



**South Valley University  
Faculty of Arts  
Department of English**

# *Criticism*

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chide  
fault  
severe  
denounce  
develop  
people  
review  
remark  
verbal  
bash  
review  
blame  
constructive  
disapproval  
critique  
condemn

# CRITICISM

censure  
negative  
peer to peer  
harsh  
judgment  
boss  
feedback  
decry  
lambaste  
opinion  
public  
sideswipe  
advice  
attack  
scorch  
assessment  
private  
put down  
chastise

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## ➔ Introduction

For centuries literary criticism was considered as an art of writing poetry; it was an advice to the poet rather than the reader. Literary criticism has been applied since the seventeenth century to the description, justification, analysis, or judgments of works arts. Criticism in modern times is classified in different ways. M.H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* talks about four different critical theories: When the critic views art in terms of the universe or what is imitated, he is using the mimetic theory. When the emphasis is shifted to the reader, and the critic views art in terms of its effect on the audience, he is using a pragmatic theory that was dominant up to the end of the eighteenth century. But in the nineteenth century the emphasis shifted to the poet, and poetry became „a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling“ of the poet. In this case a work of art is essentially the internal made external. Therefore, when a critic views art in

terms of the artist, he is using the expressive theory. In the 20th century, the emphasis shifted to the work of art, especially under the influence of the New Criticism. When the critic views art basically in its own terms, seeing the work as a self-contained entity, he is using the objective theory. Some critics have talked about theoretical and practical or applied criticism. Theoretical criticism attempts to arrive at the general principles of art. Practical criticism applies these principles to the works of art. Literary critics have also talked about other types of criticism: Historical criticism examines a work of art against its historical background and the author's life and time. Impressionistic criticism emphasizes the way that a work of art affects the critic. Textual criticism applies scholarly means to a work of art to reconstruct its original version. Analytical criticism tries to get at the nature of a work of art as an object through the detailed analysis of its parts and their organization. Judicial criticism judges a work of art by a definable set of standards. Moral criticism

evaluates a work of art in relation to human life. Mythic criticism explores the nature and significance of the archetypes and archetypal patterns in a work of art.

## ➔ **History of Literary Criticism**

Literary criticism begins with the Greeks, but little of their work has survived. Aristotle's *Poetics* is mostly devoted to drama; and Plato's theories of literature are scarcely literary criticism. From the Romans the major works are Horace's *Ars Poetica* and the works on rhetoric composed by Cicero and Quintilian. The first important critical essay in the Christian era is Louginus's *On His Sublime*, and the first medieval critic of note was Dante who, in his *De Vulgari Eloquentic*, addressed himself to the problems of language appropriate to poetry. The Renaissance writers and critics for the most part followed the Classical rules on the principle that the ancients were bound to have been right; but there were some attempts at originality. For example, Vida's

Poetica (1527), a treatise on the art of poetry; du Bellay's *Deffense et Zllustration* (1549); and Lope de Vega's *New Art of Making Comedies* (1609). In England there is little criticism of note until Puttenham's *The Art of English Poeise* (1589) and Sidney's *Apologie for poetrie* (1595), which is important because it is a detailed examination of the art of poetry and a discussion of the state of English poetry at the time.

For nearly a hundred years the major critical works to appear tended to reinforce the classical tradition and rules. Some of the main works were Ben Jonson's *Timber; or Discoveries* (1640), Pierre Corneille's *Discours* (1660) and Boileau's *L'Art Poetique* (1673). With Dryden, however, in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) – not to mention his prefaces, dedications and open-mindedness whose critical essays are works of art in themselves. He, if anybody, showed the way to the people function of criticism.



In the 18th c. G.B.Vico, the Italian critic and philosopher, was the pioneer of the historical approach to literature. Historicism, as it is called, completely changed, in the long run, critical methods. It enabled people to realize that the rules that held good for the Classical writers do not necessarily hold good in a later age, and that there were not absolute principles and rules by which literature could be judged (which was Dr. Johnson's point of view).

There was thus a reaction against Neoclassicism, an increasing interest in literatures other than those of Greece and Rome, and a greater variety of opinions about literature, about the language to be used, and about the creative and imaginative faculties and processes of the writer. The new views found expression in Wordsworth's Preface to the Second Edition of the Lyrical Ballads (1800), Coleridge's Biographia Literaria (1817), Shelley's Defense of Poetry (1820) – a reply to Peacock's ironical debunking in The Four

Ages of Poetry (1820) and The Philosophy of Composition (1846), and Matthew Arnold's Essay in Criticism (1865, 1888). The writings of Walter Pater on culture and art, especially The Renaissance (1873) and Appreciations (1889) had profound influence on critical thinking.

By the second half of the 19th c. many different critical theories had begun to proliferate, as is clear from a study of the philosophy of aestheticism, the doctrine of art for art's sake and the work of the Symbolist poets. There were fewer rules of any kind as more and more writers experimented. At the same time the work of the best critics continued in the tradition and method of Vico. Sainte-Beuve, with his immense range of learning and his keen sense of critical and judicious detachment, was the supreme exponent of historicism. Recent criticism has tended to be more and more closely analytical in the evaluation and interpretation of

literature, as is evident in the achievements of major critics like M.H. Abrams, Eric Auerbach, I.A. Richards etc.

## ➔ **What is Literary Criticism**

Sometimes the word criticism puts people off, because in everyday use it has negative connotations. We usually think of a “critic” as the kind of grumpy person who seems to exist solely to find problems and stress faults.

The word means more than that, however. It comes from the Greek verb *kritikos*, which means to judge or to decide. In its original sense, a critic is simply a person who expresses an informed judgment or opinion about the meaning, value, truth, beauty, or artistry of something.

Let’s go more specific. Literary criticism is the discipline of interpreting, analyzing and evaluating works of literature. Literature is most commonly defined as works of writing that have lasted over the years because they deal with ideas of timeless and universal interest with exceptional artistry and

power. This can include poems, stories, novels, plays, essays, memoirs, and so on.

Each of the three main activities of literary criticism – interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating – gives rise to different questions.

**The Interpretive Question:** What does this work of literature mean? When we interpret a work, we set forth one or more of its possible meanings. Reading is like a potluck picnic to which the writer brings the words and the readers bring the meanings. Literary works speak to us all in different ways, and one of the pleasures of talking about books is the chance to check out all the different ideas other readers bring to the picnic.

**The Analytic Question:** How does this piece of literature work? When we analyze a text, we get under the hood to see how the engine operates. Analysis is technical: pulling things apart, examining relationships, figuring out effects.

We are not asking what a poem means anymore but how the author makes it click.

**The Evaluative Question:** Is this work of literature any good? When evaluate a work, we form a personal judgment about its work: Is this a great novel or a rotten one? Why? Does this poem have any value? Why? What does this work of literature add – or subtract – from the world?

**→ Does Literary Criticism have any practical use?**

The discipline of literary criticism is valuable for a number of reasons, including the following:

**First**, literary criticism improves your general reading skills, giving you more tools to help solve problems of understanding as you read.

**Second**, literary criticism can help you in college by expanding your awareness of different approaches, thus giving you more ways to respond to what you read.

**Third**, literary criticism supports the development of critical thinking skills. It encourages you to identify your own reading habits and to explore beyond their boundaries. It can also give you a sense of confidence and responsibility about developing your own critical standards and judgments and not having to surrender your opinion to other's interpretations. It sharpens your general interpretive, analytic, and evaluative skills. And it improves your ability to make a good argument by encouraging the habit of backing up your opinions with reasons and textual evidence.

For all these reasons, literary criticism can help you develop your skills as an independent thinker and reader.

### **→ What's a Literary Theory?**

In literary criticism, a theory is the specific method, approach, or viewpoint a critic or reader has staked out from which he or she interprets, analyzes, and evaluates works of literature – and often the world.

There are numerous literary theories. Some you may find useful, some not so useful. That's for you to judge. But you should learn how each theory or approach works before you make your final judgment.

Here are the essential questions when looking at literary theories:

What are some of the many different ways a reader can approach a book? How does each work? What are the benefits and limitations of each literary lens? Which critical theories make sense and seem useful to you? Which don't? Why?

## ➔ **Types of literary Criticism**

**a. Theoretical criticism** proposes an explicit theory of literature, in sense of general principles, together with a set of terms, distinctions, and categories, to be applied to identifying and analyzing works of literature, as well as the criteria (The standards, or norms) by which these works

and their writers are to be evaluated. The earliest, and enduringly important, treatise of theoretical criticism was Aristotle's *Poetics* (fourth century B.C.).

**b. Practical criticism or applied criticism**, concerns itself with the discussion of particular works and writers; in an applied critique, the theoretical principles controlling the mode of the analysis, interpretation, and evaluation are often left implicit, or brought in only as the occasion demands. Among the more influential works of applied criticism in England and America are the literary essays of Dryden in the Restoration; Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81); Coleridge's chapters on the poetry of Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria* (1817) and his lectures on Shakespeare; William Hazlitt's lectures on Shakespeare and the English poets and so on.

**c. Impressionistic criticism** attempts to represent in words the felt qualities of a particular passage or work, and



to express the responses (the “impression”) that the work directly evokes from the critic. As William Hazlitt put it in his essay “On Genius and Common Sense” (1824): “you decide from feeling, and not from reason; that is, from the impression of a number of things on the mind ... though you may not be able to analyze or account for it in the several particulars.” And Walter Pater later said that in criticism “the first step toward seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly,” and posed as the basic question, “What is thing song or picture ... to /me? (Preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, 1873). As its extreme this mode of criticism becomes, in Anatole Franc’s phrase, “the adventures of a sensitive soul among masterpieces.”)

**d. Judicial criticism**, on the other hand, attempts not merely to communicate, but to analyze and explain the

effects of a work by reference to its subject, organization, techniques, and style, and to base the critic's individual judgments on specified criteria of literary excellence.

## → **Types of Traditional Critical Theories and Applied Criticism**

**a. Mimetic criticism** views the literary work as an imitation, or reflection, or representation of the world and human life, and the primary criterion applied to a work is the “truth” and “adequacy” of its representation to the matter that it represents, or should represent. This mode of criticism, which first appeared in Plato and (in a qualified way) in Aristotle, remains characteristic of modern theories of literary realism.

**b. Pragmatic criticism** views the work as something which is constructed in order to achieve certain effects on the audience (effects such as aesthetic pleasure, instruction, or kinds of emotion), and it tends to judge the value of the work

according to its successes in achieving that aim. This approach, which largely dominated literary discussion from the versified Art of Poetry by the Roman Horace (first century B.C.) through the eighteenth century, has been revived in recent rhetorical criticism, which emphasizes the artistic strategies by which an author engages and influences the responses of readers to the matters represented in a literary work. The pragmatic approach has also been adopted by some structuralists who analyze a literary text as a systematic play of codes that effect the interpretative responses of a reader.

**c. Expressive criticism** treats a literary work primarily in relation to its author. It defines as an expression, or overflow, or utterance of feelings, or as the product of the poet's imagination operating on his or her perceptions, thoughts, and feelings; it tends to judge the work by its sincerity, or its adequacy to the poet's individual vision or state of mind; and

it often seeks in the work evidences of the particular temperament and experiences of the author who, consciously or unconsciously has revealed himself or herself in it. such views were developed mainly by romantic critics in the early nineteenth century and remain current in our own time, especially in the writings of Psychological and Psychoanalytic critics and in critics of consciousness such as Poulet and the Geneva School.

**d. Objective criticism** deals with a work of literature as something which stands free from what is often called an “extrinsic” relationship to the poet, or to the audience, or to the environing world. Instead it describes the literary product as a self-sufficient and autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, which is to be contemplated as its own end, and to be analyzed and judged solely by “intrinsic” criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelations of its component elements. The conception

of the self-sufficiency of an aesthetic object was proposed in Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgment (1790) was taken up by proponents of art for art's sake in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and has been elaborated in detailed modes of applied criticism by a number of important critics since the 1920s, including the New Critics, the Chicago School, and proponents of European formalism.

## → **Six Approaches to Literature**

### ***1. Historical / Biographical Approach***

Historical / Biographical critics see works as the reflection of an author's life and times (or of the characters „life and times). H/B approach deems it necessary to know about the author and the political, economic, and sociological context of his times in order to truly understand the work (s).

**Advantages:** This approach works well for some works - - like those of Alexander Pope, John Dryden, and Milton - -

which are obviously political in nature. It also is necessary to take a historical approach in order to place allusions in their proper classical, political, or biblical background.

**Disadvantages:** New Critics refer to the historical/biographical critic's belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by the author's intention as "the intentional fallacy." Thus, art is reduced to the level of biography rather than universal.

## ***2. Moral /Philosophical Approach***

Moral / Philosophical critics believe that the larger purpose of literature is to teach morality and to probe philosophical issues. Practitioners include Matthew Arnold (works must have "high seriousness"), Plato (literature must exhibit moralism and utilitarianism), and Horace (literature should be "delightful and instructive").

**Advantages:** This approach is useful for such works as Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Man," which presents an

obvious moral philosophy. It is also useful when considering the themes of works (for example, man's inhumanity to man in Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn). Finally, it does not view literature merely as "art" isolated from all moral implications; it recognizes that literature can affect readers, whether subtly or directly, and that the message of a work - - and not just the decorous vehicle for that message - - is important.

**Disadvantages:** Detractors argue that such an approach can be too "judgmental." Some believe literature should be judged primarily (if not solely) on its artistic merits, not its moral or philosophical content.

### ***3. Formalism / New criticism***

A formalistic approach to literature, once called New Criticism involves a close reading of the text. Formalistic critics believe that all information essential to the interpretation of a work must be found within the work itself; there is no need to bring in outside information about the

history, politics, or society of the time, or about the author's life. Formalistic critics spend much time analyzing irony, paradox, imagery, and metaphor. They are also interested in the work's setting, characters, symbols, and point of view.

### **Terms used in New Criticism:**

- **Tension** – the integral unity of the poem which results from the resolution of opposites, often in irony or paradox
- **Intentional Fallacy** – the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by the author's intention
- **Affective fallacy** – the belief that the meaning or value of a work may be determined by its affect on the reader
- **External form** – rhyme scheme, meter, stanza form, etc.
- **Objective correlative** – originated by T.S. Eliot, this term refers to a collection of objects, situations, or events that instantly evoke a particular emotion.



**Advantages:** this approach can be performed without much research, and it emphasizes the value of literature apart from its context (in effect makes literature timeless). Virtually all critical approaches must begin here.

**Disadvantages:** The text is seen in isolation. Formalism ignores the context of the work. It cannot account for allusions. It tends to reduce literature to little more than a collection of rhetorical devices.

#### ***4. Psychological Approach***

Psychological critics view works through the lens of psychology. They look either at the psychological motivations of the characters or of the authors themselves, although the former is generally considered a more respectable approach: most frequently, Freudian and/or Jungian (archetypes) psychology to works.

## **(a) Freudian Approach**

- **Id** (reservoir of libbil or pleasure principle in the unconscious )
- **Superego** (the moral censoring agency and repository of conscience/pride that protects society)
- **Ego** (the rational governing agent of the unconscious that protects the individual) Freudian critics steer toward the sexual implications of symbols and imagery, since Freud theorized that all human behavior (drives) derives from libido/sexual energy.
- **Concave Images**, such as fonts, flowers, cups, and caves = female symbols.
- **Convex Images**, such as skyscrapers, submarines, obelisks, etc. = male symbols.
- **Actions**, such as dancing, riding, and flying = sexual pleasure.

- **Water** = birth, the female principle, the maternal, the womb, and the death wish.
- **Oedipus complex** = a boy's unconscious rivalry with his father for the love of his mother.
- **The Electra complex** = a girl's unconscious rivalry with her mother for the love of her father.
- Critics may also refer to Freud's psychology of child development, which includes the oral stage (eating), the anal stage (elimination).

**Advantages:** A useful tool for understanding some works, in which characters manifest clear psychological issues. Like the biographical approach, knowing something about a writer's psychological make-up can give us insight into his work.

**Disadvantages:** Psychological criticism can turn a work into little more than a psychological case study, neglecting to

view it as a piece of art. Critics sometimes attempt to diagnose long dead authors based on their works, which is perhaps not the best evidence of their psychology. Critics tend to see sex in everything, exaggerating this aspect of literature.

Finally, some works do not lend themselves readily to this approach.

### **(b) Jungian Approach**

Jung is also an influential force in myth (archetypal) criticism. Psychological critics are generally concerned with his concept of the process of individuation (the process of discovering what makes one different from everyone else).

Jung labeled three parts of the self:

- **Shadow** - - the darker, unconscious self; rarely surfaces, yet must be faced for totality of self

- **Persona** - - the public personality/mask (particularly masculine)
- **Anima/Animus** - - a man's / woman's "soul image" (the negative that makes a composite whole)
- **A neurosis** occurs when someone fails to assimilate one of these unconscious components into his conscious and projects it on someone else. The persona must be flexible and be able to balance the components of the psych

### ***5. Mythological/Archetypal***

A mythological/archetypal approach to literature assumes that there is a collection of symbols, images, characters, and motifs (i.e., archetypes) that evokes a similar response in all people. According to the psychologist Carl Jung, mankind possesses a "collective unconscious" (a cosmic reservoir of human experience) that contains these archetypes and that is common to all of humanity. Myth critics identify these

***archetypal patterns and discuss how they function in the*** works. They believe that these archetypes are the source of much of literature's power.

**Advantages:** Provides a universalistic approach to literature and identifies a reason why certain literature may survive the test of time. It works well with works that are highly symbolic.

**Disadvantages:** literature may become little more than a vehicle for archetypes, and this approach may ignore the "art" of literature.

## ***6. Feminist Approach***

Feminist criticism is concerned with the impact of gender on writing and reading. It usually begins with a critique of patriarchal culture. It is concerned with the place of female writers in the canon.

Finally, it includes a search for a feminine theory or approach to texts. Feminist criticism is political and often revisionist. Feminists often argue that male fears are portrayed through female characters. They may argue that gender determines every-thing, or just the opposite: that all gender differences are imposed by society, and gender determines nothing.

### **Elaine Showalter's Theory**

In *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter argued that literary subcultures all go through major phases of development.

For literature by or about women, she labels these stages the Feminine, Feminist, and Female:

- **Feminine Stage** - - involves “imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition” and “internalization of its standards.”

- **Feminist Stage** - - involves “protest against these standards and values and advocacy of minority rights ....”

- **Female Stage** - - this is the “phase of self-discovery, a turning inwards freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity.”

**Advantages:** Women have been underrepresented in the traditional cannon, and a feminist approach to literature attempts to redress this problem.

**Disadvantages:** Feminists turn literary criticism into a political battlefield and overlook the merits of works they consider “patriarchal.” When arguing for a distinct feminine writing style, they tend to neglect women’s literature to a ghetto status; this in turn prevents female literature from being naturally included in the literary cannon. The feminist approach is often too theoretical.



## → Conclusion

Literary criticism does not require that we all agree about what a work of literature means, how it works, or whether it's effective. We don't even have to agree with any expert's judgment. We have only two obligations when we assert our opinions. First, we are obligated to explain as clearly as possible the reasons behind our ideas and back them up with evidence from the actual text we're discussing. Second, we are obligated to listen respectfully to critics' ideas in the hope that we can learn from learning how others respond to works of literature.

## → Schools of Literary Criticism

When you research the available scholarly writings on a given work of literature, you may come across essays and articles that use one or more of these approaches. We've grouped them into four categories—author-focused, text-

focused, reader-focused, and context-focused—each with its own central approach and central question about literary works and effective ways to understand them.

**Author-Focused:** How can we understand literary works by understanding their authors?

➔ **Biographical**

criticism focuses on the author's life. It tries to gain a better understanding of the literary work by understanding the person who wrote it. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- What aspects of the author's life are relevant to understanding the work?
- How are the author's personal beliefs encoded into the work?
- Does the work reflect the writer's personal experiences and concerns? How or how not?

## ➔ **Psychological**

criticism applies psychological theories, especially Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian archetypal depth psychology, to works of literature to explore the psychological issues embedded in them. It may analyze a story's characters or plot, a poet's use of language and imagery, the author's motivations for writing, or any other aspect of a literary work from a psychological perspective. It can be classified as an author-focused approach because its emphasis is on reading the work as an expression of the author's unconscious processes, such that one can analyze and interpret the work in the same way a psychoanalyst would do with a patient's dream. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- What psychological forces and factors are involved in the words, behaviors, thoughts, and motivations of the characters in a story?

- Do dreams or psychological disorders play a part in the work?
- How did the author's life experiences affect his or her intellectual and emotional formation? How is this psychological impact evident in the text and/or the author's act of writing it?
- What unintended meanings might the author have embedded or encoded in the work?

**Text-Focused:** How can we understand literary works in terms of themselves?

➔ **Formalism**

along with one of its more conspicuous modern iterations, **New Criticism**, focuses on a literary text itself, aside from questions about its author or the historical and cultural contexts of its creation. Formalism takes a story, poem, or play "on its own terms," so to speak, viewing it as a

self-contained unit of meaning. The formalist critic therefore tries to understand that meaning by paying attention to the specific form of the text. New Criticism was a particular kind of Formalism that arose in the mid-twentieth century and enjoyed great influence for a time. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- How does the structure of the work reveal its meaning?
- How do the form and content of the work illuminate each other? What recurring patterns are there in the form, and what is their effect?
- How does use of imagery, language, and various literary devices establish the work's meaning?
- How do the characters (if any) evolve over the course of the narrative, and how does this interact with the other literary elements?

**Reader-Focused:** How can we understand literary works by understanding the subjective experience of reading them?

→ **Reader-response**

criticism emphasizes the reader as much as the text. It seeks to understand how a given reader comes together with a given literary work to produce a unique reading. This school of criticism rests on the assumption that literary works don't contain or embody a stable, fixed meaning but can have many meanings—in fact, as many meanings as there are readers, since each reader will engage with the text differently. In the words of literature scholar Lois Tyson, “reader-response theorists share two beliefs:

(1) that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and

(2) that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature.” Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- Who is the reader? Also, who is the implied reader (the one “posited” by the text)?
- What kinds of memories, knowledge, and thoughts does the text evoke from the reader?
- How exactly does the interaction between the reader and the text create meaning on both the text side and the reader side? How does this meaning change from person to person, or if the same person rereads it?

**Context-Focused:** How can we understand literary works by understanding the contextual circumstances—historical, societal, cultural, political, economic—out of which they emerged?

➔ **Historical**

criticism focuses on the historical and social circumstances that surrounded the writing of a text. It may examine biographical facts about the author's life (which can therefore connect this approach with biographical criticism) as well as the influence of social, political, national, and international events. It may also consider the influence of other literary works. New Historicism, a particular type of historical criticism, focuses not so much on the role of historical facts and events as on the ways these things are remembered and interpreted, and the way this interpreted historical memory contributes to the interpretation of literature. Typical questions involved in historical criticism include the following:



- How (and how accurately) does the work reflect the historical period in which it was written?
- What specific historical events influenced the author?
- How important is the work's historical context to understanding it?
- How does the work represent an interpretation of its time and culture? (New Historicism)

➔ **Feminist**

criticism focuses on prevailing societal beliefs about women in an attempt to expose the oppression of women on various levels by patriarchal systems both contemporary and historical. It also explores the marginalization of women in the realm of literature itself. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- How does the work portray the lives of women?

- How are female characters portrayed? How are the relationships between men and women portrayed? Does this reinforce sexual and gender stereotypes or challenge them?
- How does the specific language of a literary work reflect gender or sexual stereotypes?

### ➔ **Post-colonial**

criticism focuses on the impact of European colonial powers on literature. It seeks to understand how European hegemonic political, economic, religious, and other types of power have shaped the portrayals of the relationship and status differentials between Europeans and colonized peoples in literature written both by the colonizers and the colonized. Typical questions involved in this approach include the following:

- How does the text's worldview, as evinced in plot, language, characterization, and so on, grow out of assumptions based on colonial oppression?
- Which groups of people are portrayed as strangers, outsiders, foreign, exotic, "others"? How are they treated in the narrative?
- How does the work portray the psychology and interiority of both colonizers and colonized?
- How does the text affirm (either actively or by silence) or challenge colonialist ideology?

➔ **Critical race theory**

focuses on systemic racism and interrogates the dynamics of race and race relationships. In origin, it is a specifically American school of critical theory that sees White racism as an everyday fact of life in America, visible throughout all aspects of culture and society. As such, it encompasses all aspects of life, including literature. Its purpose is to expose

and overturn the factors that enable systemic racism to exist.

As a literary critical approach, its typical questions include the following:

- What is the significance of race, either explicit or implicit, in the literary work being examined?
- Does the work include or exclude the voices and experiences of racism's victims?
- How does the work either affirm/reinforce (whether actively or by silence) or challenge/subvert systemic racism?

A dark brown, vertically-oriented wood grain background with a prominent vertical texture and several knots.

# What is a Literary Theory?

## **Background to Literary Theory and Practical Criticism**

One of the most significant changes that have occurred in the field of literary theory and criticism, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, is where to locate the locus of meaning in a text. In the discipline of literary criticism, it was originally assumed that meaning resides with the author. Thus, the purpose of interpretation then was to discern the author's intention which would unlock the textual meaning of the work.

However, with time, critics began to focus more concerted on the text itself; hence meaning came to be seen as residing with the reader. By subjecting a work of art to a particular theoretical construct, you can acquire a deeper understanding of the work and a better appreciation of its richness.

## → The Nature of Literary Theory and Practical Criticism

According to Kelly Griffith (2002), prior to the 20th century, the investigation of the nature and value of literature had had a long and distinguished history, beginning with Plato and Aristotle and continuing into modern times with such figures as Sir Philip Sidney, John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Matthew Arnold. But their investigations focused primarily on evaluation, not interpretation. They explored what literature is and praised or condemned works that failed to meet whichever standards they deemed essential. In *The Republic*, to cite one extreme example, Plato condemned all literature because it stirs up the passions—lust, desire, pain, anger—rather than nurtures the intellect.

According to Jide Balogun (2011), the history of literature is the history of literary criticism. The latter as an ally of the former makes creative writing more complementary and helps to conceptualize the pedagogical import of texts of literature into ideological standpoints. Over the ages, literary theories have been the weapons for the realization of this crucial obligation of literary criticism. For Terry Eagleton, in *Literary Theory* (1996), the emergence of theory was a 'way of emancipating literary works from the stranglehold of a 'civilized sensibility', and throwing them open to a kind of analysis in which, in principle at least, anyone could participate.' Modern literary theory gradually emerged in Europe during the 19th century and gained momentum in the 20th century. Eagleton argues that theory is the body of ideas and methods used in the practical reading of literature. For him, theories reveal what literature can mean. It is a description of the underlying principles by which we attempt to understand literature. That is to say, all literary



interpretation draws on a basis in theory since it is literary theory that formulates the relationship between author and work.

## **➔ Relationship between Literary Theory and Practical Literary Criticism**

Even though modern literary theorizing and criticism emerged during the 19th century, both attained greater heights in the 20th century. In fact, the 20th century could be appropriately termed the age of criticism. The richness and the complexity of literary theory can be seen in the many critical movements that sprang up and in the enthusiasm with which many critics practiced the art.

The impact of the new psychologies was deeply felt in criticism. Marxism, structuralism, formalism, semiology, psychoanalysis, deconstruction and post-colonial critical studies are among the many theories that dominated the century. Among the notable critics of the century include:

I.A. Richards, P.R Leavis, T. S Eliot, T. E Hulme, William Empson, Christopher Caudwell, John Crowe, Allen Tate, Robert Perm Warren, Ezra Pound, Wayne Booth and Henry James etc.

In the preface to *A History of Literary Criticism* (1991), A. N. Jeffares gives no room for any doubt about the kinship of literature, literary criticism and literary theories. He says:

*The study of literature requires knowledge of contexts as well as of texts. What kind of person wrote the poem, the play, the novel, the essay? What forces acted upon them as they wrote. What was the historical, the political, the philosophical, the economic, the cultural background, etc?*

All of these are antecedents to the birth of a particular literary production. The argument of Jeffares is that for literature to be on course, it becomes expedient that a structure is put in place to reveal its meaning beyond the literal level. Broadly, texts of literature would possess two

levels of meaning - the literal and the super-literal. The super-literal meaning of texts of literature is the ideological implication of the same, which criticism attempts to resolve. The task of resolving the crisis engendered in literary texts is possible through the formulation of some principles, parameters and paradigms which are technically termed theories. Theories are meant to interpret and evaluate works of literature with the mind of revealing the in-depth implications of such works.

Literary theory and criticism offer us new ways of thinking about literature and about what are involved in reading critically. Literary theory and criticism is an unavoidable part of studying literature. But theory can often be intimidating or else, frankly, boring especially when it takes the form of 'isms'. Literary theory and criticism aim to explain, entertain, stimulate and challenge the student of literature. Literary theory and criticism make literature

refreshing, informative and stimulating in many ways. Some of the ways include:

- Literary theory and criticism help us to achieve a better understanding of literature. A better understanding of the world in which we live, automatically, comes along when we study literature, and the study of critical theory makes that enterprise even more productive.
- Literary theory and criticism can, not only show us our world and ourselves through new and valuable lenses, but also strengthen our ability to think logically, creatively, and with a good deal of insight in analyzing works of literature.

## **➔ LITERARY THEORY AND PRACTICAL CRITICISM AS A DISCIPLINE**

Generally, a theory is a body of rules or principles used to appraise works of literature. And on the other hand, literary

theory (critical theory), tries to explain the assumptions and values upon which various forms of literary criticism rest.

Literary theory is a site of many theories. Literary theories were developed as a means to understand the various ways people read literary texts. The proponents of each theory believe their theory is the theory, but most of us interpret texts according to the "rules" of several different theories at a time. All literary theories are lenses through which we can see texts. There is nothing to say that one is better than another or that you should read according to any of them, but it is sometimes fun to "decide" to read a text with one in mind because you often end up with a whole new perspective on your reading. To study literary theory is to seek to understand exactly how readers (critics) interpret (criticize) texts, especially literary ones. Most scholars today would agree that there is no single meaning waiting to be simply found in any text. Meaning is, rather, produced, that

is, it is a function of the different interpretative strategies which various readers bring to bear upon a text. Thus, a cardinal rule of modern literary criticism could be summed up as follows: the 'answers' you get from a text depend entirely upon the kind of 'questions' you put to it.

Strictly speaking, when we interpret a literary text, we are doing literary/practical criticism, but when we examine the criteria upon which our interpretation rests, we are applying literary theory. In other words, literary criticism is the application of critical theory to a literary text, whether or not a given critic is aware of the theoretical assumptions informing his or her interpretation.

## **➔ THE FUNCTIONS OF LITERARY THEORY AND PRACTICAL CRITICISM**

The term '**literary theory**' within the discipline of literary studies can be best understood as the set of concepts and intellectual assumptions on which rests the work of

explaining or interpreting literary texts. Essentially, theory in literature refers to the ways of looking at literature beyond the typical plot-theme and character-setting studies. Jonathan Culler (1997) in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* holds that theory in literature refers to the principles derived from internal analysis of literary texts or from knowledge external to the text that can be applied in multiple interpretive situations. M. H. Abrams points out in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) that “any reasonably adequate theory takes some account of four elements.”

These elements are:

1. The work itself
2. The artist who creates the work
3. The universe or the nature that is being imitated by the work
4. The audience of the work.

**Literary theory**, Abrams holds, can be divided into *four categories*: mimetic theories, which focus on the relationship between text and universe (by "universe" he means all things of the world apart from audience, text and author); pragmatic theories, which are interested in the relationship between text and audience; expressive theories, which are concerned with the text-author relationship; and objective theories, the most recent classification, which focus on analysis of the text in isolation.

Because nothing exists other than universe, text, author and audience, any form of theory must fit into one of these four categories, or be a combination of several. For Abrams, there are author-based theories, reader-based theories, text-based theories, and theories that propose the text as imitative of the universe.

To study **practical literary criticism** is to seek to understand exactly how readers (critics) interpret (criticize)



texts, especially literary ones. A cardinal rule of modern literary criticism may be summed up as follows: the 'answers' you get from a text depend entirely upon the kind of 'questions' you put to it. As a result, for example, a Marxist critic would necessarily come up with a different interpretation from that of a Psychoanalytic critic of the same text, each of which is equally valid (provided that there is textual evidence to support the interpretation in question). The primary necessity for literary criticism lies in the fact that "new strategies of interpretation of literature are constantly being developed to cope with the complexities of change in literary traditions".

The importance of **practical literary** criticism therefore resides in its secondary but invaluable role of interpretation. Practical criticism deals with analyzing, classifying, expounding and evaluating a work of art in order to form one's opinion. Serious practical literary criticism is both

evaluative and analytical, thereby helping us to better a literary work. Writing on the role of practical literary criticism, I.A. Richards notes that “the critical reading of poetry (prose and drama) is an arduous discipline. The lesson of all criticism is that we have nothing to rely upon in making our choices, but ourselves.”

**Practical literary criticism** begins the very moment you close the book and begins to reflect on what has been read. Thus, criticism includes the process of reflecting on, organizing and articulating your response to a given literary work. Criticism presupposes that a piece of literature contains relationships and patterns of meaning that the critic can discern and share after reading a text. It also presupposes that the critic has the ability to translate his experience of the work into intellectual terms that can be communicated to and understood by others. Again, literary criticism presupposes that the critic’s experience of the work

once organized and articulated, will be compatible with the experience of other readers. This means that to be valid and valuable, the critic's reading of a work must accord, at least in some ways, with what other intelligent readers, over a reasonable period of time are willing to agree on and accept.

In conclusion, as a student of literary criticism, some of the questions to ask include:

- Am I reading a literary text in order to measure how accurate its representation of reality is?
- Am I reading a literary text for insights into the life and mind of its writer?
- As the reader, is my role passive or active?
- Is meaning simply 'found' in a literary text or is it 'constructed' or 'produced' by the reader?

Practical literary criticism offers new ways of thinking about literature and about what is involved in reading critically. **Literary theory** and **practical criticism** refers to a particular form of literary criticism in which particular academic, scientific, or philosophical approach is followed in a systematic fashion while analyzing literary texts. In other words, literary theorists adapt systems of knowledge developed largely outside the realm of literary studies (for instance, philosophy or sociology) and impose them upon literary texts for the purpose of discovering or developing new and unique understandings of those texts.

**Literary theory** can be distinguished from criticism, since it concerns itself with the formulation of concepts. It is a philosophical activity which should underlie criticism but, again, should not be regarded as part of it. Literary theory refers to a set of principles evolved for the evaluation of

works of literature. There is no single approach to the criticism of literature.

**Practical literary criticism** refers to the analysis and judgment of works of literature. It tries to interpret specific works of literature and also helps us to identify and understand different ways of examining and interpreting them. The study of literary criticism contributes to maintenance of high standards of literature. In our day-to-day life, the study of criticism of literary works enables us to become aware of the present and past works of literature. Criticism also enables writers to understand the factors that affect the quality and character of literary works and in this way improve their ability to produce better works.

**Practical literary criticism** allows us to see things from different perspectives. It allows us to gain a far wider insight into a work of literature than from our own perspective. That way, we gain a greater understanding of the world in which

we live. In addition, literary criticism helps readers develop critical thinking skills. Literary criticism is not an abstract intellectual exercise. It is a natural human response to literature. The discipline of literary criticism is nothing more than discourse-spoken or written-about literature. It is a by-product of the reading process.

## **➔ THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LITERARY CRITIC AND THE WRITER**

Literary criticism takes the reader to a higher level of cognitive thought by evaluating what the critic says, and then applying it to the piece of literature in ways that the reader may not have originally thought. A person who examines a text closely, looking for deeper meaning and insights, is called a literary critic. There are several different approaches a literary critic can take when closely examining a text. The literary critic is concerned with what the writer has tried to say in his work and how successful he has been

able to express it. For instance, the formalist critic is interested in how an author expresses an idea, while the Marxist critic is interested in what an author is trying to express. To a certain degree, a literary critic should be conversant with literary history to be able to make a genuine judgment upon a work of literature. He should be aware of what others have said and must be grounded in literary theory. It is important to note that literary critics have borrowed from other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, linguistics, psychology and philosophy to analyze works of literature more perceptively.

The literary critic gives life to a literary text by bringing out the hidden meanings embedded in the work. Most often, it is through the eyes of the cautious critical reader that we evaluate the success or otherwise of a text. The critic analyses and evaluates what a writer has written. He comments on, and evaluates the quality of both the author's

literary composition and his vision of, or insight into human experience. It should be noted that a critic does not prescribe which realities are valid, but identifies the nature of the individual experience and the aesthetic means used to express that experience. The underlying implication is that it is not the task of the critic to set up or frame prescriptions which writers must conform to. A literary critic approaches a work according to established codes, doctrines or aesthetic principles. He is a mediator between the work and the reading public. He can arouse enthusiasm in the reader and can as well kill that enthusiasm.

Generally, despite their tendency to interpret, rather than to evaluate literature, literary critics have an enormous effect on the literary marketplace, not in terms of what they say about particular works but in terms of which works they choose to interpret and which works they ignore. And of course, critics tend to interpret works that lend themselves



readily to the critical theory they employ. Thus, whenever a single critical theory dominates literary studies, those works that lend themselves well to that theory will be considered “great works” and will be taught in the college classroom, while other works will be ignored.



## Practical Criticism

ONE of the things you will almost certainly have to do as a student of literature is 'practical criticism'. Practical criticism is that exercise in which you are given a poem, or a passage of prose, or sometimes an extract from a play, that you have not seen before and are asked to write a critical analysis of it. Usually you are not told who wrote the poem or passage, and usually, too, you are not given any indication of what you might look for or say. We can sum it up, then, as criticism based on the close analysis of a text in isolation.

Practical criticism is a form of literary analysis which focuses exclusively on the text, ignoring such extraneous factors as authorial intention and historical context.

The term originates with an experiment performed on Cambridge literature students by I.A. Richards. The students were given a selection of poems to read and comment on,

but they were not given the titles of the poems, nor were they told anything about who the authors of the poems were. The idea was that the students should judge the texts before them solely based on what they had in front of them. Richards was amazed at how poorly (in his view) the students performed and concluded that what was needed was more practical instruction in the art of reading texts. The results of his experiments (Richards's background was in fact in psychology) are written up in the appropriately titled *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (1929), which became a kind of handbook for the discipline of literary studies and had an enormous influence.

It was, however, his former student, FR. Leavis, who popularized the method of 'close reading' through the journal, *Scrutiny*, which he founded. It became the default way of reading literary texts in most of the Anglophone world. Even after its influence waned in universities due to

the impact of structuralism and poststructuralism in the 1960s, it remained very much in force in high schools and colleges well into the 1980s. The exception to this rule was the US, which was instead gripped by New Criticism, a home-grown mutation of Practical Criticism, that was similarly concerned to focus only on the text.

The strength of Practical Criticism was that it set aside the merely impressionistic responses and brought genuine rigor to the business of reading texts. Students were taught to better understand the effects of literary convention and technique (e.g. the role of metaphor) and were given free rein to pronounce judgment on the relative worth of specific texts.

Practical Criticism, mainly its leading avatar F.R. Leavis, was virtually obsessed with deciding what did and did not belong in the canon of 'great texts' worthy of further study. While this enabled literary studies to develop standardized

texts and more importantly standardized tests in schools, thus explaining its incredible influence, it also led to standardized responses to texts and promoted the idea that only certain responses. Because Practical Criticism ignored both the author's and the reader's background and was only interested in so-called 'universals' like 'truth, it consciously reduced the range of meanings any text might in fact yield. It was this factor more than anything that led to its eventual demise as other methods celebrating the diversity of meaning came into fashion. But it was also attacked from a political perspective for ignoring the significance of identity politics, particularly issues to do with gender, race, and sexuality. The plurality of possible readings that texts can give rise to is explored by reader-response critics.

# Short Story Analysis

## What Is a Short Story?

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

### → ***Setting***

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

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

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

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

Setting: The setting of a story is usually represented by its depiction of time and place. While the author may state the original settings in the story, it is important that readers know that there could be various settings in the story as well. The expressions of events and actions do change from place to place and time to time. Discuss the time when the



story was written or the time period, and explain where the story took place. You will use a lot of inferences to help you determine some of them. Please, always support your claim with evidence from the story.

### → ***Characterization***

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

- Who is the main character?
- Are the main character and other characters described through dialogue – by the way they speak (dialect or slang for instance)?
- Has the author described the characters by physical appearance, thoughts and feelings, and interaction (the way they act towards others)?
- Are they static/flat characters who do not change?

- Are they dynamic/round characters who DO change?
- What type of characters are they? What qualities stand out? Are they stereotypes?
- Are the characters believable?

Characterization: The characters in the story are the people or animals that author uses to represent various events and actions. When discussing the characters, please, identify their physical traits and personality attributes and explain how each of them interrelates amongst one another in the story.

List all the characters in the story; but discuss in full only two main characters-usually the protagonist, and one antagonist. Please, make sure that when you point out their characters, you must substantiate them with evidence from the story.

## → ***Plot***

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

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

Plot summary: The plot is a brief but thorough summary of the story. You should exhibit knowledge of the five stages of the plot in your summary (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution). While I do not want you to specifically indicate each of them as you write your analysis, I want to be able to tell that you have incorporated them all. Please, cut out unnecessary detail

when you summarize. Please begin your analysis like this:

**The short story, "--Name of Short story--" begins -----**

Your summaries must not be more than a page long.

➔ ***Narrator and Point of view***

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

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

- Who is the narrator or speaker in the story?
- Does the author speak through the main character?
- Is the story written in the first person "I" point of view?
- Is the story written in a detached third person "he/she" point of view?

- Is there an "all-knowing" third person who can reveal what all the characters are thinking and doing at all times and in all places?

Point of view: The point of view of a story is usually the angle from which the author tells his or her story. It is usually expressed in either the first person, second person, or third person. In the first person point of view, the author or narrator tells his or her story; it is mostly used in autobiographical or eyewitness reports. The second person point of view is rarely used in narratives. The third person point of view can be expressed in either third person limited or omniscient. In the third person limited, the narrator is usually not included as a character in the story. He or she is detached from the story; however, he or she is able to narrate the story based on what can be determined from one character in the story. In the third person omniscient, the character is fully involved

in the story. He or she is able to see everything that is going on in the minds of the characters and is able to tell the movement of the characters as they progress from stage to stage.

→ ***Conflict***

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

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

The conflicts that occur in a literary work are usually expressed as internal or external. Conflicts are the problems that the characters have as they interrelate amongst one another, and as they express their inner

thoughts and feelings in a story. Please, make sure that you identify the internal and external conflicts in your story analysis; and make sure that you use references from the story to support your points.

### → ***Climax***

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

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

### → ***Theme***

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

- How is the theme expressed?

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

Theme: What is the universal meaning that the story provides you? How do you explain the fact that you have gotten the message in the story? A theme is usually the universal message or idea that is identified by the reader or audience. In stating the theme of a story, you should be able to express how much meaning and impact that the story had on you. A story may have as many themes as possible; however, you should choose one theme that you can fully discuss, using evidence from the story.

## → **Style**

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



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

Style: The manner in which an author expresses himself or herself in writing.

*The language* that the authors use to convey their thoughts. What kinds of words are used? Do you find them too lofty and difficult to understand? Do you find them easy to read? How are the words arranged?

*Figurative language.* Are there lots of imagery? Are there flashbacks and foreshadowing used? Are there lots of literary devices used?

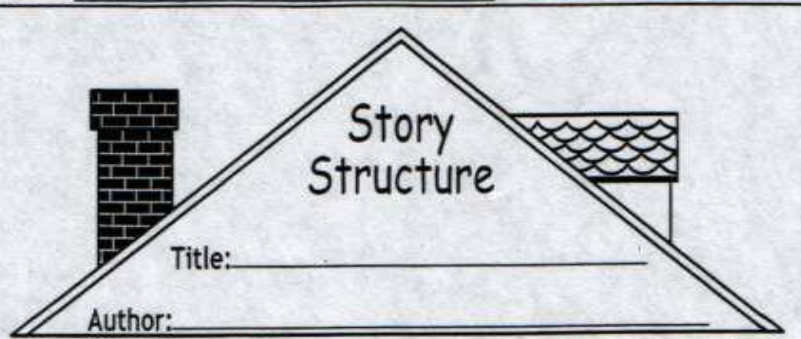
What are the structure and organization of writing? Is it in letter form, does it have paragraphs separating main ideas? Are there lots of dialogues or just one long straight

narrative? What does the title of the story tell you about what to expect?

What Kind of grammar is used? What punctuation style do the authors use?

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Beginning \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Middle \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

End \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Story Building Blocks

Fill in the blocks with information that builds your story.

**Plot**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Main Character**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Supporting Characters**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Setting**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Title**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Author**

\_\_\_\_\_

## *"The Story of An Hour"*

*Kate Chopin (1894)*

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When

the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone.

She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and

shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will--as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under hte breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare

and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.



And yet she had loved him--sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

"Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door--you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door."

"Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she

carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease--of the joy that kills.

*Hilary's Aunt*  
– *by Cyril Hare*

Hilary Smith belonged to a good family, and his father never hesitated to mention this fact. The actual age of the family was doubtful, but Mr. Smith behaved like a man of the past. His ideas and manners were those of the Victorian age.

Unfortunately Hilary himself had some unimportant trouble with the bank about a few cheques. It seemed a very slight matter to the young man, but not so to his father. Hilary was sent off to Australia without delay. Mr. Smith knew little about that place, but he understood one thing. It was a convenient country for those who did not like the customs of old England.

Hilary did not like Australia, and Australia did not like Hilary. He therefore took the earliest opportunity of returning to England. He could not, of course, earn enough money to buy a ticket. So he had to wait until his father

and his brother died. They fortunately did this at the same time. After that he received all the money which belonged to the good old family .

There was not a great deal of money, and Hilary soon spent it. ( The old family had not been able to get much in recent years).When all the money had been spent, Hilary could do one of two things . He could die or work. The thought of neither of these gave him any pleasure. Then he remembered that he was not alone in the world. He possessed an aunt.

She was his father's only sister, and he knew little about her. His father's ancient ideas were responsible for this unfortunate fact. When her name was mentioned , he never looked very pleased. “ Your aunt Mary brought no honour to the family” , he said. Hilary, of course, tried to discover what she had done. It seemed that she had failed to marry a nobleman.

Instead, she had chosen a husband who was connected with “trade”. No old family could bear that sort of thing, of course. As soon as she became “Mrs. Prothero” , her brother considered her dead. Later on , her husband died and left her a lot of money; but that did not bring her back to life in her brother’s opinion.

Hilary discovered his aunt’s address by talking to the family lawyer. Fortunately she had remained faithful to him even after she fell. So Hilary’s sun shone again, and the old lady seemed to like him. When he was feeling honest, he could talk attractively. He frequently visited his aunt’s house; and soon he was living comfortably in the building which the profits of trade had provided.

Hilary was very relieved when he was able to move into the house. He felt like a sailor who had just reached harbour.

He had only about sixpence in his pocket.

One thing was immediately clear: his aunt was seriously ill. She acted bravely, but she was slowly dying. He had

a private talk with her doctor which alarmed him greatly.

The doctor told him that nothing could cure the old woman.

She might perhaps live for some time, but the end was certain.

“Her condition may become worse at any moment”, the doctor

said. “When it has passed a certain stage, she won’t want to live . No kind person will want her to live either.”

Hilary was very annoyed. Fate had found a home for him, and

was now going to throw him out of it. Once again he would have to live in the hard world alone. There was only one thing that he could do. He chose an evening when his aunt was feeling better than usual. Then, very gently , he asked for details of her will.

When she heard the word “will” , his aunt laughed loudly.

“Have I made a will?” she said. “Yes, of course I have. I left all my money to – now , what was it ? To whom did I

leave it ? Some religious people in China, I think. Or were they in Polynesia ? I can't remember . The lawyer, will tell you about it. He still has the will, I suppose. I was very religious when I was a girl.”

“Did you make this will when you were a girl, Aunt Mary?”

“Yes, when I was twenty-one. Your grandfather told me to make a will. He believed that everyone ought to do that. I had no money then, of course, and so my will wasn't very useful.”

Hilary had been filled with sorrow when he heard the first details; but now his eyes were happier again.

“Didn't you make another will when you were married?”

His aunt shook her head “No, there was no need. I had nothing and John had everything. Then, after John died, I had a lot of money but no relations. What could I do with the money? Perhaps I ought to talk to my lawyer again.” She looked at Hilary with steady eyes.

Hilary said that there was no need to hurry. Then he

changed the subject.

On the next day he went to the public library and examined a certain book. It told him what he already believed. When a woman marries, an earlier will loses its value . a new will must be made. If no new will is made, the money goes to the nearest relation. Hilary knew that he was his aunt's only relation. His future was safe.

After a few months had passed, Hilary's problems became serious. The change in his aunt's condition showed that the doctor had been right. She went to bed and stayed there. It seemed certain that she would never get up again. At the same time Hilary badly needed money. He had expensive tastes, and owed a lot of money to shopkeepers.

They trusted him because his aunt was rich; but their bills were terrible.

Unfortunately his aunt was now so ill that he could not easily talk to her. She did not want to discuss money matters at all. She was in great pain and could hardly



sleep; so she became angry when money was mentioned. In the end they had a quarrel about the small amount of ten pounds. She accused him of trying to get her money.

Hilary was not very angry. He understood that Aunt Mary was

a sick woman. She was behaving strangely because she was ill. He remembered the doctor's words , and began to wonder about a new problem. Was it kind to want his aunt to live any longer ? Was it not better for her to die now? He thought about this for a long time. When he went to bed, he was still thinking.

His aunt gave him some news in the morning. She told him that she was going to send for Mr. Blenkinsop.

So she was going to make a new will ! Hilary was not sure that a new will would help him. She might leave all her money to someone else. What could he do then? He reached a clear decision. He must do a great kindness to the poor old woman.

Every night she took some medicine to make her sleep.

Hilary decided to double the amount. He did not need to say anything to her about it. He could just put her to sleep for ever.

He found that it was a very easy thing to do. His aunt even seemed to help his plans. An old servant had been nursing her, and she told this woman to go out. So the servant went off to attend to her own affairs. She was told to prepare the medicine before she went out . Then Hilary could give it to his aunt at the proper time.

It was easy for Hilary. He had only to put some more medicine into the glass. If anything awkward happened, he could easily explain. He could say that he had not understood the plan. He had not known that the servant had put the medicine in. So he had put the proper amount into the glass. It was unfortunate, of course. The total amount was too great. But who would suspect dear Hilary?

His aunt took the glass from his hand with a grateful look.

“Thank you, I want, more than anything , to sleep, and never to wake up again. That is my greatest wish” She looked at him steadily. “ Is that what you wish , Hilary ? I have given you your chance . Forgive me if I am suspecting you wrongly. Sick people get these ideas, you know. If I am alive tomorrow, I shall do better for you. My lawyer is coming here, and I shall make a will in your favour. If I die tonight, you ‘ll get nothing. Some people in China will get all the money. I ought , perhaps, to explain. John Prothero never married me. He already had a wife and couldn’t marry me again. That made your foolish father very angry with me ... No, Hilary , don’t try to take the glass away. If you do that , I shall know; and I don’t want to know. Good-night, Hilary.”

Then, very carefully, she raised the glass to her lips and drank.

## *IT HAPPENED NEAR A LAKE*

*John Collier*

John Henry Noyes Collier was born in 1901 at Carshalton, and was privately educated. His books include *Tom's A-cold* (1933) and several other full-length stories; he has also written short stories and poems. He is fond of gardening, and now lives in the U.S.A.

In this story Mr. Beaseley is a shopkeeper who has never made much money or done anything unusual or interesting. His wife treats him badly, and he tries to escape from his dull life by reading about the wonders of science. One day he receives a large number of dollars and decides to travel to interesting places. The first place he chooses is Yucatan. (Yucatan is mostly in Mexico; its famous ruins are chiefly those of splendid buildings put up by men of an ancient civilization.) His wife wants to have a flat in New York and a house in Miami; but she does not want him to escape from her, and so she travels with him (angrily). She behaves

unpleasantly everywhere. When they go up the River Amazon in search of a terrible creature in a lake, she at last loses all patience. She declares that she will leave for Para. (This is a port at the mouth of the Amazon; its full name is Belem do Para.) In fact, she never leaves the lake, and the story explains why. MR. BEASELEY was fifty. He was shaving and he was looking at his face in the glass. It showed him that he was very like a mouse. "I'm older," he thought. "But what do I care? I don't care, except for Maria. And how old she's getting, too!" He finished his dressing and hurried down the stairs. He thought anxiously that he was probably late for breakfast. Immediately after breakfast, he had to open his shop; and that always kept him busy until ten o'clock at night. He never made much money although he worked so long. Sometimes during the day Maria came into the shop and showed him his mistakes. She did this even when there were people there.

He found a little comfort every morning when he opened the newspaper. When he read it, he could escape from his dull life. For a short time he could forget it. On Fridays he enjoyed himself more than on other days. On Fridays he received his copy of the other paper, Wonders of Science. This paper showed him one way out of his terrible and hopeless life. With Wonders of Science he escaped from the dull house into a splendid country. On this particular morning, splendid news kindly came to Mr. Beaseley in his own home. It came on fine paper in a long envelope from a lawyer. "Believe it or not, my dear," Mr. Beaseley said to his wife. "Someone has died. I've been left four hundred thousand dollars." "What?" she said. "Where? Let me see! Don't keep the letter to yourself like that! Give it to me!" "Go on!" said he. "Read it! Push your nose into it! Do you think it will help you?" "Oh!" she cried. "The money has made you rude already!" "Yes," he said thoughtfully. "I've been left four hundred thousand dollars. Four hundred thousand!" "We'll

be able to have a flat in New York," she said, "or a little house in Miami." "You may have half the money," said Mr. Beaseley. "You may do as you like with it. I myself intend to travel." Mrs. Beaseley heard this remark without pleasure. He belonged to her. She never liked losing anything that belonged to her. She always wanted to keep everything, even old and useless things, "So you want to leave me!" she cried. "I want to see other places, unusual places, different places. In Wonders of Science it says that some people have very long necks. I want to see them. And I want to see the very little people, and some of the strange birds. I want to go to Yucatan. I have offered you half the money because you like city life. You like high society, but I prefer to travel. If you want to come with me, come."

She did not hesitate much. "I will," she said. "And don't forget I'm doing it for your sake. I have to keep you on the right path. When you're tired of wandering about with your mouth open, we'll buy a house. We'll have a flat in New York and a

house in Miami." So Mrs. Beaseley went angrily with him. She hated it; but she was ready to bear anything that took away some happiness from her husband. Their journeys took them into deep forests. Their bedroom walls and floors were often made of bare wood; but outside the window there was a beautiful scene like a painting. The colours of the flowers and the straightness of the trees looked fine in the bright light. In the high Andes their window was a square of burning blue. Sometimes a small white cloud appeared in a lower corner of the square. On islands in the sun they took huts by the sea. There the tide brought offerings to their door in the mornings. They found shells on the sand or creatures of the sea. Mr. Beaseley was glad, but his wife preferred bottles of wine to shells. She dreamed every day of a flat in New York; or she thought of a little house in Miami. She tried endlessly to punish the man because he kept them from her. When a beautiful bird settled on a branch over her husband's head, she gave a terrible cry. Then the bird flew away before



Mr. Beaseley had the time to examine it. He wanted to see birds like that, but she tried to prevent him. They planned a trip to some old buildings in Yucatan; but she told him the wrong time for the start of the journey. When he tried to watch an interesting animal, she pretended to have something in her eye. So he had to look into it and get the thing out. Usually he found nothing. She was determined to stay in Buenos Aires for a long time. Her hair had to be arranged; she needed a permanent wave. She also needed some better clothes, and she wanted to go to the races. Mr. Beaseley agreed because he wanted to be just. They took rooms in a comfortable hotel. One day, when his wife was at the races,

Mr. Beaseley met a little Portuguese doctor. Soon they were talking happily together. They discussed some of the strange creatures which lived in South America. "I have recently returned from the River Amazon," said the doctor. "The lakes are terrible. In one of them there is a very strange creature.

Science knows nothing about it, but the Indians have seen it. It is immensely big. It lives in the water and has a very long neck. Its teeth are like swords." Mr. Beaseley was delighted. "What a monster!" he cried happily. "Yes, yes," said the Portuguese doctor. "It is certainly interesting." "I must go there!" cried Mr. Beaseley. "I must talk to those Indians. If there's a monster in the lake, I must see it. Will you show me the way? Are you free just now? Can you come with me?" The doctor agreed, and everything was arranged without delay. Mrs. Beaseley returned from the races and learnt of the new plan without much joy. She was told that they were going to start almost immediately. The two men explained that they would live near the unknown lake. They would spend their time among the Indians.

She was not pleased, and she insulted the little doctor. He only gave a polite reply to her hard words. He had no need to worry. He was going to be paid highly for his help. Mrs. Beaseley complained loudly all the way up the river. She told

her husband that there was no monster in the lake. She mentioned that the doctor was not an honest man. Although her husband often suffered from this kind of remark, he was hurt. He felt ashamed in front of the Portuguese. His wife's voice, too, was loud and sharp. One result was that every animal hurried away from them. Mr. Beaseley saw nothing of the animals except their back legs. They all left the great river and the terrible voice at high speed. They hid themselves in the dark forest behind the biggest trees. The little party reached the lake after many days on the river. "How do we know that this is the right place?" Mrs. Beaseley said to her husband. She was watching the doctor, who was talking to some Indians. "It is probably any lake. It's not a special one. What are those Indians saying to him? You can't understand a word. You're ready to believe anything, aren't you? You'll never see the monster. Only a fool would believe that story." Mr. Beaseley gave no reply. The doctor continued his conversation with the Indians, and they gave

him some useful news. They told him about a hut which was made of grass. It was near the lake and no one was using it. The little party found this hut after great efforts, and they stayed in it for several days. Mr. Beaseley watched the lake every day, but never saw the monster. In fact, he saw nothing at all. Mrs. Beaseley was very satisfied with this result of their long journey, but she always looked angry. One day she spoke severely to her husband. "I will bear this kind of life no longer," she said. "I've allowed you to drag me from one place to another. I've tried to watch you and take care of you all the time. I've travelled hundreds of miles in an open boat with Indians. Now you're wasting your money on a man who only wants to trick you. We shall leave for Para in the morning." "You may go if you wish," said he. "I'll write you a cheque for two hundred thousand dollars. Perhaps you can persuade an Indian to take you down the river in a boat. But I will not come with you." "We shall see," she said. She had no wish to leave her husband alone. She was afraid

that he might enjoy himself. He wrote out the cheque and gave it to her. She still threatened to leave him, but she stayed. She got up early the next morning and went outside the hut. She decided to have breakfast alone, and walked angrily towards some trees. It was her intention to get some fruit from the trees; but she had not gone far when she noticed a mark on the sand. It was the mark of an immense foot nearly a yard wide. The toes seemed to have sharp nails, and the next footprint was ten feet away. Mrs. Beaseley looked without interest at the marks which the monster had left. No very strong feelings reached her mind. She was only angry at the thought of her husband's success. She was angry because the Portuguese had been telling the truth. She neither cried out in wonder, nor called to the sleeping men. She only gave a kind of bitter laugh. Then she picked up a small branch which was lying on the ground. The monster's footprints had never been seen before by a European, but she rubbed it out with the branch. When this

had been done thoroughly, she smiled bitterly. There was now no sign of the mark, and so she looked for the next one. She wiped that mark off the sand too. Further on she saw another, and then one more. She rubbed both out. Then she saw another, moved towards it, and rubbed it out. She continued in this way, holding the branch with both hands. In a short time she had rubbed out every mark down to the edge of the lake. The last footprint was partly in the water. The monster had clearly gone back to the lake.

Mrs. Beaseley rubbed out the last mark with pleasure, and then stood up straight. She looked back sourly towards the hut. She said some words to her husband, who was asleep up there. "I will tell you about this," she said, "when we are far away. We shall be living at Miami, and you will be an old man. You will never have seen the footprint or the monster. You'll be too old to do anything then." At that moment there was a sound in the water behind her. She was seized by a set of teeth. The Portuguese doctor had described these

teeth very well: they were exactly like swords. He had mentioned various other details, but she had no time to prove their correctness. After she had given one short cry, she was pulled under the water. Her cry was not heard by either of the men. It was given in a weak voice. She had used her voice too much during the past weeks, and it was tired. A short time later Mr. Beaseley awoke. He saw that his wife was absent. He went to talk to the doctor, and mentioned the fact; but the doctor knew nothing and went to sleep again. Mr. Beaseley went outside and looked round for his wife; but he could see nothing. He returned to his friend. "I think my wife has run away," he explained. "I've found her footprints. They lead down to the lake. I suppose she saw an Indian in his boat. Perhaps he has taken her away from here. She was threatening to leave yesterday. She wants to take a small house in Miami." "That is not a bad place," the doctor replied; "but probably Buenos Aires is a better one. This monster is a great disappointment, my dear friend. Let

us go back to Buenos Aires. I will show you some things there that will surprise you. They are very different from anything here, of course." "You're a very good companion," said Mr. Beaseley. "You make even life in a city seem attractive." "If you get tired of it," the Portuguese said, "we can always move on. I know some wonderful islands, and they have splendid people in them. We can visit them after we leave the cities."



## Selected and Analyzed Poems

### Dover Beach

1 The sea is calm tonight.  
2 The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
3 Upon the straits; on the French coast the light  
4 Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,  
5 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.  
6 Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!  
7 Only, from the long line of spray  
8 Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,  
9 Listen! you hear the grating roar  
10 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,  
11 At their return, up the high strand,  
12 Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
13 With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
14 The eternal note of sadness in.

15 Sophocles long ago  
16 Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought  
17 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow  
18 Of human misery; we  
19 Find also in the sound a thought,  
20 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.  
21 The Sea of Faith  
22 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
23 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
24 But now I only hear  
25 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
26 Retreating, to the breath  
27 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear  
28 And naked shingles of the world.  
29 Ah, love, let us be true  
30 To one another! for the world, which seems  
31 To lie before us like a land of dreams,

32 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
33 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
34 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
35 And we are here as on a darkling plain  
36 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
37 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Matthew Arnold was an English poet and cultural critic, whose work remains amongst the best known of 19th century British poetry. Arnold found great success as a writer. He was elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1857, and re-elected in 1862. Though he wrote on a variety of subjects, he is best known for his themes of nature, modern society, and moral instruction.

The poems of Matthew Arnold can broadly be classified into narrative, dramatic, elegiac and lyrical poems besides a few sonnets which he wrote from time to time. Arnold was not a born poet like Shelley whom he criticized as an “ineffectual angel” , but a man who wrote poetry for it served as a good and helpful medium of expressing his views about life and its problems.

Matthew Arnold was one of the greatest poets of the Victorian Age but he was considered more a critic than a poet. He has influenced a whole school of critics including new critics such as T. S. Eliot. He was the founder of the sociological school of criticism. Arnold's evaluations of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats are landmarks in descriptive criticism.

It is Matthew Arnold who has a very high conception of poetry, is known as a poet of the Victorian age. To Arnold, it is only poetry of the best kind that can and will fulfill the important role of forming sustaining and delighting mankind. In this point of view, Arnold's statement is noteworthy. He says in the following ways: "Poetry is the criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." By the phrase "criticism of life" he wants to focus a noble and profound application of ideas of life. It means that poetry is not for affording pleasure and creating beauty, it must have a high ideal. Arnold could not rejoice at the material prosperity and industrial expansion of his time of Victorian age. So reasonably Arnold's poetry becomes a criticism of life.

Matthew Arnold Poems offer a criticism of the Victorian age which was concerned with materialism. His poems

critically represent the growing craze of the Victorian people for power pelf, riches and wealth. The Victorian people are wavering between doubt and faith, instability and stability of their long patronizing customs and values. At that time, Arnold seeks faith and stability earnestly. So we notice in Arnold's poetry that the search for faith and stability is a dominant note.

***Dover Beach*** by Matthew Arnold was published in 1867 in the volume entitled *New Poems*. Dover is a city in England that is famous for White Cliffs. The beach lies between England and France. The poet is on the England side and is watching the coast of France. The time is that of night. This piece is made up of four stanzas containing a variable number of lines. They range in length from fourteen to six lines in length. There is no consistent rhyme scheme but there are a number of random end rhymes throughout the poem and it is written in irregular iambic pentameter.

***Dover Beach*** by Matthew Arnold is dramatic monologue lamenting the loss of true Christian faith in England during the mid-1800's as science captured the minds of the public. The poet's speaker, considered to be Matthew Arnold himself, begins by describing a calm and quiet sea out in the English Channel. He stands on the

Dover coast and looks across to France where a small light can be seen briefly, and then vanishes. This light represents the diminishing faith of the English people, and those the world round. Throughout this poem the speaker/Arnold crafts an image of the sea receding and returning to land with the faith of the world as it changes throughout time. At this point in time though, the sea is not returning. It is receding farther out into the strait.

Faith used to encompass the whole world, holding the populous tight in its embrace. Now though, it is losing ground to the sciences, particularly those related to evolution (The Origin of Species by Charles Darwin was published in 1859). The poem concludes pessimistically as the speaker makes clear to the reader that all the beauty and happiness that one may believe they are experiencing is not in fact real.

### **First Stanza**

Arnold begins this poem by giving a description of the setting in which it is taking place. It is clear from the title, although never explicitly stated in the poem, that the beach in question is Dover, on the coast of England. The sea is said to be calm, there is beach on the water at full tide. The moon “lies fair,” lovely, “upon the straits” (a strait is a narrow

passage of water such as the English Channel onto which Dover Beach abuts).

The speaker is able to see across the Channel to the French side of the water. The lights on the far coast are visibly gleaming, and then they disappear and the “cliffs of England” are standing by themselves “vast” and “glimmering” in the bay. The light that shines then vanishes representing to this speaker, and to Arnold himself, the vanishing faith of the English people. When the light vanishes, the poet sees the White Cliffs which are shining in the moonlight on the Shore of England.

Now for the first time (in the poem), the poet interacts with his wife. He requests her to come to the window side and enjoy the pleasant air of the night. He then asks her to focus on the edge where the sea meets the land. The land is looking white and shiny due to the moonlight.

In the next line, the mood suddenly changes. There is a shift from ecstasy to sorrow. The poet says ‘listen!’ to the unpleasant and harsh sound of pebbles that are pulled out by the strong tides and turned back on the shore when the tide return. The process is continuous and the poet focuses on their rhythmic movement.

The movement of pebbles is ‘tremulous cadence slow’ they are trembling in a slow rhythmic movement. The rhythmic sound of pebbles mingles with that of the poem. This movement of the pebbles with terrible sound is not pleasant and brings out the note or music that is sad and never-ending.

### **Second Stanza**

The stanza 2 begins with reference to Sophocles. It was the tradition of Victorians to refer to the classical poets and writers in their works. The poet says that Sophocles had already heard this eternal note of sadness while sitting on the shores of Aegean.

‘The turbid ebb and flow’ means the movement of water in and out. It also refers to the loss of Faith. Sophocles compared eternal movement with the miseries of humans which like them are also never-ending. This is how he succeeded in composing painful tragedies.

According to the poet, he can hear the same sound of sea sand and retreating tide by sitting, like Sophocles, on the Shore of the Northern Sea (English Channel). The term ‘We’ in a context refers to the poet and his wife but in a



broader sense, it refers to every human. In this sense, the poet draws our attention to the universality and eternity of sadness.

### **Third Stanza**

According to the poet, the Sea of Faith once had united the whole of mankind but now it has declined. He hears its sadness, longings and roars of pulling away of faith as night wind is hovering over the sky. What remains there are the naked stones which have been pulled out of the earth by the tides.

The Sea of Faith that once existed among mankind gradually vanished. The Faith can refer to trust, humanity religion, kindness, sympathy and so on. Thus the greed gave a death blow to this faith. In this sense, the whole scene which was calm and pleasant (from stanza one) can be considered as the Sea of Faith. But suddenly the night wind or industrialization or Science and Technology came that murdered that peace and spirituality.

The poet describes religious faith as a sea that was once full like the tide. At that time, it reached around the earth like a girdle. Now the poet hears that sea's sad retreat. As the Sea of Faith becomes smaller, says the poet, it disappears

into the atmosphere and leaves the edges of the world naked.

#### **Fourth Stanza**

Stanza 4 is characterized by a feeling of escapism. The poet asks his beloved to be true to him. He speaks directly to her, and perhaps, to all those true believers in God that are still out there. He asks that they remain true to one another in this “land of dreams.” The world is no longer what it was, it is more like a dream than the reality he is used to. It is a land that appears to be full of various beautiful, new and joyous things but that is not the case. The poet believes that the world which was like the Land of Dreams in the beginning is in reality hollow from inside. There is no joy, love, light, certainty, peace, sympathy in it.

The poem concludes with a pessimistic outlook on the state of the planet. Both the poet and his beloved are in a dark and ugly world. They hear the sound of struggle and fights of the people who are fighting without seeing each other. This fight can be regarded as the fight of opposing ideologies in the mind of man or that of forces of materialism or selfish and political forces. The poem thus ends with the terrible picture of society during the Victorian age.

## **Dover Beach Themes (Loss of Faith and Certainty)**

Written during the Victorian era, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" admits to and laments the loss of religious faith that came with advances in various fields at the time: evolutionary biology, geology, archeology, and textual analysis of the Bible, to name a few. For the speaker, loss of faith equates to loss of certainty. The Dover beach itself seems to embody this loss, both in its sights and its sounds.

At first, the poem offers no clues that its main subject is the loss of faith. Instead, it begins by describing the atmosphere in which the speaker stands. The descriptions of the sea and the sound of the pebbles on the beach are lyrically beautiful at first, but they mask "the eternal note of sadness" that is revealed at the end of stanza 1. This sudden interruption of sadness hints at the speaker's sense of loss, which finds fuller expression later in the poem.

Secondly, mapping the loss of religious faith onto the movement of the waves implies that these kinds of historical changes come in cycles—waves, in other words. Indeed, the speaker imagines the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles hearing the same sadness in the sea that the speaker hears now. That is, the speaker sees an analogy between the

irrelevance of the classical Greek Gods in the speaker's time with the coming irrelevance of the Christian God in the near future.

The speaker's position on this loss of religious faith becomes clear in the third stanza. Faith once made the world "full" and "bright"—that is, it offered comfort and joy in its certainty. Its loss, then, represents "melancholy." What's more, the "Sea of Faith" once touched the shores of the entire world, but is now "withdrawing." The poem is essentially saying that this loss of faith is global, in turn suggesting the vast reach of scientific advancements at the time. The speaker doubles down on the idea that scientific advancement represents a loss rather than a gain in the poem's final couplet, saying that the new era will herald "confused alarms of struggle and flight," and "ignorant armies clash[ing] by night." In other words, the speaker believes that scientific advancement will bring only scientific—not spiritual—certainty and will lead to more doubt and questioning (which is, in fact, an important part of the scientific method of inquiry).

Overall, the poet fully admits the change that is in process—it is as inevitable as the waves rising and falling—

and challenges the reader to consider whether this loss of faith is progress or a wrong turn. “Dover Beach,” then, is a deeply pessimistic poem that questions the dominant values of its day and embodies the sense of grief that some felt at the prospect of the loss of religion. This questioning still stands up in the 21st century, calling on its readers to examine whether their own lives are spiritually fulfilled.

### **Dover Beach Themes (Optimism & Pessimism)**

The poem ‘Dover Beach’ is composed by the Victorian poet, Mathew Arnold. His poems are often sad and express melancholy. This poem depicts the conflict between religion and science which existed in the Victorian age. ‘Dover Beach’ deals with the dual theme; Religion and Science which symbolizes optimism and pessimism respectively. Poet has used ‘sight and sound’ imagery in this poem. The poem can be broadly divided into two parts.

#### **First part- Optimism**

The first part is about the beautiful and pleasant scene of Dover beach which is bathed in full moonlight. The sky has touched the horizons and wind is blowing swiftly. Everything seems perfectly pleasant. Poet calls his beloved to enjoy the scene. According to the poet, religion is superior to science,

so he compares the beautiful 'sight' with religion. He praises the past period which gave importance to Religion. Though there were barriers and differences among people due to religion, poet ignores it and thinks that people were happy because they were more connected to god than today.

Hence, the pleasant sight of Dover beach is the symbolism of happy past. In this way the 'sight' imagery conveys symbolism and contributes as an essential element to the poem. Here we can observe the first theme; Religion. The poet is optimistic about past and pessimistic about the present and future.

### **Second part- Pessimism**

Soon there is shift of mood. In the second part of the poem, poet hears the sound of pebbles and regards it as sad reality of the world. Once, Sophocles, the ancient Greek writer stood on this sea shore and experienced sorrow in the sound of pebbles. In the same way, poet feels a kind of negativity in the sound of pebbles. He thinks that development of science and technology has made people lose faith in God. The sound of the pebbles stands for sorrowful present. And therefore the 'sound' imagery is used to symbolize 'pessimism.'

Even though Science has made great discoveries, the poet does not like it because he thinks that scientific development has made people skeptic and has diverted their faith in god to Science. The poet says that the beautiful sight of the Dover beach is only a mirage of the religious past and it is soon going to disappear due to development of science. Even if the world looks happy, it is full of sadness. There's no love, joy and peace, and people have become unhelpful to each other. The poem ends on a pessimistic note. Hence, 'sight and sound' imagery conveys symbolism of optimism and pessimism which is interwoven with the dual theme of religion and science, and it contributes as a contrasting element to the poem.

## **Dover Beach Symbols**

### ***The Sea***

The sea is both a symbol and a metaphor, referencing the "eternal note of sadness" as well as the "Sea of Faith". Imagery related to the sea pervades the poem. The first line describes the sea as "calm" at high tide, and this description is reiterated in line five: "the tranquil bay." This early in the poem, the sea seems to represent stability—especially in contrast to the chaotic final image of the poem.

Finally, to the speaker the sea represents faith. This is the most explicitly stated symbol in the poem, as the speaker refers to the "Sea of Faith." He describes how it was once "at the full" and is now like a retreating wave "withdrawing" and leaving the world a darker, harsher, more confusing place.

### ***Light and Dark***

For Arnold, the loss of religious faith is closely tied to and symbolized by the lack of light in the world. In the first stanza both the land and the sea reflect the light, but it is the dim light of the moon, not the bright light of the sun. The brightest light of day has already gone from the world. This loss of light foreshadows the meaning of Stanza 3, in which Arnold describes the decline of faith and laments its loss. Here the speaker notes that in the past, faith was like a "bright girdle" around the world, clothing it in light. Not so now, he laments in Stanza 4, describing the world as having no light at all.

The loss of light from the world leaves its inhabitants in symbolic dark. The "darkling plain" of the final stanza is a place of utter confusion, as soldiers who cannot be seen and who cannot see fight invisible opponents. The chaotic darkness of this image offers a bleak representation of the human state.



## From In Memoriam A. H. H.

### II

Old Yew, which graspest at the stones  
That name the under-lying dead,  
Thy fibres net the dreamless head,  
Thy roots are wrapt about the bones.

The seasons bring the flower again,  
And bring the firstling to the flock;  
And in the dusk of thee, the clock  
Beats out the little lives of men.

O, not for thee the glow, the bloom,  
Who changest not in any gale,  
Nor branding summer suns avail  
To touch thy thousand years of gloom:

And gazing on thee, sullen tree,  
Sick for thy stubborn hardihood,  
I seem to fail from out my blood  
And grow incorporate into thee.

## **In Memoriam A. H. H.**

Arthur Henry Hallam (1811 - 1833 ) is often known only as the source of the dark poetry by the famous English poet Alfred Tennyson, especially his magnum opus *In Memoriam* (1850), conceived after Hallam's early death. Yet, Hallam was a remarkable young intellectual in his own right, and he produced a small body of work of interest to scholars of Victorian poetry.

Tennyson wrote "In Memoriam" after he learned that his beloved friend Arthur Henry Hallam had died suddenly and unexpectedly of a fever at the age of 22. Hallam was not only the poet's closest friend and confidante, but also the fiancé of his sister. After learning of Hallam's death, Tennyson was overwhelmed with doubts about the meaning of life and the significance of man's existence. He composed the short poems that comprise "In Memoriam" over the course of seventeen years (1833-1849) with no intention of weaving them together, though he ultimately published them as a single lengthy poem in 1850.

This chiefly elegiac work examines the different stages of Tennyson's period of mourning over the death of his close

friend Arthur Henry Hallam. The verses show the development of the poet's acceptance and understanding of his friend's death and conclude with an epilogue, a happy marriage song on the occasion of the wedding of the poet's sister Cecilia. An enormous critical and popular success, the poem also won Tennyson the friendship of Queen Victoria and helped bring about, in the year of its publication, his appointment as poet laureate. Scholars agree that this was the most important event in Tennyson's life, and the one which most shaped his work.

*In Memoriam* consists of 131 smaller poems of varying length. Each short poem is comprised of isometric stanzas. The stanzas are iambic tetrameter quatrains with the rhyme scheme ABBA, a form that has since become known as the "In Memoriam Stanza." The poem resolves itself in each quatrain; each stanza seems complete, closed. Thus to move from one stanza to the next is a motion that does not come automatically to us by virtue of the rhyme scheme; rather, we must will it ourselves; this force of will symbolizes the poet's difficulty in moving on after the loss of his beloved friend Arthur Henry Hallam.

“In Memoriam” begins with expressions of sorrow and grief, followed by the poet’s recollection of a happy past spent with the individual he is now mourning. These fond recollections lead the poet to question the powers in the universe that could allow a good person to die, which gives way to more general reflections on the meaning of life. Eventually, the poet’s attitude shifts from grief to resignation. Finally, in the climax, he realizes that his friend is not lost forever but survives in another, higher form. The poem closes with a celebration of this transcendent survival. “In Memoriam” ends with a wedding poem, celebrating the marriage of Tennyson’s sister Cecilia. Not just an elegy, the poem is also a deeply philosophical reflection on religion, science, and the promise of immortality. Tennyson was deeply troubled by the proliferation of scientific knowledge about the origins of life and human progress: while he was writing this poem.

In this section of the poem the speaker contemplates an old tree that lies in a graveyard and is so close to the graves that it "graspest" at the gravestones themselves. Tennyson addresses a yew tree in a graveyard. He imagines that the roots are wrapped around a body buried beneath. This tree

is seen as a symbol of lasting nature which the speaker compares to the frailty and ephemeral nature of man. Time is said to "beat out the little lives of men," but against the small lives of humans, which pass so quickly, the tree returns to life each year again and again, seemingly without end. The tree therefore acts as a symbol of permanence, as the third stanza suggests.

Whereas the lives of men are so fickle and short, the tree is characterized by "stubborn hardihood," which the speaker is very jealous of. The poem ends by the desire of the speaker to be able to cheat death and gain something of the permanence of this "sullen tree," which is personified through this adjective. This section of the poem represents yet another attempt of the speaker to come to terms with the death of Hallam, his beloved friend, and also to accept the frailty of humanity and the mortality that plagues mankind.

## **Crossing the Bar**

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have cross'd the bar.

*Crossing the Bar*, is a short poem by Alfred Tennyson, written in 1889, three years before he died. He was 80 years old and recovering from a serious illness. Tennyson's illness and old age may have contributed to this very personal and memorable meditation on death. The poem contains four stanzas of four lines each, with a traditional ABAB rhyme scheme.

The poem is written as an elegy, utilizing an extended metaphor; a metaphorical meditation on death. The speaker

compares dying to gently crossing the sandbar between a coastal area and the wider sea/ocean. Tennyson uses the metaphor of a sand bar to describe the barrier between life and death. The poem relates death to a sea voyage. He so much believed in his being able to see the face of God when his great journey of life and death was over. The point of view of the poem is first person with the poet as the speaker, which is how the poet conveys his own thoughts on life and death.

The voyage is a metaphor for the final journey of man. "Crossing the Bar" is Tennyson's most famous metaphorical meditation on Death. Where "Bar" or sandbar is metaphor used for the demarcation between the harbor and the open ocean, as the barrier between life and death. Thus Crossing the Bar is the act of passing beyond life, or it can be said that it signifies meeting death. The poem begins with the description of a ship that is about to sail on a long voyage at "sunset" when the "evening star" is visible in the sky. Here the setting of the Sun and appearance of evening star are symbolic of old age of the speaker and his impending death. Allegorically the poet says that as the Sun is setting and the day ends his time in this world or we can say his life in this world is also ending. He can hear the clear

call of death which is the signal for the speaker that his death is nearing.

**The 1st stanza** The poem begins with the phrase *sunset and evening star*. It depicts the transitional time between day and night. It marks the end of the day and the beginning of the night. In a deeper sense, it also refers to the stage of life and death or end of life and beginning of the afterlife. There are two metaphors for death in the first stanza: "Sunset and evening star." Both bring the darkness. The sun setting in the west has always symbolized the end of a person's life. When the poet adds the clear call, he states that death is calling to him. The poem equates a sea voyage with the passing on of a person. The bar is a place at the mouth of a river or harbor where tides deposit sand. The waves and wind blow over the bar and sounds of moaning come from it. These sounds denote that there is not enough water to sail over the bar. Symbolically, the reference to the bar shows the life and death of the ship or boat that would try to go over it when the tide is low or hopefully high. The passing over from life to death is the crossing of the bar.

**The 2nd Stanza** The second stanza can be an explanation of the first one. The poet says the tide which was full of might is moving now in such a way that it seems



to be quiet and weak. Its might is gone it can neither produce sound nor foam. It came from deep inside the sea and now going back to its origin. Going deeper into the words we find that the tide here refers to the life. It seems to come from unknown place which takes the boat toward home. The tide that is needed will help the ship pass over and seems to come from a deep cavern far away. The boat will be taken out to sea toward home or heaven for the one who has passed away.

**The 3rd Stanza** The third stanza is quite similar to the first one. The poet uses different images to depict the same ideas described in the first stanza. He says that it is evening now and the evening bell has rung. The poet begins with two more references to the evening time and the symbolic night: twilight of a person's life and the sounding of the death knell. After this, it would be dark. In a deeper sense, his end is near. Now he will die. Again he asks his friends not to be sad after he has gone. He wants no one to be sad or melancholy about his passing. The word embark gives the impression that he is starting a journey. To Tennyson who was a Christian, this is a journey that he may look forward to making.

**The 4th Stanza** The poet says that after his death he will be free from the bonds of time and place. The word flood here refers to the afterlife journey. The poet says that the journey will take him away from the limitations of the world and then only he will be able to see his Pilot or the One who has brought him in the world and is taking him back to his original home. All this will happen once he crosses the bar i.e. the wall between life and death. The poet thus presumes to see his Pilot. This is Tennyson's hope when he crosses the bar on his long trek to heaven. By capitalizing "Pilot" , Tennyson has equated the Pilot with God, but God in the guise of a specially qualified and skilled mariner.

## My Last Duchess

FERRARA

- 1 That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
- 2 Looking as if she were alive. I call
- 3 That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
- 4 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
- 5 Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
- 6 "Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
- 7 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
- 8 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
- 9 But to myself they turned (since none puts by
- 10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
- 11 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
- 12 How such a glance came there; so, not the first
- 13 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
- 14 Her husband's presence only, called that spot

15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps  
16 Frà Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps  
17 Over my Lady's wrist too much," or "Paint  
18 Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
19 Half-flush that dies along her throat"; such stuff  
20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough  
21 For calling up that spot of joy. She had  
22 A heart . . . how shall I say? . . . too soon made glad,  
23 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er  
24 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.  
25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,  
26 The dropping of the daylight in the West,  
27 The bough of cherries some officious fool  
28 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule  
29 She rode with round the terrace--all and each  
30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
31 Or blush, at least. She thanked men,--good; but thanked

32 Somehow . . . I know not how . . . as if she ranked  
33 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
34 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
36 In speech--(which I have not)--to make your will  
37 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this  
38 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
39 Or there exceed the mark"--and if she let  
40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
41 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,  
42 --E'en then would be some stooping; and I chuse  
43 Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
44 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
46 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
47 As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet  
48 The company below, then. I repeat,

49 The Count your Master's known munificence  
50 Is ample warrant that no just pretence  
51 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
52 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
53 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
54 Together down, Sir! Notice Neptune, though,  
55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
56 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.

ROBERT BROWNING was another important poet of the Victorian era. Browning began his poetic career under the inspiring example of P.B. Shelley. His earliest work in poetry is "PAULINE"(1833). The poem is a monologue addressed by Pauline on the development of a soul. In 1842, Browning produced "DRAMATICS LYRICS" followed by "DRAMATIC ROMANCES AND LYRICS" in 1845.

In 1845 Browning met Elizabeth Barrett. They were married secretly in September 1846; and went to live in Italy until she died in 1861. In 1855, Browning brought out "MEN AND WOMEN" which was dedicated to Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

In “DRAMATIC PERSONAE” (1864) Browning carried forward his study of human beings and produced a number of dramatic monologues. In 1868-69, Browning produced “THE RING AND THE BOOK”. Besides composing lyrics and dramatic monologues Browning also penned a few dramas at intervals. He brought all his dramas in a collection known as “BELLS AND POMEGRANATES”. Browning is the author of eight plays.

The most characteristics of Browning’s poetry is his profound interest in character. He is a great master of the art of presenting the inner side of human beings, their mental and moral qualities. It is in his **dramatic monologues** that Browning is seen at his best. He uses the dramatic monologues for the study of character, of particular mental states, and moral crisis in the soul of the characters concerned. Browning is an optimist to the core. Browning’s optimism is best seen in his treatment of love. Browning is one of the greatest of love poets in the English language.

***My Last Duchess***, is poem of 56 lines in rhyming couplets by Robert Browning, published in 1842 in *Dramatic Lyrics*, a volume in his *Bells and Pomegranates* series. It is one of Browning’s most successful dramatic monologues.

Robert Browning's inspiration for *My Last Duchess* came from the Duke and Duchess Ferrara. The Duchess died under very suspicious circumstances. She was married at fourteen and dead by seventeen. Browning uses these suspicious circumstances as inspiration for a poem which dives deep into the mind of a powerful Duke who wishes to control his wife in every aspect of her life, including her feelings.

Throughout the poem, the duke reveals his belief that women are objects to be controlled, possessed, and discarded. In many ways, this reflects the thinking of Browning's own era, when Victorian social norms denied women the right to be fully independent human beings. Through this portrayal of the duke, Browning critiques such a viewpoint. Browning wrote real life poetry that reflected upon some of the darkest aspects of Victorian life. One of those aspects, of course, being the treatment of wives by their husbands. Browning reveals that this mentality was widespread during this time. The life of a Victorian wife was a dangerous and risky one.



## Lines 1-15

*My Last Duchess* opens up with the speaker asking a listener if he would please sit down and look at a portrait of his last Duchess. This makes the readers wonder why this Duchess is no longer his present Duchess. He asks his listener to sit and look at the life sized painting of her. He reveals that this painting is behind a curtain, and that no one but he is allowed to draw the curtain to view the painting or to show it to anyone. This is very suspicious behavior. The reader can immediately sense that the Duke is controlling. The question that still remains unanswered is, why is this his last Duchess?

The Duke personifies the painting throughout this passage, both by saying “there she stands,” as though the duchess herself and not her image in the painting is standing against the wall, and “will’t please you sit and look at her,” instead of asking the messenger to look at “it” or “the painting.” This again suggests that he views the woman and the work of art as one and the same.

The Duke also makes it clear that he cares for the status the painting can give him and not for the nostalgia or memories about his former wife. He remarks on the artistry

of the painting in seeming so lifelike (“looking as if she were alive”), rather than on missing her, since the woman herself as we will soon find out, has died. Likewise, he describes the artwork as “a piece” and “a wonder,” and brags about how “busily” the famous Fra Pandolf worked to paint it, in a move calculated to impress the emissary with the quality of his art collection and therefore his wealth

The Duke describes the look on the Duchess’ face, and that she had a joyous look and earnest glance. He notes that “twas not her husband’s presence only called that spot of joy into the Duchess’ cheek”. This is a curious thing to say. Why would he expect that his presence alone, and nothing else, would bring joy to her face? He does not answer that question, but the fact that he notes this gives a little bit of insight into why he was the only one who was allowed to open the curtain. All along, he wanted to be the only one who would bring a look of joy to his Duchess’ face. Now that she was put away somewhere, and her life-size painting was on the wall, he could be the only one to ever see that look of joy on her face, because he would allow no one else to look at the painting without his permission. Suddenly, our speaker seems somewhat psychotic; unbalanced.

## Lines 16-24

In this section of *My Last Duchess*, the Duke seems to be remembering his former Duchess and all that bothered him about her. It would seem that she was too easily pleased by everyone around her. The Duke was not happy with this. He didn't like that if someone like "Fra Pandolf" (we don't know much more about this character) were to tell her that her shawl covered her wrists too much, she would blush. The Duke did not like that she would blush at the flirtations of another man. He did not like that the things which he called common courtesy would "call up that spot of joy" which she seemed to always have on her face.

The Duke accuses her of having a heart that was "too soon made glad" and "too easily impressed". He was annoyed that she liked everything that she looked at. This man seems more and more psychotic and controlling as *My Last Duchess* goes on. It would seem that he put away his Duchess because he could not control her feelings. He wanted to be the only one to bring her joy and make her blush.

## **Lines 25 -35**

In these lines of *My Last Duchess*, the Duke continues to explain all of the flaws in the Duchess' character. He says that she values her white mule, a branch of cherries, and a sunset as much as she values a piece of jewelry that he had given her. He is irritated that she does not seem to see the value in what he gives to her, or that she seems to value the simple pleasures of life as much as she values his expensive gifts to her. He also seems irritated that she does not seem to understand the importance of his place in life. By marrying her, he had given her a "nine-hundred-years-old name". This reveals that his family had been around for a very long time and thus he gave her a well-known and prestigious name in marrying her. She did not seem to be any more thankful for this than she was thankful to watch the sun set. This irritated the Duke so much that was not even willing to "stoop" to her level to discuss it with her. He thinks it would be "trifling" to do so.

## **Lines 35-47**

The Duke continues to explain that he chooses never to stoop to discuss with his Duchess what made him so disgusted with her. Yet, he seems quite comfortable

discussing it with this listener. Perhaps he thought himself to high and mighty to stoop to talk to a woman, even if that woman was his wife.

He admitted that she smiled at him pleasantly when he passed by, but it bothered him that everyone received that same smile from her. He explained that he “gave commands” and “then all smiles stopped together”. This causes the reader to feel sorry for the Duchess, and rightly so. She was a lovely, happy, smiling person. It seems that the Duke commanded her in such a way as to make her stop smiling altogether. He robbed her of her joy with his controlling attitude toward her.

After explaining what happened when he commanded her, the Duke turns his attention back to the painting on the wall and says, “there she stands as if alive”. This suggests that the real Duchess is no longer alive. The Duke seems happier with a painting of her because he can control who gets to look at the joy in her face. The Duke then invites his listener to return downstairs with him.

## Lines 47-56

This section of My Last Duchess reveals the identity of the Duke's listener. He is the servant of a Count in the land, and they are trying to arrange a marriage between the Duke and the Count's daughter. The Duke says that his "fair daughter" is his "object".

He brings the man back downstairs with him, and as they walk, he points out bronze statue that was made especially for him. The statue is of Neptune taming a sea-horse. Neptune is the Roman god of the sea, and the statue represents dominance. This symbolizes the Duke, and the sea-horse symbolizes any Duchess he would acquire. The Duke views himself as a god, and he wishes to tame his wife to do whatever he wishes her to do, and even to feel whatever he wishes her to feel. As such, the statue perfectly reflects the duke's opinion of himself: he sees himself as an all-powerful god who tames and subdues everything around him, whether wives or prospective in-laws. What's more, the statue is "a rarity," further implying how special and powerful the duke must be in order to be in possession of it. This man is clearly controlling.

## **SPEAKER/VOICE**

- The Duke (Duke Alfonso of Ferrara) is the speaker in the poem.
- We know that he's been married at least once before, and that his wife died — by the end it is suggested that he killed her. He is already remarrying.
- His words are cold, practical and superior.
- His cool manner when speaking about his last wife suggests that he is comfortable with death and murder, and as he is speaking to the envoy of his new wife it presents a threat to her that she will also be killed if she doesn't behave as he wishes.
- The other voices in the poem are silent — the envoy listens and sometimes asks short questions, but we don't know exactly what he asks — we assume he speaks and responds, but the Duke clearly dominates the conversation — he uses his power and status to gain control.





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