer (1910–1988), an American psychiatrist as well as a psychoanalytic literary critic.
6. Black West Indian psychoanalyst and social critic (1925–1961; see above), who was an influential proponent of the national liberation of colonial peoples.

Whatever Conrad's problems were, you might say he is now safely dead. Quite true. Unfortunately, his heart of darkness plagues us still. Which is why an offensive and deplorable book can be described by a serious scholar as "among the half-dozen greatest short novels in the English language." And why it is today perhaps the most commonly prescribed novel in twentieth-century literature courses in English departments of American universities.

There are two probable grounds on which what I have said so far may be contested. The first is that it is no concern of fiction to please people about whom it is written. I will go along with that. But I am not talking about pleasing people. I am talking about a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question.

Secondly, I may be challenged on the grounds of actuality. Conrad, after all, did sail down the Congo in 1890 when my own father was still a babe in arms. How could I stand up more than fifty years after his death and purport to contradict him? My answer is that as a sensible man I will not accept just any traveller's tales solely on the grounds that I have not made the journey myself. I will not trust the evidence even of a man's very eyes when I suspect them to be as jaundiced as Conrad's. And we also happen to know that Conrad was, in the words of his biographer, Bernard C. Meyer, "notoriously inaccurate in the rendering of his own history."[7]

But more important by far is the abundant testimony about Conrad's savages which we could gather if we were so inclined from other sources and which might lead us to think that these people must have had other occupations besides merging into the evil forest or materializing out of it simply to plague Marlow and his dispirited band. For as it happened, soon after Conrad had written his book an event of far greater consequence was taking place in the art world of Europe. This is how Frank Willett, a British art historian, describes it:

> Gauguin had gone to Tahiti, the most extravagant individual act of turning to a non-European culture in the decades immediately before and after 1900, when European artists were avid for new artistic experiences, but it was only about 1904–5 that African art began to make its distinctive impact. One piece is still identifiable; it is a mask that had been given to Maurice Vlaminck in 1905. He records that Derain was "speechless" and "stunned" when he saw it, bought it from Vlaminck and in turn showed it to Picasso and Matisse, who were also greatly affected by it. Ambroise Vollard then borrowed it and had it cast in bronze . . . The revolution of twentieth century art was under way![8]

The mask in question was made by other savages living just north of Conrad's River Congo. They have a name too: the Fang people, and are without a doubt among the world's greatest masters of the sculptured form. The event

7. Meyer, p. 30 [Achebe's note].

8. Frank Willett, *African Art* (New York: Praeger, 1971), pp. 35–36 [Achebe's note]. Willett (1925–2006), English art historian who focused on works from Africa. Willett names the important French modern painters Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), Maurice de Vlaminck (1876–1958), André Derain (1880–1954), and Henri Matisse (1869–1954), as well as the great Spanish modernist Pablo Picasso (1881–1973). Vollard (1867–1939) was an influential French art dealer and publisher who supported modern art.

Frank Willett is referring to marked the beginning of cubism and the infusion of new life into European art that had run completely out of strength.

The point of all this is to suggest that Conrad's picture of the peoples of the Congo seems grossly inadequate even at the height of their subjection to the ravages of King Leopold's International Association for the Civilization of Central Africa.[9]

Travellers with closed minds can tell us little except about themselves. But even those not blinkered, like Conrad, with xenophobia, can be astonishingly blind. Let me digress a little here. One of the greatest and most intrepid travellers of all time, Marco Polo, journeyed to the Far East from the Mediterranean in the thirteenth century and spent twenty years in the court of Kublai Khan[1] in China. On his return to Venice he set down in his book entitled *Description of the World* his impressions of the peoples and places and customs he had seen. But there were at least two extraordinary omissions in his account. He said nothing about the art of printing, unknown as yet in Europe but in full flower in China. He either did not notice it at all or, if he did, failed to see what use Europe could possibly have for it. Whatever the reason, Europe had to wait another hundred years for Gutenberg.[2] But even more spectacular was Marco Polo's omission of any reference to the Great Wall of China, nearly four thousand miles long and already more than one thousand years old at the time of his visit. Again, he may not have seen it; but the Great Wall of China is the only structure built by man which is visible from the moon![3] Indeed, travellers can be blind.

As I said earlier Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it. For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry, the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa. If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa trapped in primordial barbarity it could say with faith and feeling: There go I but for the grace of God. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray[4]—a carrier on to whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently, Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man's jeopardous integrity. Keep away from Africa, or else! Mr. Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness* should have heeded that warning and the prowling horror in his heart would have kept its place, chained to its lair. But he foolishly exposed himself to the wild irresistible allure of the jungle and lo! the darkness found him out.

In my original conception of this essay I had thought to conclude it nicely on an appropriately positive note in which I would suggest from my privileged position in African and Western cultures some advantages the West might

9. An international group of explorers, geographers, and scientists, founded by Leopold II; it was first convened in Brussels in 1876.

1. Great Mongol ruler and emperor of China (1215–1294). Polo (1254–1324), Venetian merchant and traveler who is said to have spent years in the Khan's service; his writings about the court and Asia made him famous.

2. Johannes Gutenberg (ca. 1397–1468), the German printer credited with inventing movable type, which revolutionized book production.

3. This often-repeated claim is not true (no structure is visible).

4. The title character of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), by the Irish author OSCAR WILDE; he does not age while his portrait changes, reflecting his moral disintegration.

derive from Africa once it rid its mind of old prejudices and began to look at Africa not through a haze of distortions and cheap mystifications but quite simply as a continent of people—not angels, but not rudimentary souls either—just people, often highly gifted people and often strikingly successful in their enterprise with life and society. But as I thought more about the stereotype image, about its grip and pervasiveness, about the wilful tenacity with which the West holds it to its heart; when I thought of the West's television and cinema and newspapers, about books read in its schools and out of school, of churches preaching to empty pews about the need to send help to the heathen in Africa, I realized that no easy optimism was possible. And there was in any case something totally wrong in offering bribes to the West in return for its good opinion of Africa. Ultimately the abandonment of unwholesome thoughts must be its own and only reward. Although I have used the word "wilful" a few times here to characterize the West's view of Africa, it may well be that what is happening at this stage is more akin to reflex action than calculated malice. Which does not make the situation more but less hopeful.

The *Christian Science Monitor*, a paper more enlightened than most, once carried an interesting article written by its Education Editor on the serious psychological and learning problems faced by little children who speak one language at home and then go to school where something else is spoken. It was a wide-ranging article taking in Spanish-speaking children in America, the children of migrant Italian workers in Germany, the quadrilingual phenomenon in Malaysia and so on. And all this while the article speaks unequivocally about language. But then out of the blue sky comes this:

> In London there is an enormous immigration of children who speak Indian or Nigerian dialects, or some other native language.[5]

I believe that the introduction of "dialects," which is technically erroneous in the context, is almost a reflex action caused by an instinctive desire of the writer to downgrade the discussion to the level of Africa and India. And this is quite comparable to Conrad's withholding of language from his rudimentary souls. Language is too grand for these chaps; let's give them dialects!

In all this business a lot of violence is inevitably done not only to the image of despised peoples but even to words, the very tools of possible redress. Look at the phrase "native language" in the *Christian Science Monitor* excerpt. Surely the only *native* language possible in London is Cockney English. But our writer means something else—something appropriate to the sounds Indians and Africans make!

Although the work of redressing which needs to be done may appear too daunting, I believe it is not one day too soon to begin. Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation but was strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth. But the victims of racist slander who for centuries have had to live with the inhumanity it makes them heir to have always known better than any casual visitor, even when he comes loaded with the gifts of a Conrad.

5. *Christian Science Monitor*, November 25, 1974, p. 11 [Achebe's note].

Some questions postcolonial critics ask:

1. **How does the literary text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression? Special attention is often given to those areas where political and cultural oppression overlap, as it does, for example, in the colonizers' control of language, communication, and knowledge in colonized countries.**
2. **What does the text reveal about the problematics of postcolonial identity, including the relationship between personal and cultural identity and such issues as double consciousness and hybridity?**
3. **What does the text reveal about the politics and/or psychology of anticolonialist resistance? For example, what does the text suggest about the ideological, political, social, economic, or psychological forces that promote or inhibit resistance? How does the text suggest that resistance can be achieved and sustained by an individual or a group?**
4. **Are there meaningful similarities among the literatures of different postcolonial populations? One might compare, for example, the literatures of native peoples from different countries whose land was invaded by colonizers, the literatures of white settler colonies in different countries, or the literatures of different populations in the African diaspora. Or one might compare literary works from all three of these categories in order to investigate, for example, if the experience of colonization creates some common elements of**

cultural identity that outweigh differences in race and nationality.

5. **Analyze the anticolonialist agenda of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In order to accomplish this task, examine the novel's representation of precolonial tribal life in Africa. What is lost as a result of colonial contact? What are the colonizers' strategies in indoctrinating the native population to their way of thinking? Why are the colonizers so successful?[1]**

[1] **Lois Tyson. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge, 2006, PP. 431—445.**

Shooting an Elephant

Essay by George Orwell

VIDEO TRAILER THINK central KEYWORD: HML12-1250A

COMMON CORE

RI 1 Cite evidence to support inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. **RI 2** Determine central ideas of a text and analyze their development. **RI 3** Analyze a complex sequence of events and explain how specific events interact and develop over the course of the text. **RI 4** Analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of key terms over the course of a text. **RI 5** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition, including whether the structure makes points clear and engaging. **L 5a** Interpret figures of speech in context.

DID YOU KNOW?

George Orwell . . .

- wrote his first poem when he was about five years old.
- never legally changed his name from Eric Blair to George Orwell.
- coined the terms "newspeak" and "Big Brother."

Meet the Author

George Orwell 1903–1950

Throughout his short life, George Orwell sympathized with the underdog and spoke out against social and political injustice. He is perhaps best known for his novel *1984,* which focused on the appalling possibilities of life in a totalitarian state.

An Uneasy Conscience Orwell was born in the Indian province of Bengal, where his father served in the Indian civil service. In 1922, Orwell joined the Indian Imperial Police and left for Burma, which at the time was ruled by Britain. When he discovered firsthand the oppression of British rule, however, he grew increasingly disenchanted with imperialist policies.

Voluntary Poverty and War In 1927, at the age of 25, Orwell resigned from the Imperial Police and decided to embark on a career as a writer. Turning his back on his middle-class upbringing, he moved to London and lived the destitute existence of the poor and downtrodden. Working as a dishwasher and a day laborer, he tramped through the countryside with the homeless. In 1928, he moved to Paris, where he continued to eke out a meager existence and wrote newspaper articles on unemployment, poverty, and social inequality. Out of these experiences came his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London,* published in 1933.

In 1936, Orwell left England to fight with the antifascist forces in Spain's civil war. His experiences during the war helped solidify his political outlook, and he became a committed socialist (he rejected communism as it was practiced in the Soviet Union). The war also provided him with the material for his book *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), in which he articulated his conviction that totalitarianism was an imminent danger to Europe's future.

The Conscience of His Generation During World War II, Orwell became increasingly cynical about the way in which both the Allied forces and the Axis powers used propaganda. Near the end of World War II, he completed the first of his famous novels, *Animal Farm* (1945), a satiric fable about the dangers of dictatorships. The book established Orwell's literary reputation worldwide. In 1949, Orwell completed *1984* while battling tuberculosis. He died a year later at the peak of his career. In an obituary, author V. S. Pritchett called Orwell "the wintry conscience of his generation," a reference to Orwell's unrelenting—if at times somewhat despairing—campaign for honesty and intellectual freedom.

Author Online THINK central

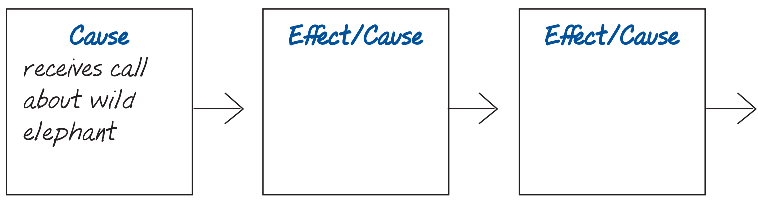
Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-1250B

TEXT ANALYSIS: REFLECTIVE ESSAY

In a reflective essay, the writer makes a connection between a personal observation and a universal idea, such as love, honor, or freedom. In "Shooting an Elephant," Orwell reflects on a specific incident from his time as a young police officer in British-ruled Burma during the 1920s. Paradoxically, readers find Orwell—one of the 20th-century's most eloquent opponents of tyranny—as a representative of a sometimes-harsh colonial power. As you read, note the ambiguity of Orwell's situation, especially apparent in the tension between his role in the incident described and his role as the author.

READING SKILL: ANALYZE CAUSE-AND-EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS

The unfortunate climax of "Shooting an Elephant" develops from a series of related actions. In a **cause-and-effect relationship,** an event or action directly results in another event or action. Note that an effect can become the cause of a subsequent effect. As you read, use a chart like the one shown to trace the chain of cause-and-effect relationships that structures the essay.



VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Use the context of each sentence to help you determine the meaning of the boldface words.

1. Many natives resented British **imperialism.**
2. We are not a **cowed** people; we can still fight.
3. New rulers may **supplant** the old with little resistance.
4. The **prostrate** subjects cringed before their harsh king.
5. The **despotic** king rules with an iron fist.
6. The ancient town is a confusing **labyrinth** of streets.
7. Her costume was so **garish** that it hurt my eyes.
8. Is forgetfulness a sign of **senility** in older people?

Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

How important is it to "SAVE FACE"?

George Orwell once said, "An autobiography is only to be trusted when it reveals something disgraceful." Most people have done things that they've regretted or about which they've later felt ashamed. Character flaws are difficult to admit, and people often go to great lengths—even compromising their values—to protect their reputation.

QUICKWRITE Recall a time or incident when you had to "save face." Try to remember why you reacted to the situation as you did. Write a short description of what happened, how you "saved face," and what you might do differently today in a similar situation.

Shooting an Elephant

George Orwell

BACKGROUND Orwell's essay is set in Burma, a Southeast Asian country now known as Myanmar. In a series of wars in the 19th century, the British gained control of Burma and made it a province of British India. The Burmese resented British rule, under which they endured poverty and a lack of political and religious freedom. Like many of his fellow British officers, Orwell was inexperienced in police work when he arrived in Burma at age 19.

In Moulmein, in Lower Burma,[1] I was hated by large numbers of people—the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was subdivisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice[2] over her dress. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football[3] field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the
10 end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans. **A**

Analyze Visuals ▸
Draw as many conclusions as you can about this photograph.

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY
Summarize the experiences Orwell describes in lines 1–14. What effect did these experiences have on him?

1. **Moulmein** (mo͞ol-mān'), **in Lower Burma:** the main city of British-controlled Burma, now the independent Asian nation of Myanmar. Moulmein is now usually called Mawlamyine.
2. **betel** (bēt'l) **juice:** the saliva created when chewing a mixture of betel palm nuts, betel palm leaves, and lime.
3. **football:** soccer.

All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that **imperialism** was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up[4] my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically—and secretly, of course—I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the gray, **cowed** faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos—all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to **supplant** it. All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj[5] as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, *in saecula saeculorum,*[6] upon the will of **prostrate** peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty. B

One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism—the real motives for which **despotic** governments act. Early one morning the subinspector at a police station the other end of the town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I got on to a pony and started out. I took my rifle, an old .44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful *in terrorem.*[7] Various Burmans stopped me on the way and told me about the elephant's doings. It was not, of course, a wild elephant, but a tame one which had gone "must."[8] It had been chained up as tame elephants always are when their attack of "must" is due, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. Its mahout,[9] the only person who could manage it when it was in that state, had set out in pursuit, but had taken the wrong direction and was now twelve hours' journey away, and in the morning the elephant had suddenly reappeared in the town. The Burmese population had no weapons and were quite helpless against it. It had already

imperialism (ĭm-pîr′ē-ə-lĭz′əm) *n.* the policy of forming and maintaining an empire, especially in the quest for raw materials and more markets

cowed (koud) *adj.* made timid and submissive through fear or awe **cow** *v.*

supplant (sə-plănt′) *v.* to take the place of

prostrate (prŏs′trāt′) *adj.* completely submissive

B **REFLECTIVE ESSAY**
What **internal conflict** does Orwell describe in lines 15–35?

despotic (dĭ-spŏt′ĭk) *adj.* ruling absolutely without allowing any dissent; tyrannical

4. **chucked up:** threw off; gave up.
5. **British Raj:** India and adjoining areas (such as Burma) controlled by Britain in the 19th and early 20th centuries. *Raj* is the word for "kingdom" or "rule" in Hindi, a chief language of India.
6. ***in saecula saeculorum*** (ĭn sĕk′yə-lə sĕk-yə-lôr′əm) *Latin:* forever and ever.
7. ***in terrorem*** (ĭn tĕ-rôr′əm) *Latin:* for terror.
8. **gone "must":** had an attack of must, a dangerous frenzy that periodically seizes male elephants.
9. **mahout** (mə-hout′): an elephant keeper.

George Orwell at the police training school in Burma, 1922.

destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock; also it had met the municipal rubbish van, and, when the driver jumped out and took to his heels, had turned the van over and inflicted violences upon it.

The Burmese subinspector and some Indian constables[10] were waiting for me in the quarter where the elephant had been seen. It was a very poor quarter, a **labyrinth** of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palm-leaf, winding all over a steep hillside. I remember that it was a cloudy stuffy morning at the beginning of the rains. We began questioning the people as to where the elephant had gone, and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. That is invariably the case in the East; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes. Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another, some professed not even to have heard of any elephant. I had almost made up my mind that the whole story was a pack of lies, when we heard yells a little distance away. There was a loud, scandalized cry of "Go away, child! Go away this instant!" and an old woman with a switch in her hand came round the corner of a hut, violently shooing away a crowd of naked children. Some more women followed, clicking their tongues and exclaiming; evidently there was something there that the children ought not to have seen. I rounded the hut and saw a man's dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie,[11] almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the

labyrinth (lăb'ə-rĭnth') *n.* an intricate structure of winding passages; a maze

Language Coach

Commonly Confused Words Some words that sound or look similar are easy to confuse. Don't confuse *scandalized* and *scandalous*. One means "greatly offended" and the other means "causing a scandal (great offense)." Which is the meaning of *scandalized* in line 68?

10. **constables:** police officers.
11. **Dravidian** (drə-vĭd'ē-ən) **coolie:** a dark-skinned menial laborer from the south of India.

elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the
80 teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. (Never tell me, by the way, that the dead look peaceful. Most of the corpses I have seen looked devilish.) The friction of the great beast's foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit. As soon as I saw the dead man I sent an orderly[12] to a friend's house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle. I had already sent back the pony, not wanting it to go mad with fright and throw me if it smelled the elephant. C

The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields[13] below, only a few hundred yards away. As I started forward practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of the houses and
90 followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. They had not shown much interest in the elephant when he was merely ravaging their homes, but it was different now that he was going to be shot. It was a bit of fun to them, as it would be to an English crowd; besides, they wanted the meat. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant—I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary—and it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels. At the bottom, when you got away from the huts, there was a metalled road and beyond that a miry waste of
100 paddy fields a thousand yards across, not yet ploughed but soggy from the first rains and dotted with coarse grass. The elephant was standing eighty yards from the road, his left side towards us. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd's approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth. D

I had halted on the road. As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant—it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery—and obviously one ought not to do it if it can possibly be avoided. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I
110 thought then and I think now that his attack of "must" was already passing off; in which case he would merely wander harmlessly about until the mahout came back and caught him. Moreover, I did not in the least want to shoot him. I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow

12. **orderly:** a military aid.

13. **paddy fields:** rice fields.

C CAUSE
What causes the narrator to send the orderly for an elephant gun?

COMMON CORE RI 1

D AMBIGUITY
In this passage, Orwell hints at the uncertainty, or **ambiguity,** of the threat posed by the elephant. On the surface, the elephant is plainly quite peaceful at this point in the narrative. However, other details complicate the picture. As you finish reading the story, think about the following questions: Does Orwell ever really know that the elephant is a continuing threat? What replaces the threat of the elephant in the story?

faces above the **garish** clothes—faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they
120 would watch a conjurer[14] about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it
130 is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib.[15] For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives," and so in every crisis he has got to do what the "natives" expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing—no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle
140 not to be laughed at. **E**

But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a *large* animal.) Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks—five pounds, possibly. But I had got to act quickly. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the
150 elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.

It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behavior. If he charged I could shoot, if he took no notice of me it would be safe to leave him until the mahout came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind. For at that
160 moment, with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense,

garish (gâr'ĭsh) *adj.* too bright or showy; gaudy; glaring

COMMON CORE RI 4

Language Coach

Key Terms Each time an author repeats a key term, readers get a deeper understanding of that term's meaning in context. What are the technical meanings of the terms *natives* and *sahib* in lines 130–136? How does Orwell's explanation refine the meanings of these terms?

COMMON CORE L 5a

E **PARADOX**

A **paradox** is a statement or situation that appears to lead to a contradiction but, in fact, reveals some element of truth. Characters can say or do things that seem contradictory but, because of ambiguous or complex circumstances, may in fact express a deeper truth. What is paradoxical about Orwell's situation at this point?

14. **conjurer** (kŏn'jər-ər): magician.

15. **sahib** (sä'ĭb): a title of respect formerly used by native Indians to address a European gentleman.

as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn't be frightened in front of "natives"; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do. There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine[16] and lay down on the road to get a better aim. F

F CAUSE AND EFFECT
What ultimately causes the narrator to shoot the elephant?

The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theater curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were 170 going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one should shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole; actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick—one never does when a shot goes home—but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He 180 looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful

16. **magazine:** the compartment from which cartridges are fed into the rifle's firing chamber.

impact of the bullet had paralyzed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time—it might have been five seconds, I dare say—he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous **senility** seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs
190 collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upwards like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open—I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I
200 thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.

In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that
210 it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were arriving with dahs[17] and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon.

Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee[18] coolie. And afterwards I was very glad
220 that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool. G

senility (sĭ-nĭl'ĭ-tē) *n.* the mental deterioration that sometimes comes with old age

Language Coach

Fixed Expressions The expression *have got to* can be used instead of *have to* for emphasis (*I have got to study!*). How would the narrator's feelings in line 204 seem different if he had said *had to* instead of *had got to*?

G **REFLECTIVE ESSAY**
What does the shooting of the elephant symbolize for Orwell?

17. **dahs:** large knives.
18. **Coringhee:** coming from a port in southeastern India.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** How was Orwell treated by the local Burmese?
2. **Recall** How does the Burmese crowd react when they see Orwell approach the elephant with his rifle?
3. **Summarize** What happens after Orwell starts firing at the elephant?

Text Analysis

4. **Identify Cause-and-Effect Relationships** Review the graphic organizer you created as you read the essay, paying special attention to the instances where an effect becomes the cause of a further effect. Which moments in the essay have the greatest influence on Orwell's actions? What makes this structure effective for the topic?
5. **Analyze a Reflective Essay** Orwell says that the incident with the elephant proved enlightening "in a roundabout way." What did he learn about himself and about imperialism through this incident?
6. **Analyze Conflict** Orwell depicts several conflicts that developed between British colonialists and native Burmese. Describe how each of the following conflicts is reflected in his essay, and explain Orwell's position on the conflict:
   - occupation vs. freedom
   - industrial society vs. pre-industrial society
   - tribal justice vs. legal justice
7. **Interpret Paradox** In lines 129–130, Orwell writes, "I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys." Why is this statement paradoxical? How does it reflect Orwell's point of view about British imperialism?

Text Criticism

8. The elephant is an important **symbol,** or a person, place, thing, or idea that stands for something beyond itself. What political idea or situation might the confused but violent elephant symbolize? Cite supporting details from the text to explain the elephant's symbolic importance.

How important is it to **"SAVE FACE"?**

A few times in the essay, Orwell talks about the need to "save face," or protect his reputation, as an agent of the British Empire. Why was this so important to him?

COMMON CORE

RI 2 Determine central ideas of a text and analyze their development. **RI 3** Analyze a sequence of events and explain how specific events interact and develop over the course of the text. **RI 5** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition, including whether the structure makes points clear and engaging. **RI 6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power of the text.

Vocabulary In Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Use your knowledge of the boldface vocabulary words to decide whether each statement is true or false.

1. Most small lands welcome the **imperialism** of larger nations.
2. A superhero is an easily **cowed** person.
3. The new president **supplants** the previous president.
4. A **prostrate** person always stands up for himself.
5. A **despotic** ruler allows little if any dissent.
6. It is easy for most people to get lost in a **labyrinth.**
7. Las Vegas singers may wear **garish** clothes when they perform.
8. People experiencing **senility** sometimes forget where they are.

WORD LIST

cowed
despotic
garish
imperialism
labyrinth
prostrate
senility
supplant

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• approach • assume • environment • method • strategy

Orwell discusses racism, oppression, and **environmental** rights. Write about one of these issues, using at least one additional Academic Vocabulary word.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: USING ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

Electronic resources can expand your vocabulary by clarifying what a word means, how it is normally used, and how it functions in a sentence.

1. In your computer's word-processing program, you can type an unfamiliar word and right-click it for options such as LOOK UP and THESAURUS. The LOOK UP option lists references stored on your computer as well as Internet resources.
2. Other Internet resources include free dictionaries and encyclopedias. Be careful using "wiki" resources; they're "open-source" and may contain errors.
3. See if you are allowed to access your library's database through the Internet.

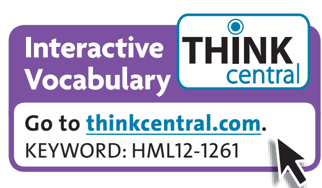
COMPUTER PROGRAM	INTERNET	LIBRARY DATABASES
—"look up" options —reference books —research sites —thesaurus —translations	—online dictionaries —"wiki" resources —library Web sites —free encyclopedias	—dictionaries & thesauri —online usage and syntax references

COMMON CORE

L 1b Consult usage references as needed. **L 3a** Consult syntax references for guidance as needed. **L 4c** Consult digital reference materials to clarify a word's precise meaning or its standard usage.

PRACTICE Answer the following questions about electronic resources.

1. How can you find a synonym for a word in a document you are writing?
2. What kind of vocabulary references may be available through a library database?
3. How can you find a translation for a word you know in Spanish but not English?



Joseph Conrad

An Outpost of Progress (1897)

I

There were two white men in charge of the trading station. Kayerts, the chief, was short and fat; Carlier, the assistant, was tall, with a large head and a very broad trunk perched upon a long pair of thin legs. The third man on the staff was a Sierra Leone nigger, who maintained that his name was Henry Price. However, for some reason or other, the natives down the river had given him the name of Makola, and it stuck to him through all his wanderings about the country. He spoke English and French with a warbling accent, wrote a beautiful hand, understood bookkeeping, and cherished in his innermost heart the worship of evil spirits. His wife was a negress from Loanda, very large and very noisy. Three children rolled about in sunshine before the door of his low, shed-like dwelling.

Makola, taciturn and impenetrable, despised the two white men. He had charge of a small clay storehouse with a dried-grass roof, and pretended to keep a correct account of beads, cotton cloth, red kerchiefs, brass wire, and other trade goods it contained. Besides the storehouse and Makola's hut, there was only one large building in the cleared ground of the station. It was built neatly of reeds, with a verandah on all the four sides. There were three rooms in it. The one in the middle was the living- room, and had two rough tables and a few stools in it. The other two were the bedrooms for the white men. Each had a bedstead and a mosquito net for all furniture. The plank floor was littered with the belongings of the white men; open half-empty boxes, torn wearing apparel, old boots; all the things dirty, and all the things broken, that accumulate mysteriously round untidy men.

There was also another dwelling-place some distance away from the buildings. In it, under a tall cross much out of the perpendicular, slept the man who had seen the beginning of all this; who had planned and had watched the construction of this outpost of progress. He had been, at home, an unsuccessful painter who, weary of pursuing fame on an empty stomach, had gone out there through high protections. He had been the first chief of that station. Makola had watched the energetic artist die of fever in the just finished house with his usual kind of "I told you so" indifference. Then, for a time, he dwelt alone with his

family, his account books, and the Evil Spirit that rules the lands under the equator. He got on very well with his god. Perhaps he had propitiated him by a promise of more white men to play with, by and by.

At any rate the director of the Great Trading Company, coming up in a steamer that resembled an enormous sardine box with a flat-roofed shed erected on it, found the station in good order, and Makola as usual quietly diligent. The director had the cross put up over the first agent's grave, and appointed Kayerts to the post. Carlier was told off as second in charge. The director was a man ruthless and efficient, who at times, but very imperceptibly, indulged in grim humour. He made a speech to Kayerts and Carlier, pointing out to them the promising aspect of their station. The nearest trading-post was about three hundred miles away. It was an exceptional opportunity for them to distinguish themselves and to earn percentages on the trade. This appointment was a favour done to beginners. Kayerts was moved almost to tears by his director's kindness. He would, he said, by doing his best, try to justify the flattering confidence, &c., &c.

Kayerts had been in the Administration of the Telegraphs, and knew how to express himself correctly. Carlier, an ex-non- commissioned officer of cavalry in an army guaranteed from harm by several European Powers, was less impressed. If there were commissions to get, so much the better; and, trailing a sulky glance over the river, the forests, the impenetrable bush that seemed to cut off the station from the rest of the world, he muttered between his teeth, "We shall see, very soon."

Next day, some bales of cotton goods and a few cases of provisions having been thrown on shore, the sardine-box steamer went off, not to return for another six months. On the deck the director touched his cap to the two agents, who stood on the bank waving their hats, and turning to an old servant of the Company on his passage to headquarters, said, "Look at those two imbeciles. They must be mad at home to send me such specimens. I told those fellows to plant a vegetable garden, build new storehouses and fences, and construct a landing-stage. I bet nothing will be done! They won't know how to begin. I always thought the station on this river useless, and they just fit the station!"

"They will form themselves there," said the old stager with a quiet smile.

"At any rate, I am rid of them for six months," retorted the director.

The two men watched the steamer round the bend, then, ascending arm in arm the slope of the bank, returned to the station. They had been in this vast and dark country only a very short time, and as yet always in the midst of other white men, under the eye and guidance of their superiors. And now, dull as they were to the subtle influences of surroundings, they felt themselves very much alone, when suddenly left unassisted to face the wilderness; a wilderness rendered more strange, more incomprehensible by the mysterious glimpses of the vigorous life it contained. They were two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organization of civilized crowds.

Few men realize that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings. The courage, the composure, the confidence; the emotions and principles; every great and every insignificant thought belongs not to the individual but to the crowd: to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals, in the power of its police and of its opinion.

But the contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart. To the sentiment of being alone of one's kind, to the clear perception of the loneliness of one's thoughts, of one's sensations–to the negation of the habitual, which is safe, there is added the affirmation of the unusual, which is dangerous; a suggestion of things vague, uncontrollable, and repulsive, whose discomposing intrusion excites the imagination and tries the civilized nerves of the foolish and the wise alike.

Kayerts and Carlier walked arm in arm, drawing close to one another as children do in the dark; and they had the same, not altogether unpleasant, sense of danger which one half suspects to be imaginary. They chatted persistently in familiar tones. "Our station is prettily situated," said one. The other assented with enthusiasm, enlarging volubly on the beauties of the situation. Then they passed near the grave. "Poor devil!" said Kayerts. "He died of fever, didn't he?" muttered Carlier, stopping short. "Why," retorted Kayerts, with indignation, "I've been told that the fellow exposed himself recklessly to the sun. The climate here, everybody says, is not at all worse than at home, as long as you keep out of the sun. Do you hear that, Carlier? I am chief here, and my orders are that you should not expose yourself to the sun!" He assumed his superiority

jocularly, but his meaning was serious. The idea that he would, perhaps, have to bury Carlier and remain alone, gave him an inward shiver. He felt suddenly that this Carlier was more precious to him here, in the centre of Africa, than a brother could be anywhere else.

Carlier, entering into the spirit of the thing, made a military salute and answered in a brisk tone, "Your orders shall be attended to, chief!" Then he burst out laughing, slapped Kayerts on the back and shouted, "We shall let life run easily here! Just sit still and gather in the ivory those savages will bring. This country has its good points, after all!" They both laughed loudly while Carlier thought: "That poor Kayerts; he is so fat and unhealthy. It would be awful if I had to bury him here. He is a man I respect." . . . Before they reached the verandah of their house they called one another "my dear fellow."

The first day they were very active, pottering about with hammers and nails and red calico, to put up curtains, make their house habitable and pretty; resolved to settle down comfortably to their new life. For them an impossible task. To grapple effectually with even purely material problems requires more serenity of mind and more lofty courage than people generally imagine. No two beings could have been more unfitted for such a struggle. Society, not from any tenderness, but because of its strange needs, had taken care of those two men, forbidding them all independent thought, all initiative, all departure from routine; and forbidding it under pain of death. They could only live on condition of being machines. And now, released from the fostering care of men with pens behind the ears, or of men with gold lace on the sleeves, they were like those lifelong prisoners who, liberated after many years, do not know what use to make of their freedom. They did not know what use to make of their faculties, being both, through want of practice, incapable of independent thought.

At the end of two months Kayerts often would say, "If it was not for my Melie, you wouldn't catch me here." Melie was his daughter. He had thrown up his post in the Administration of the Telegraphs, though he had been for seventeen years perfectly happy there, to earn a dowry for his girl. His wife was dead, and the child was being brought up by his sisters. He regretted the streets, the pavements, the cafes, his friends of many years; all the things he used to see, day after day; all the thoughts suggested by familiar things–the thoughts effortless, monotonous, and soothing of a Government clerk; he regretted all the gossip, the small enmities, the mild venom, and the little jokes of Government

offices. "If I had had a decent brother- in-law," Carlier would remark, "a fellow with a heart, I would not be here."

He had left the army and had made himself so obnoxious to his family by his laziness and impudence, that an exasperated brother-in-law had made superhuman efforts to procure him an appointment in the Company as a second-class agent. Having not a penny in the world he was compelled to accept this means of livelihood as soon as it became quite clear to him that there was nothing more to squeeze out of his relations. He, like Kayerts, regretted his old life. He regretted the clink of sabre and spurs on a fine afternoon, the barrack-room witticisms, the girls of garrison towns; but, besides, he had also a sense of grievance. He was evidently a much ill-used man. This made him moody, at times.

But the two men got on well together in the fellowship of their stupidity and laziness. Together they did nothing, absolutely nothing, and enjoyed the sense of the idleness for which they were paid. And in time they came to feel something resembling affection for one another. They lived like blind men in a large room, aware only of what came in contact with them (and of that only imperfectly), but unable to see the general aspect of things. The river, the forest, all the great land throbbing with life, were like a great emptiness. Even the brilliant sunshine disclosed nothing intelligible. Things appeared and disappeared before their eyes in an unconnected and aimless kind of way. The river seemed to come from nowhere and flow nowhither. It flowed through a void.

Out of that void, at times, came canoes, and men with spears in their hands would suddenly crowd the yard of the station. They were naked, glossy black, ornamented with snowy shells and glistening brass wire, perfect of limb. They made an uncouth babbling noise when they spoke, moved in a stately manner, and sent quick, wild glances out of their startled, never-resting eyes. Those warriors would squat in long rows, four or more deep, before the verandah, while their chiefs bargained for hours with Makola over an elephant tusk. Kayerts sat on his chair and looked down on the proceedings, understanding nothing. He stared at them with his round blue eyes, called out to Carlier, "Here, look! look at that fellow there–and that other one, to the left. Did you ever such a face? Oh, the funny brute!"

Carlier, smoking native tobacco in a short wooden pipe, would swagger up twirling his moustaches, and surveying the warriors with haughty indulgence, would say–

"Fine animals. Brought any bone? Yes? It's not any too soon. Look at the muscles of that fellow third from the end. I wouldn't care to get a punch on the nose from him. Fine arms, but legs no good below the knee. Couldn't make cavalry men of them." And after glancing down complacently at his own shanks, he always concluded: "Pah! Don't they stink! You, Makola! Take that herd over to the fetish" (the storehouse was in every station called the fetish, perhaps because of the spirit of civilization it contained) "and give them up some of the rubbish you keep there. I'd rather see it full of bone than full of rags."

Kayerts approved.

"Yes, yes! Go and finish that palaver over there, Mr. Makola. I will come round when you are ready, to weigh the tusk. We must be careful." Then turning to his companion: "This is the tribe that lives down the river; they are rather aromatic. I remember, they had been once before here. D'ye hear that row? What a fellow has got to put up with in this dog of a country! My head is split."

Such profitable visits were rare. For days the two pioneers of trade and progress would look on their empty courtyard in the vibrating brilliance of vertical sunshine. Below the high bank, the silent river flowed on glittering and steady. On the sands in the middle of the stream, hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. And stretching away in all directions, surrounding the insignificant cleared spot of the trading post, immense forests, hiding fateful complications of fantastic life, lay in the eloquent silence of mute greatness. The two men understood nothing, cared for nothing but for the passage of days that separated them from the steamer's return.

Their predecessor had left some torn books. They took up these wrecks of novels, and, as they had never read anything of the kind before, they were surprised and amused. Then during long days there were interminable and silly discussions about plots and personages. In the centre of Africa they made acquaintance of Richelieu and of d'Artagnan, of Hawk's Eye and of Father Goriot, and of many other people. All these imaginary personages became subjects for gossip as if they had been living friends. They discounted their virtues, suspected their motives, decried their successes; were scandalized at

their duplicity or were doubtful about their courage. The accounts of crimes filled them with indignation, while tender or pathetic passages moved them deeply. Carlier cleared his throat and said in a soldierly voice, "What nonsense!" Kayerts, his round eyes suffused with tears, his fat cheeks quivering, rubbed his bald head, and declared. "This is a splendid book. I had no idea there were such clever fellows in the world." They also found some old copies of a home paper. That print discussed what it was pleased to call "Our Colonial Expansion" in high-flown language. It spoke much of the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth.

Carlier and Kayerts read, wondered, and began to think better of themselves. Carlier said one evening, waving his hand about, "In a hundred years, there will be perhaps a town here. Quays, and warehouses, and barracks, and– and–billiard-rooms. Civilization, my boy, and virtue–and all. And then, chaps will read that two good fellows, Kayerts and Carlier, were the first civilized men to live in this very spot!" Kayerts nodded, "Yes, it is a consolation to think of that." They seemed to forget their dead predecessor; but, early one day, Carlier went out and replanted the cross firmly. "It used to make me squint whenever I walked that way," he explained to Kayerts over the morning coffee. "It made me squint, leaning over so much. So I just planted it upright. And solid, I promise you! I suspended myself with both hands to the cross-piece. Not a move. Oh, I did that properly."

At times Gobila came to see them. Gobila was the chief of the neighbouring villages. He was a gray- headed savage, thin and black, with a white cloth round his loins and a mangy panther skin hanging over his back. He came up with long strides of his skeleton legs, swinging a staff as tall as himself, and, entering the common room of the station, would squat on his heels to the left of the door. There he sat, watching Kayerts, and now and then making a speech which the other did not understand. Kayerts, without interrupting his occupation, would from time to time say in a friendly manner: "How goes it, you old image?" and they would smile at one another.

The two whites had a liking for that old and incomprehensible creature, and called him Father Gobila. Gobila's manner was paternal, and he seemed really to love all white men. They all appeared to him very young, indistinguishably alike (except for stature), and he knew that they were all brothers, and also

immortal. The death of the artist, who was the first white man whom he knew intimately, did not disturb this belief, because he was firmly convinced that the white stranger had pretended to die and got himself buried for some mysterious purpose of his own, into which it was useless to inquire. Perhaps it was his way of going home to his own country? At any rate, these were his brothers, and he transferred his absurd affection to them. They returned it in a way.

Carlier slapped him on the back, and recklessly struck off matches for his amusement. Kayerts was always ready to let him have a sniff at the ammonia bottle. In short, they behaved just like that other white creature that had hidden itself in a hole in the ground. Gobila considered them attentively. Perhaps they were the same being with the other–or one of them was. He couldn't decide–clear up that mystery; but he remained always very friendly. In consequence of that friendship the women of Gobila'svillage walked in single file through the reedy grass, bringing every morning to the station, fowls, and sweet potatoes, and palm wine, and sometimes a goat. The Company never provisions the stations fully, and the agents required those local supplies to live. They had them through the good-will of Gobila, and lived well.

Now and then one of them had a bout of fever, and the other nursed him with gentle devotion. They did not think much of it. It left them weaker, and their appearance changed for the worse.Carlier was hollow-eyed and irritable. Kayerts showed a drawn, flabby face above the rotundity of his stomach, which gave him a weird aspect. But being constantly together, they did not notice the change that took place gradually in their appearance, and also in their dispositions.

Five months passed in that way.

Then, one morning, as Kayerts and Carlier, lounging in their chairs under the verandah, talked about the approaching visit of the steamer, a knot of armed men came out of the forest and advanced towards the station. They were strangers to that part of the country. They were tall, slight, draped classically from neck to heel in blue fringed cloths, and carried percussion muskets over their bare right shoulders. Makola showed signs of excitement, and ran out of the storehouse (where he spent all his days) to meet these visitors. They came into the courtyard and looked about them with steady, scornful glances. Their leader, a powerful and determined-looking negro with bloodshot eyes, stood in

front of the verandah and made a long speech. He gesticulated much, and ceased very suddenly.

There was something in his intonation, in the sounds of the long sentences he used, that startled the two whites. It was like a reminiscence of something not exactly familiar, and yet resembling the speech of civilized men. It sounded like one of those impossible languages which sometimes we hear in our dreams.

"What lingo is that?" said the amazed Carlier. "In the first moment I fancied the fellow was going to speak French. Anyway, it is a different kind of gibberish to what we ever heard."

"Yes," replied Kayerts. "Hey, Makola, what does he say? Where do they come from? Who are they?"

But Makola, who seemed to be standing on hot bricks, answered hurriedly, "I don't know. They come from very far. Perhaps Mrs. Price will understand. They are perhaps bad men."

The leader, after waiting for a while, said something sharply to Makola, who shook his head. Then the man, after looking round, noticed Makola's hut and walked over there. The next moment Mrs. Makola was heard speaking with great volubility. The other strangers–they were six in all–strolled about with an air of ease, put their heads through the door of the storeroom, congregated round the grave, pointed understandingly at the cross, and generally made themselves at home.

"I don't like those chaps–and, I say, Kayerts, they must be from the coast; they've got firearms," observed the sagacious Carlier.

Kayerts also did not like those chaps. They both, for the first time, became aware that they lived in conditions where the unusual may be dangerous, and that there was no power on earth outside of themselves to stand between them and the unusual. They became uneasy, went in and loaded their revolvers. Kayerts said, "We must orderMakola to tell them to go away before dark."

The strangers left in the afternoon, after eating a meal prepared for them by Mrs. Makola. The immense woman was excited, and talked much with the visitors. She rattled away shrilly, pointing here and there at the forests and at the river. Makola sat apart and watched. At times he got up and whispered to his wife. He accompanied the strangers across the ravine at the back of the station-

ground, and returned slowly looking very thoughtful. When questioned by the white men he was very strange, seemed not to understand, seemed to have forgotten French–seemed to have forgotten how to speak altogether. Kayerts and Carlier agreed that the nigger had had too much palm wine.

There was some talk about keeping a watch in turn, but in the evening everything seemed so quiet and peaceful that they retired as usual. All night they were disturbed by a lot of drumming in the villages. A deep, rapid roll near by would be followed by another far off–then all ceased. Soon short appeals would rattle out here and there, then all mingle together, increase, become vigorous and sustained, would spread out over the forest, roll through the night, unbroken and ceaseless, near and far, as if the whole land had been one immense drum booming out steadily an appeal to heaven. And through the deep and tremendous noise sudden yells that resembled snatches of songs from a madhouse darted shrill and high in discordant jets of sound which seemed to rush far above the earth and drive all peace from under the stars.

Carlier and Kayerts slept badly. They both thought they had heard shots fired during the night–but they could not agree as to the direction. In the morning Makola was gone somewhere. He returned about noon with one of yesterday's strangers, and eluded all Kayerts' attempts to close with him: had become deaf apparently. Kayerts wondered. Carlier, who had been fishing off the bank, came back and remarked while he showed his catch, "The niggers seem to be in a deuce of a stir; I wonder what's up. I saw about fifteen canoes cross the river during the two hours I was there fishing." Kayerts, worried, said, "Isn't this Makola very queer to-day?" Carlier advised, "Keep all our men together in case of some trouble."

II

There were ten station men who had been left by the Director. Those fellows, having engaged themselves to the Company for six months (without having any idea of a month in particular and only a very faint notion of time in general), had been serving the cause of progress for upwards of two years. Belonging to a tribe from a very distant part of the land of darkness and sorrow, they did not run away, naturally supposing that as wandering strangers they would be killed by the inhabitants of the country; in which they were right. They lived in straw huts on the slope of a ravine overgrown with reedy grass, just behind the station buildings.

They were not happy, regretting the festive incantations, the sorceries, the human sacrifices of their own land; where they also had parents, brothers, sisters, admired chiefs, respected magicians, loved friends, and other ties supposed generally to be human. Besides, the rice rations served out by the Company did not agree with them, being a food unknown to their land, and to which they could not get used. Consequently they were unhealthy and miserable.

Had they been of any other tribe they would have made up their minds to die–for nothing is easier to certain savages than suicide–and so have escaped from the puzzling difficulties of existence. But belonging, as they did, to a warlike tribe with filed teeth, they had more grit, and went on stupidly living through disease and sorrow. They did very little work, and had lost their splendid physique.

Carlier and Kayerts doctored them assiduously without being able to bring them back into condition again. They were mustered every morning and told off to different tasks– grass-cutting, fence-building, tree-felling, &c., &c., which no power on earth could induce them to execute efficiently. The two whites had practically very little control over them.

In the afternoon Makola came over to the big house and found Kayerts watching three heavy columns of smoke rising above the forests. "What is that?" asked Kayerts. "Some villages burn," answered Makola, who seemed to have regained his wits. Then he said abruptly: "We have got very little ivory; bad six months' trading. Do you like get a little more ivory?" "Yes," said Kayerts, eagerly. He thought of percentages which were low. "Those men who came yesterday are traders from Loanda who have got more ivory than they can

carry home. Shall I buy? I know their camp." "Certainly," said Kayerts. "What are those traders?" "Bad fellows," said Makola, indifferently. "They fight with people, and catch women and children. They are bad men, and got guns. There is a great disturbance in the country. Do you want ivory?"

"Yes," said Kayerts. Makola said nothing for a while. Then: "Those workmen of ours are no good at all," he muttered, looking round. "Station in very bad order, sir. Director will growl. Better get a fine lot of ivory, then he say nothing."

"I can't help it; the men won't work," said Kayerts. "When will you get that ivory?"

"Very soon," said Makola. "Perhaps to-night. You leave it to me, and keep indoors, sir. I think you had better give some palm wine to our men to make a dance this evening. Enjoy themselves. Work better to-morrow. There's plenty palm wine–gone a little sour."

Kayerts said "yes," and Makola, with his own hands carried big calabashes to the door of his hut. They stood there till the evening, and Mrs. Makola looked into every one. The men got them at sunset. When Kayerts and Carlier retired, a big bonfire was flaring before the men's huts. They could hear their shouts and drumming. Some men from Gobila's village had joined the station hands, and the entertainment was a great success.

In the middle of the night, Carlier waking suddenly, heard a man shout loudly; then a shot was fired. Only one. Carlier ran out and met Kayerts on the verandah. They were both startled. As they went across the yard to call Makola, they saw shadows moving in the night. One of them cried, "Don't shoot! It's me, Price." Then Makola appeared close to them. "Go back, go back, please," he urged, "you spoil all."

"There are strange men about," said Carlier. "Never mind; I know," said Makola. Then he whispered, "All right. Bring ivory. Say nothing! I know my business." The two white men reluctantly went back to the house, but did not sleep. They heard footsteps, whispers, some groans. It seemed as if a lot of men came in, dumped heavy things on the ground, squabbled a long time, then went away. They lay on their hard beds and thought: "This Makola is invaluable." In the morning Carlier came out, very sleepy, and pulled at the cord of the big bell. The station hands mustered every morning to the sound of the bell. That morning nobody came. Kayerts turned out also, yawning. Across the yard they

saw Makola come out of his hut, a tin basin of soapy water in his hand. Makola, a civilized nigger, was very neat in his person. He threw the soapsuds skilfully over a wretched little yellow cur he had, then turning his face to the agent's house, he shouted from the distance, "All the men gone last night!"

They heard him plainly, but in their surprise they both yelled out together: "What!" Then they stared at one another. "We are in a proper fix now," growled Carlier. "It's incredible!" muttered Kayerts. "I will go to the huts and see," said Carlier, striding off. Makola coming up found Kayerts standing alone.

"I can hardly believe it," said Kayerts, tearfully. "We took care of them as if they had been our children."

"They went with the coast people," said Makola after a moment of hesitation.

"What do I care with whom they went–the ungrateful brutes!" exclaimed the other. Then with sudden suspicion, and looking hard at Makola, he added: "What do you know about it?"

Makola moved his shoulders, looking down on the ground. "What do I know? I think only. Will you come and look at the ivory I've got there? It is a fine lot. You never saw such."

He moved towards the store. Kayerts followed him mechanically, thinking about the incredible desertion of the men. On the ground before the door of the fetish lay six splendid tusks.

"What did you give for it?" asked Kayerts, after surveying the lot with satisfaction.

"No regular trade," said Makola. "They brought the ivory and gave it to me. I told them to take what they most wanted in the station. It is a beautiful lot. No station can show such tusks. Those traders wanted carriers badly, and our men were no good here. No trade, no entry in books: all correct."

Kayerts nearly burst with indignation. "Why!" he shouted, "I believe you have sold our men for these tusks!" Makola stood impassive and silent. "I–I–will–I," stuttered Kayerts. "You fiend!" he yelled out.

"I did the best for you and the Company," said Makola, imperturbably. "Why you shout so much? Look at this tusk."

"I dismiss you! I will report you–I won't look at the tusk. I forbid you to touch them. I order you to throw them into the river. You–you!"

"You very red, Mr. Kayerts. If you are so irritable in the sun, you will get fever and die–like the first chief!" pronounced Makola impressively.

They stood still, contemplating one another with intense eyes, as if they had been looking with effort across immense distances. Kayerts shivered. Makola had meant no more than he said, but his words seemed to Kayerts full of ominous menace! He turned sharply and went away to the house. Makola retired into the bosom of his family; and the tusks, left lying before the store, looked very large and valuable in the sunshine.

Carlier came back on the verandah. "They're all gone, hey?" asked Kayerts from the far end of the common room in a muffled voice. "You did not find anybody?"

"Oh, yes," said Carlier, "I found one of Gobila's people lying dead before the huts–shot through the body. We heard that shot last night."

Kayerts came out quickly. He found his companion staring grimly over the yard at the tusks, away by the store. They both sat in silence for a while. Then Kayerts related his conversation with Makola. Carlier said nothing. At the midday meal they ate very little. They hardly exchanged a word that day. A great silence seemed to lie heavily over the station and press on their lips. Makola did not open the store; he spent the day playing with his children. He lay full-length on a mat outside his door, and the youngsters sat on his chest and clambered all over him. It was a touching picture. Mrs. Makola was busy cooking all day, as usual. The white men made a somewhat better meal in the evening. Afterwards, Carlier smoking his pipe strolled over to the store; he stood for a long time over the tusks, touched one or two with his foot, even tried to lift the largest one by its small end. He came back to his chief, who had not stirred from the verandah, threw himself in the chair and said–

"I can see it! They were pounced upon while they slept heavily after drinking all that palm wine you've allowed Makola to give them. A put-up job! See? The worst is, some of Gobila's people were there, and got carried off too, no doubt. The least drunk woke up, and got shot for his sobriety. This is a funny country. What will you do now?"

"We can't touch it, of course," said Kayerts.

"Of course not," assented Carlier.

"Slavery is an awful thing," stammered out Kayerts in an unsteady voice.

"Frightful–the sufferings," grunted Carlier with conviction.

They believed their words. Everybody shows a respectful deference to certain sounds that he and his fellows can make. But about feelings people really know nothing. We talk with indignation or enthusiasm; we talk about oppression, cruelty, crime, devotion, self-sacrifice, virtue, and we know nothing real beyond the words. Nobody knows what suffering or sacrifice mean–except, perhaps the victims of the mysterious purpose of these illusions.

Next morning they saw Makola very busy setting up in the yard the big scales used for weighing ivory. By and by Carlier said: "What's that filthy scoundrel up to?" and lounged out into the yard. Kayerts followed. They stood watching. Makola took no notice. When the balance was swung true, he tried to lift a tusk into the scale. It was too heavy. He looked up helplessly without a word, and for a minute they stood round that balance as mute and still as three statues. Suddenly Carlier said: "Catch hold of the other end, Makola–you beast!" and together they swung the tusk up. Kayerts trembled in every limb. He muttered, "I say! O! I say!" and putting his hand in his pocket found there a dirty bit of paper and the stump of a pencil. He turned his back on the others, as if about to do something tricky, and noted stealthily the weights which Carlier shouted out to him with unnecessary loudness. When all was over Makola whispered to himself: "The sun's very strong here for the tusks." Carlier said to Kayerts in a careless tone: "I say, chief, I might just as well give him a lift with this lot into the store."

As they were going back to the house Kayerts observed with a sigh: "It had to be done." And Carlier said: "It's deplorable, but, the men being Company's men the ivory is Company's ivory. We must look after it." "I will report to the Director, of course," said Kayerts. "Of course; let him decide," approved Carlier.

At midday they made a hearty meal. Kayerts sighed from time to time. Whenever they mentioned Makola's name they always added to it an opprobrious epithet. It eased their conscience. Makola gave himself a half-holiday, and bathed his children in the river. No one from Gobila's villages came near the station that day. No one came the next day, and the next, nor for a

whole week. Gobila's people might have been dead and buried for any sign of life they gave. But they were only mourning for those they had lost by the witchcraft of white men, who had brought wicked people into their country. The wicked people were gone, but fear remained. Fear always remains. A man may destroy everything within himself, love and hate and belief, and even doubt; but as long as he clings to life he cannot destroy fear: the fear, subtle, indestructible, and terrible, that pervades his being; that tinges his thoughts; that lurks in his heart; that watches on his lips the struggle of his last breath. In his fear, the mild old Gobila offered extra human sacrifices to all the Evil Spirits that had taken possession of his white friends. His heart was heavy. Some warriors spoke about burning and killing, but the cautious old savage dissuaded them. Who could foresee the woe those mysterious creatures, if irritated, might bring? They should be left alone. Perhaps in time they would disappear into the earth as the first one had disappeared. His people must keep away from them, and hope for the best.

Kayerts and Carlier did not disappear, but remained above on this earth, that, somehow, they fancied had become bigger and very empty. It was not the absolute and dumb solitude of the post that impressed them so much as an inarticulate feeling that something from within them was gone, something that worked for their safety, and had kept the wilderness from interfering with their hearts. The images of home; the memory of people like them, of men that thought and felt as they used to think and feel, receded into distances made indistinct by the glare of unclouded sunshine. And out of the great silence of the surrounding wilderness, its very hopelessness and savagery seemed to approach them nearer, to draw them gently, to look upon them, to envelop them with a solicitude irresistible, familiar, and disgusting.

Days lengthened into weeks, then into months. Gobila's people drummed and yelled to every new moon, as of yore, but kept away from the station. Makola and Carlier tried once in a canoe to open communications, but were received with a shower of arrows, and had to fly back to the station for dear life. That attempt set the country up and down the river into an uproar that could be very distinctly heard for days. The steamer was late. At first they spoke of delay jauntily, then anxiously, then gloomily. The matter was becoming serious. Stores were running short. Carlier cast his lines off the bank, but the river was low, and the fish kept out in the stream. They dared not stroll far away from the station to shoot. Moreover, there was no game in the impenetrable forest. Once

Carlier shot a hippo in the river. They had no boat to secure it, and it sank. When it floated up it drifted away, and Gobila's people secured the carcase.

It was the occasion for a national holiday, but Carlier had a fit of rage over it and talked about the necessity of exterminating all the niggers before the country could be made habitable. Kayerts mooned about silently; spent hours looking at the portrait of his Melie. It represented a little girl with long bleached tresses and a rather sour face. His legs were much swollen, and he could hardly walk. Carlier, undermined by fever, could not swagger any more, but kept tottering about, still with a devil-may-care air, as became a man who remembered his crack regiment. He had become hoarse, sarcastic, and inclined to say unpleasant things. He called it "being frank with you." They had long ago reckoned their percentages on trade, including in them that last deal of "this infamous Makola." They had also concluded not to say anything about it. Kayerts hesitated at first–was afraid of the Director.

"He has seen worse things done on the quiet," maintained Carlier, with a hoarse laugh. "Trust him! He won't thank you if you blab. He is no better than you or me. Who will talk if we hold our tongues? There is nobody here."

That was the root of the trouble! There was nobody there; and being left there alone with their weakness, they became daily more like a pair of accomplices than like a couple of devoted friends. They had heard nothing from home for eight months. Every evening they said, "To-morrow we shall see the steamer." But one of the Company's steamers had been wrecked, and the Director was busy with the other, relieving very distant and important stations on the main river. He thought that the useless station, and the useless men, could wait. Meantime Kayerts and Carlier lived on rice boiled without salt, and cursed the Company, all Africa, and the day they were born. One must have lived on such diet to discover what ghastly trouble the necessity of swallowing one's food may become. There was literally nothing else in the station but rice and coffee; they drank the coffee without sugar. The last fifteen lumps Kayerts had solemnly locked away in his box, together with a half- bottle of Cognac, "in case of sickness," he explained. Carlier approved. "When one is sick," he said, "any little extra like that is cheering."

They waited. Rank grass began to sprout over the courtyard. The bell never rang now. Days passed, silent, exasperating, and slow. When the two men spoke,

they snarled; and their silences were bitter, as if tinged by the bitterness of their thoughts.

One day after a lunch of boiled rice, Carlier put down his cup untasted, and said: "Hang it all! Let's have a decent cup of coffee for once. Bring out that sugar, Kayerts!"

"For the sick," muttered Kayerts, without looking up.

"For the sick," mocked Carlier. "Bosh! . . . Well! I am sick."

"You are no more sick than I am, and I go without," said Kayerts in a peaceful tone.

"Come! out with that sugar, you stingy old slave-dealer."

Kayerts looked up quickly. Carlier was smiling with marked insolence. And suddenly it seemed to Kayerts that he had never seen that man before. Who was he? He knew nothing about him. What was he capable of? There was a surprising flash of violent emotion within him, as if in the presence of something undreamt-of, dangerous, and final. But he managed to pronounce with composure–

"That joke is in very bad taste. Don't repeat it."

"Joke!" said Carlier, hitching himself forward on his seat. "I am hungry–I am sick–I don't joke! I hate hypocrites. You are a hypocrite. You are a slave-dealer. I am a slave-dealer. There's nothing but slave-dealers in this cursed country. I mean to have sugar in my coffee to-day, anyhow!"

"I forbid you to speak to me in that way," said Kayerts with a fair show of resolution.

"You!–What?" shouted Carlier, jumping up.

Kayerts stood up also. "I am your chief," he began, trying to master the shakiness of his voice.

"What?" yelled the other. "Who's chief? There's no chief here. There's nothing here: there's nothing but you and I. Fetch the sugar–you pot-bellied ass."

"Hold your tongue. Go out of this room," screamed Kayerts. "I dismiss you–you scoundrel!"

Carlier swung a stool. All at once he looked dangerously in earnest. "You flabby, good-for-nothing civilian–take that!" he howled.

Kayerts dropped under the table, and the stool struck the grass inner wall of the room. Then, as Carlier was trying to upset the table, Kayerts in desperation made a blind rush, head low, like a cornered pig would do, and over-turning his friend, bolted along the verandah, and into his room. He locked the door, snatched his revolver, and stood panting. In less than a minute Carlier was kicking at the door furiously, howling, "If you don't bring out that sugar, I will shoot you at sight, like a dog. Now then–one–two–three. You won't? I will show you who's the master."

Kayerts thought the door would fall in, and scrambled through the square hole that served for a window in his room. There was then the whole breadth of the house between them. But the other was apparently not strong enough to break in the door, and Kayerts heard him running round. Then he also began to run laboriously on his swollen legs. He ran as quickly as he could, grasping the revolver, and unable yet to understand what was happening to him. He saw in succession Makola's house, the store, the river, the ravine, and the low bushes; and he saw all those things again as he ran for the second time round the house. Then again they flashed past him. That morning he could not have walked a yard without a groan.

And now he ran. He ran fast enough to keep out of sight of the other man.

Then as, weak and desperate, he thought, "Before I finish the next round I shall die," he heard the other man stumble heavily, then stop. He stopped also. He had the back and Carlier the front of the house, as before. He heard him drop into a chair cursing, and suddenly his own legs gave way, and he slid down into a sitting posture with his back to the wall. His mouth was as dry as a cinder, and his face was wet with perspiration–and tears. What was it all about? He thought it must be a horrible illusion; he thought he was dreaming; he thought he was going mad! After a while he collected his senses. What did they quarrel about? That sugar! How absurd! He would give it to him–didn't want it himself. And he began scrambling to his feet with a sudden feeling of security. But before he had fairly stood upright, a commonsense reflection occurred to him and drove him back into despair. He thought: "If I give way now to that brute of a soldier, he will begin this horror again to-morrow–and the day after–every day–raise other pretensions, trample on me, torture me, make me his slave–and I will be

lost! Lost! The steamer may not come for days–may never come." He shook so that he had to sit down on the floor again. He shivered forlornly. He felt he could not, would not move any more. He was completely distracted by the sudden perception that the position was without issue–that death and life had in a moment become equally difficult and terrible.

All at once he heard the other push his chair back; and he leaped to his feet with extreme facility. He listened and got confused. Must run again! Right or left? He heard footsteps. He darted to the left, grasping his revolver, and at the very same instant, as it seemed to him, they came into violent collision. Both shouted with surprise. A loud explosion took place between them; a roar of red fire, thick smoke; and Kayerts, deafened and blinded, rushed back thinking: "I am hit–it's all over." He expected the other to come round–to gloat over his agony. He caught hold of an upright of the roof– "All over!" Then he heard a crashing fall on the other side of the house, as if somebody had tumbled headlong over a chair–then silence. Nothing more happened. He did not die. Only his shoulder felt as if it had been badly wrenched, and he had lost his revolver. He was disarmed and helpless! He waited for his fate. The other man made no sound. It was a stratagem. He was stalking him now! Along what side? Perhaps he was taking aim this very minute!

After a few moments of an agony frightful and absurd, he decided to go and meet his doom. He was prepared for every surrender. He turned the corner, steadying himself with one hand on the wall; made a few paces, and nearly swooned. He had seen on the floor, protruding past the other corner, a pair of turned-up feet. A pair of white naked feet in red slippers. He felt deadly sick, and stood for a time in profound darkness. Then Makola appeared before him, saying quietly: "Come along, Mr. Kayerts. He is dead." He burst into tears of gratitude; a loud, sobbing fit of crying. After a time he found himself sitting in a chair and looking at Carlier, who lay stretched on his back. Makola was kneeling over the body.

"Is this your revolver?" asked Makola, getting up.

"Yes," said Kayerts; then he added very quickly, "He ran after me to shoot me–you saw!"

"Yes, I saw," said Makola. "There is only one revolver; where's his?"

"Don't know," whispered Kayerts in a voice that had become suddenly very faint.

"I will go and look for it," said the other, gently. He made the round along the verandah, while Kayerts sat still and looked at the corpse. Makola came back empty-handed, stood in deep thought, then stepped quietly into the dead man's room, and came out directly with a revolver, which he held up before Kayerts. Kayerts shut his eyes. Everything was going round. He found life more terrible and difficult than death. He had shot an unarmed man.

After meditating for a while, Makola said softly, pointing at the dead man who lay there with his right eye blown out–

"He died of fever." Kayerts looked at him with a stony stare. "Yes," repeated Makola, thoughtfully, stepping over the corpse, "I think he died of fever. Bury him to-morrow."

And he went away slowly to his expectant wife, leaving the two white men alone on the verandah.

Night came, and Kayerts sat unmoving on his chair. He sat quiet as if he had taken a dose of opium. The violence of the emotions he had passed through produced a feeling of exhausted serenity. He had plumbed in one short afternoon the depths of horror and despair, and now found repose in the conviction that life had no more secrets for him: neither had death! He sat by the corpse thinking; thinking very actively, thinking very new thoughts. He seemed to have broken loose from himself altogether. His old thoughts, convictions, likes and dislikes, things he respected and things he abhorred, appeared in their true light at last! Appeared contemptible and childish, false and ridiculous. He revelled in his new wisdom while he sat by the man he had killed. He argued with himself about all things under heaven with that kind of wrong-headed lucidity which may be observed in some lunatics.

Incidentally he reflected that the fellow dead there had been a noxious beast anyway; that men died every day in thousands; perhaps in hundreds of thousands–who could tell?–and that in the number, that one death could not possibly make any difference; couldn't have any importance, at least to a thinking creature. He, Kayerts, was a thinking creature. He had been all his life, till that moment, a believer in a lot of nonsense like the rest of mankind–who are fools; but now he thought! He knew! He was at peace; he was familiar with

the highest wisdom! Then he tried to imagine himself dead, and Carlier sitting in his chair watching him; and his attempt met with such unexpected success, that in a very few moments he became not at all sure who was dead and who was alive. This extraordinary achievement of his fancy startled him, however, and by a clever and timely effort of mind he saved himself just in time from becoming Carlier. His heart thumped, and he felt hot all over at the thought of that danger. Carlier! What a beastly thing! To compose his now disturbed nerves–and no wonder!–he tried to whistle a little. Then, suddenly, he fell asleep, or thought he had slept; but at any rate there was a fog, and somebody had whistled in the fog.

He stood up. The day had come, and a heavy mist had descended upon the land: the mist penetrating, enveloping, and silent; the morning mist of tropical lands; the mist that clings and kills; the mist white and deadly, immaculate and poisonous. He stood up, saw the body, and threw his arms above his head with a cry like that of a man who, waking from a trance, finds himself immured forever in a tomb. "Help! . . . . My God!"

A shriek inhuman, vibrating and sudden, pierced like a sharp dart the white shroud of that land of sorrow. Three short, impatient screeches followed, and then, for a time, the fog-wreaths rolled on, undisturbed, through a formidable silence. Then many more shrieks, rapid and piercing, like the yells of some exasperated and ruthless creature, rent the air. Progress was calling to Kayerts from the river. Progress and civilization and all the virtues. Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be taken care of, to be instructed, to be judged, to be condemned; it called him to return to that rubbish heap from which he had wandered away, so that justice could be done.

Kayerts heard and understood. He stumbled out of the verandah, leaving the other man quite alone for the first time since they had been thrown there together. He groped his way through the fog, calling in his ignorance upon the invisible heaven to undo its work. Makola flitted by in the mist, shouting as he ran–

"Steamer! Steamer! They can't see. They whistle for the station. I go ring the bell. Go down to the landing, sir. I ring."

He disappeared. Kayerts stood still. He looked upwards; the fog rolled low over his head. He looked round like a man who has lost his way; and he saw a dark smudge, a cross-shaped stain, upon the shifting purity of the mist. As he began

to stumble towards it, the station bell rang in a tumultuous peal its answer to the impatient clamour of the steamer.

The Managing Director of the Great Civilizing Company (since we know that civilization follows trade) landed first, and incontinently lost sight of the steamer. The fog down by the river was exceedingly dense; above, at the station, the bell rang unceasing and brazen.

The Director shouted loudly to the steamer:

"There is nobody down to meet us; there may be something wrong, though they are ringing. You had better come, too!"

And he began to toil up the steep bank. The captain and the engine-driver of the boat followed behind. As they scrambled up the fog thinned, and they could see their Director a good way ahead. Suddenly they saw him start forward, calling to them over his shoulder:–"Run! Run to the house! I've found one of them. Run, look for the other!"

He had found one of them! And even he, the man of varied and startling experience, was somewhat discomposed by the manner of this finding. He stood and fumbled in his pockets (for a knife) while he faced Kayerts, who was hanging by a leather strap from the cross. He had evidently climbed the grave, which was high and narrow, and after tying the end of the strap to the arm, had swung himself off. His toes were only a couple of inches above the ground; his arms hung stiffly down; he seemed to be standing rigidly at attention, but with one purple cheek playfully posed on the shoulder. And, irreverently, he was putting out a swollen tongue at his Managing Director.

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