Literary and Film Analysis

Analyzing literature and film is a specialized form of rhetorical analysis, which is itself a specialized form of critical analysis and evaluation. Therefore, as background to this document, you may wish to review Chapter 14 "Critical Analysis and Evaluation" and Chapter 15 "Rhetorical Analysis" in *Acting on Words*, or find out more about those two related forms in another source.

"Rhetoric" refers to the art of using language at all levels, from individual words to entire structures. Rhetorical analysis therefore refers to thinking and writing critically about how a piece of writing works. Literary analysis most commonly refers to the analysis of fiction, poetry, plays, or film/TV fiction. We use the term in that sense here, not to express the view that non-fiction lacks literary merit but because fiction and poetry use specialized techniques requiring specialized preparation. Literary analysis looks at how prose fiction, poetry, plays, or films work as specialized rhetoric to express meaning. Literary analysis may also extend its interest to topics and meanings beyond the text in question. Expanded inquiry may involve connections between the works and their authors, readers, historical times and places, and cultures. Inquiry into relationships between literary works and many other fields of knowledge is increasingly common.

Two Main Stages of Analysis

There are two main stages of critical analysis: 1) breaking your subject down into meaningful parts and relationships and 2) evaluating those according to a standard or standards you deem suitable (logical, practical, ethical, aesthetic, spiritual, etc.). These stages overlap, but it can be helpful to have this basic method in mind to help guide your efforts. Introductory work in literary analysis often emphasizes the mechanical angle: *how*, from a craft standpoint, the writer applies technique to achieve effects, to imply meaning. Without closely considering a work's language and structure, including the various reader appeals these make, it is hard to gather the work's intentions and thus decide whether you believe they succeed and have broader significance.

Why Analyze Literature?

Stories and art lie at the core of human experience. As Daniel David Moses comments, stories entertain, teach, and heal (*Pursued By a Bear* 91). In traditional cultures, certain stories were and sometimes still are told at certain seasons, and by specified people to certain others for specific reasons. Someone seeking advice from an elder may receive a powerful gift: a story. It often proves puzzling, sustaining, and at last illuminating.

If you have ever tried interpreting your dreams, you know that an insight may come to you in a sudden intuitive flash, but sometimes you will not grasp certain meanings of the dream until much time has passed. Intellect alone cannot do the job; in fact, students sometimes complain that analyzing a story can seem to remove the joy of it, to "ruin" the work. While stories can surely survive the sticks and stones, never mind the words, of analysis, it does seem wise to avoid excessive reliance on the intellect, as well as to remember that understanding cannot be unduly willed. With that awareness in mind, learning to apply analytical tools in the approach to literature has many benefits, not least of which is personal joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment.

If the joy seems at times to flee, perhaps it is because you are pressing too hard or not allowing intuition, emotion, and deeper consciousness to have fair say. Perhaps you are not allowing time to gather ideas and look from fresh angles. Interpretation is a creative and often collaborative activity (though remember that collaborators need to be cited). Through literary analysis you deepen and sharpen your thinking and writing skills, your appreciation of art and your reader's understanding of the topic and text you have selected. Art is meant to affect us, but it is also like a puzzle calling for clever and persistent reasoning. The more we learn to apply the necessary thinking, the more entire will be our response to the work and its contribution to our lives.

Once you master the basics of how to analyze literature, you will be ready to explore broader connections between texts and fields such as history, philosophy, sociology, environment, politics, science, and so on. As many of us know, learning through literature can be a most pleasurable form of discovering and exploring ideas.

What to Find in this Document

To provide the tools for literary analysis and evaluation, we offer a short glossary of technical elements: "Basic Literary Terms Defined" (6-24). Here you will find the elements of craft that you need to consider during Stage 1 of breaking down your subject (a literary text or a film) into its parts, functions, and relationships. For evaluation, Stage 2 of the process, you will explore and explain the role of one or two elements of particular interest and how those aspects of craft contribute to a deepened understanding of the work.

In addition to "Basic Literary Terms Defined," you will find sample literary analyses, of short stories, poetry, songs, and a TV series. You will also find two comparative analyses of films at this web site under Rhetoric, Chapter 13. We think you may enjoy these samples and gain motivation, as a result, to try one of your own.

Following discussion and illustration of song analysis later in this document, you will find guidance on how to write a film review ("Writing a Film Review" 55). Throughout the document, as well, you will find help with specific technical problems, such as how to quote lines of poetry or song lyrics ("Oops! I Quoted Her Again" 54).

For Further Reference

To supplement the preliminary information in this document, you can easily acquire any of numerous fine texts on topics related to writing about literature.

Introductions to Writing About Literature

A number of books provide expanded discussion of the standard guidelines reflected in this document. Such texts define technical terms and illustrate various approaches in applying them. Here are three excellent short books on writing about literature:

Barnet, Sylvan, Reid Gilbert and William E. Cain. *A Short Guide to Writing About Literature*. 2nd Can ed. Toronto: Pearson, 2004.

Gardner, Janet E. *Writing About Literature: A Portable Guide*. Boston: Bedford, 2004.

Roberts, Edgar V. *Writing About Literature*. 11th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2006.

Should I Read the Critics and Theories?

Introductory books on writing about literature usually provide brief information on the views of various literary critics and movements. A literary critic or theorist specializes in directions intensified at Stage 2 of critical thinking: evaluation. Theories and movements occur when critics generalize about the experience of reading literature and define it a certain way. They then tend to approach all texts through the lens of their theory. Reading critics and theorists will give you a sense of the enormous range of evaluative responses to literary works and issues. Such reading will enrich your own ideas of how a certain work may be considered and how literature may affect you and others. Depending on your instructor's requirements, however, it may be best not to delve too deeply into the critics and theoretical movements until you have begun to solidify your own sense of how to interpret literature at a preliminary level.

When you do read the critics, it should be with an active and questioning attitude, not with a sense of passive absorption. Critics state their opinions and their reasons for those opinions. Your opinions—developed by practising the basic skills offered in guidelines such as this document—are necessary to help you evaluate and respond to critical outlooks. A good approach to the critics is first to read an historical overview of the various theories and movements, as you will find in most texts on writing about literature. Find an overview that includes the latest trends in critical thought. In that way, when you read individual critics, you will have an introductory sense of their approach and relationship to other approaches. That will help you to evaluate the critical ideas, maintaining your own sense of self-initiated viewpoint while also expanding that viewpoint.

Literary Terms

Following in this document, 6 - 24, is a brief glossary of literary terms. These should be sufficient for your first analyses. However, if you wish to pursue literary analysis, it will be beneficial to acquire an expanded listing, such as M.H. Abrams' book *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed., 1993 or *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, 2nd ed. By Ross Nurfin and Supryia M. Ray, 2003. See "Basic Definitions of Writing Forms," Chapter 1, website.

Film Technique

For further information on elements of technique specific to film, consider the following:

Mast, Gerald. *A Short History of the Movies*, 5th ed., rev. Bruce F. Kawin, 1992.

Kawin, Bruce F. *How Movies Work*, 1992.

Bordwell, David. *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, 1989.

Film Theory

In addition, you can find books on film theory, such as the following:

Mast, Gerald, Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy, eds. *Film Theory and Criticism*. 4th ed., 1992.

Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 1989. (on feminist film theory)

How Film Scripts Evolve

For an entertaining inside look at how film scripts evolve (or in some cases devolve) to their final shooting form, see

Cohen, David S. *Screen Plays: How 25 Scripts Made It to a Theatre Near You—For Better or Worse.* New York: Harper, 2008.

Acting on Words

This document is a companion to the composition text, *Acting on Words: An Integrated Rhetoric, Reader, and Handbook*, 2nd edition. Some courses using *Acting on Words* require or suggest topics in writing about literature. As there was not room to cover this specialized form of writing in the text itself, we provide this online manuscript as a supplement. We are pleased that the information is hereby available to anyone interested in it. Although we refer to various definitions and guidelines from *Acting on Words*, it is not necessary to have that particular text to make use of what follows here.

For those with *Acting on Words*, you will see strong connections between information on literary craft presented in this document and information in Chapter 8 of *Acting on Words*, which discusses evocative and expressive methods used in personal essays. Consider the elements of craft defined and discussed in this document as a supplement to the awareness to be gathered from Chapter 8 and your reading and writing of personal essays.

Other parts of *Acting on Words* that contribute directly to writing about literature are Chapter 6 "Outlining: Thesis Sentences and Topic Sentences," Chapter 13 "The Summary," Chapter 14 "Critical Analysis and Evaluation," Chapter 15 "Rhetorical Analysis," and Chapter 16 "Argumentation." Instructors often assign literary topics requiring comparison of two works. For this reason, you may also wish to review Chapter 12 "Comparison-Contrast," which illustrates comparison forms with sample analyses of two essays, including one by Margaret Atwood.

Basic Literary Terms Defined

Given the hundreds of pages typically devoted to writing about literature, we can give but a preliminary sense of its analytical tools and methods in this document. We have, however, selected the most common basic elements to provide a good starting point.

Theme: What is the literary work attempting to say? What meaning do you gather from it? In his seminal book *Playwriting: How to Write for the Theatre*, 1961, Brooklyn College professor emeritus Bernard Grebanier suggests that we consider theme as a statement, a complete idea. He would have us distinguish between a theme (a meaning) and a subject, concern, or motif (a word or phrase—a fragmentary thought rather than an idea). Theme, in Grebanier's sense of the word, expresses a developed point of view *on* a topic. It is analogous to the thesis of an essay. Here is an example from a well-known play:

Topic or subject: young love.

Theme: Young love is impulsive and thereby doomed to folly and destruction.

Theme: Young love is pure, noble, and true.

As you may suspect, authors often express multiple – sometimes even contradictory - themes on their topic, aspiring thereby to create complex meaning. Given this complexity-- as students point out-- who can definitively state what is meant by works such as Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605), Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947), or the poems of Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)? Far more ambiguous and challenging than much non-fiction prose, literary art regularly generates heated debate over its implied meanings. Authors often state that they work intuitively and that even they do not understand everything they produce. Certain theorists argue, furthermore, that meaning exists only in the mind of the reader, and/or that objective meaning does not exist at all. But all this does not dismiss the value of writing a literary analysis.

Your goal is not to prove that the author meant one thing and one thing only. Rather it is to isolate a thematic statement that you *can* demonstrate, through textual evidence and technique, a statement that is indeed suggested by the work in question. Encouraging your reader to consider this interpretation does not mean that you are discounting many

others. As we said in our introduction, through this exercise you will deepen and sharpen your thinking and writing skills, your appreciation of art, and your reader's understanding of the topic and text you have selected.

To deliver your interpretation (your evaluative thesis), you will need to work with at least some of the following terms.

<PARA><KT>**Subject**</KT> refers to what the story seems to be about. Alice Munro's short story "Thanks for the Ride" (*Acting on Words* 376) presents the subject of casual teenage sexuality, of two young men looking for a one-night fling and two young women going along "for the ride." On a symbolic level (see "symbol" below), the story may refer beyond its local setting and characters and perhaps identify as figured subject a state of being or problem embodied by the main character. In other words, the main character and situation serve to represent a larger or abstract concept, such as teenage rebellion. Stories usually include several important subjects. If "Thanks for the Ride" is about teenage rebellion, for instance, it is also about gender differences, economic forces, class behaviour, disillusion, and possibly regret. Readers need not agree on which subject to privilege. Various statements of theme can relate perceived secondary subjects to a perceived main one, as illustrated above under "Theme."

<PARA><KT>**Setting**</KT> refers not only to where a story takes place; it covers the historical period and the span of time that runs from the beginning to the end of the narrative. Like all the elements of fiction, setting shapes and is shaped by the other elements. So, while the setting for a novel may be Vancouver in the 1930s, the reader's impression of that setting will be shaped by the author's narration, characterization, plot, and symbols combined. Setting, a specific time and place, both blatantly and subtly, conveys values.</PARA>

Authors may or may not choose to create settings that clearly and specifically signify even document, known times and places. There may be artistic and even practical reasons for choosing a general or highly imagined setting rather than a strictly representational one. Fantasy and speculative fictions by their basic nature involve the presentation of

"other worlds": settings that vary considerably from the ones the author and readers inhabit. Placing contemporary political satire in a remote setting, for example, can help contemporary readers to see basic issues as well as mitigate possible angry responses. This may help to market the work. As another marketing example, <PARA> Canadian screenwriters sometimes adopt generic American settings in the belief that American producers and audiences will be alienated by Canadian settings. Whether this practice is artistically advisable is a matter of debate. Sometimes the use of a generic setting, such as mid-America "anywhere," can work artistically, especially if the writer wishes to emphasize other elements of the story. </PA<PARA>More often, however, removal of a story from its particular environment guts the narrative of its heart and soul. Novelists such as Charles Dickens (1812-1870), Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964), William Faulkner (1897-1962), and Margaret Laurence (1926-1987) are celebrated for an ability to imbue their works with intense representations of the places they know well. Consider the bill bissett poem "polar bears on yonge street" (from *language n desire*, talonbooks, 2009). For the poem, see http://www.billbissett.com/html/bill_poetry_polarbears.htm. Can his meaning be separated from the uniqueness of Toronto's famous "endless" street?

Setting in literature almost always expresses a psychological, moral, and even spiritual attitude rather than a mere collection of physical details. It is said that stories, while universal in theme, can arise only from the particular places where they take place (even if those places are implicit rather than explicit in the work).</PARA>

<PARA><KT>**Characterization**</KT> refers to techniques that show us the personalities, values, and essence of imaginary people in a work of fiction (and also of real people in non-fiction). In one of the earliest major books about writing fiction, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), E.M. Forster introduces the terms "flat" and "round" characters to differentiate between caricatured (or one-dimensional) characters and more complex portrayals that suggest multi-faceted psychology. For many years, "flat" characterization was generally considered inferior to "round," appearing to critics of the time as less complex and sophisticated. Today readers seem more aware that so-called "flat" characters may simply represent a non-realistic style and purpose, that the work

may not be inferior at all, simply different, from conventions of the “psychological novel,” for instance.</PARA>

<PARA>We can also distinguish between melodramatic and dramatic characterization. The character in a melodrama, whether a protagonist (hero) or antagonist (a character opposed to the protagonist), does not change significantly in the course of the story. Dramatic characters, on the other hand, demonstrate an arc of experience through their hoping, suffering, and learning as the story progresses.</PARA>

<PARA>Stories generally feature a central character as well as two or more additional main characters, and often a number of secondary and even minor characters. Traditionally, we are introduced to the central and main characters through their motivations to achieve specific goals and fulfill underlying, often unconscious, desires. We see them confronted by internal and/or external obstacles to achieving those goals and desires. Be alert to *how* their authors develop these characters as you read: through narrative language, the particular characters’ own words, the observations of other characters, and the characters’ actions. Also pay attention to contradictions between these four sources of character information. Writers and creative writing instructors often remark that character is action: a total of what the particular character does or does not do. </PARA>

<PARA><KT>**Plot**</KT> refers to a story’s incidents and developments, to the pattern of causally linked events. Forster points out that to say the king died and then the queen died is to tell a very brief story; to say that the king died and then the queen *died of a broken heart* is to tell a plot. The difference between story and plot is this link between cause and effect; in story, events may be said to transpire, but, in plot, events specifically create, shape, and emerge from each other.</PARA>

<PARA>In adapting the ideas of William T. Price (1846–1920), Bernard Grebanier likens plot to the syllogism of logic. (See “Deductive Reasoning” in *Acting on Words*, Chapter 3, 6-37). He believes that plot, like syllogism, can be expressed in three steps. The first step of plot, the “condition” of the action, contains the roots of what follows. The middle step, the “cause,” follows from the first step, and raises the central concern,

what Grebanier calls the plot “question,” which the rest of the story will address or “answer.” </PARA>

<PARA>What three steps would you offer to define the plot of Alice Munro’s “Thanks for the Ride”?

Here is a possible answer, in terms of the main character:

</PARA>

<BL>• <ITEM>Lois meets Dick. (Condition of action)</ITEM>

• <ITEM>She agrees to go with him for a ride, alcohol and likely sex (Major action raising the story’s main question)</ITEM>

• <ITEM>Will she or he find meaning in the experience? (Answer: The experience disappoints her, but means enough for him to produce the story, many years later, as its first-person narrator.)</ITEM></BL>

<PARA>We have suggested stating the plot solely in terms of Lois, our perceived main character. Although Dick narrates the story and is the first character we get to know, he is passive, more onlooker than actor. Lois, whose final words give the story its title, is the one who takes decisive action. Her friend Adelaide makes this clear when she suggests that Lois might say “no” to the boys’ invitation to join them.</PARA>

<PARA>In literary fiction (intended primarily to challenge the reader rather than to satisfy a more mainstream market), plot may often appear hard to isolate and identify. Many so-called “experimental” (or “alternative”) writers choose to situate their plots far from easy view. William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (1939), for example, all reveal their plots through highly sophisticated and complicated structures that upset more familiar, linear developments of the action. Such non-chronological presentations force readers to delve deeply into individual characterizations: to try to understand *effects* (decisions, moods, attitudes, rationales, actions) and put them into context without the benefit of explicit and immediate *causes*.</PARA>

<PARA>***A final caution about plot:*** To think and write significantly about any story, you must identify its plot as precisely as you can. Unless your instructor requests a plot summary, however, you may assume your reader already knows the plot of the story. Your essay should explore and examine potential meaning within the story rather than merely summarize its plot. If you do refer to an element of the plot, ask yourself about the significance of that observation to your overall interpretation of the story. This question (sometimes called the "so what?" question) will help steer you clear of mere plot summary. Your goal is to forge into analysis.</PARA>

<PARA><KT>**Pace**</KT> refers to the rate at which storytellers reveal information and complications in the course of their writings. A writer who slows down the conveying of this information risks losing the reader, but slowing down also allows the story to build suspense and intensity. Too fast a pace can also lose the reader: he or she will not have the time to develop sufficient interest in the characters and events. A knowledgeable writer holds the reader's attention and allows the reader enough information to keep him or her submerged in the pages. While satisfying the reader's curiosity about one point, the writer raises his or her curiosity about another.</PARA>

<PARA>There are primarily four ways that fiction writers reveal information and engage their readers' interest while controlling pace: *description*, *scene/action*, *essay-style exposition*, and *narrative summary*.</PARA>

<PARA>From the storyteller's point of view, what would be the advantages and disadvantages of each way of revealing information? Here is an illustration of each method from Alice Munro's "Thanks for the Ride":</PARA>

*<EXT>**Description***

Description stresses a dominant impression. It deals in specific appeals to the five senses.

> <PARA>It was getting dark in there, and they had not turned the lights on, but you could still read the signs plastered against the mirror between the fly-speckled and slightly yellowed cutouts of strawberry sundaes and tomato sandwiches.</PARA>

Scene/dialogue

Scene/dialogue in prose fiction resembles a portion of a film script or theatre play: it presents characters interacting with each other. In prose fiction, for most scenes of character interaction, the narrator interjects a sprinkling of description, summary, or exposition (indicating what someone does or what appears or happens between moments of interchange.) Some writers of prose fiction do on occasion present scenes that almost resemble film or play scripts in their emphasis upon dialogue. However, a common principle for authors of short prose fiction is the principle (and cliché) that "less is more." Dialogue constitutes a high-impact element of fictional art. Many writers of prose fiction tend to limit lines of dialogue to peak moments.

> <PARA>Now I felt vengeful, and I said softly, "I had quite a talk with your mother."</PARA>
>
> <PARA>"I can imagine," said Lois.</PARA>
>
> <PARA>"She told me about that guy you went out with last summer."</PARA>
>
> <PARA>"This summer."</PARA>
>
> <PARA>"It's last summer now. He was engaged or something, wasn't he?"</PARA>
>
> <PARA>[The scene continues in this manner for another page and a half.]</PARA>

Essay-style exposition

Direct narrative statements or information that provides background to setting and situation may be likened to the prose style of an exposition essay: the emphasis is upon direct telling. This may seem to contradict a central principle of storytelling, which is "show, don't tell." What this principle refers to is the desirability of implying theme and authorial attitude rather than stating it directly. For instance, if the idea of a story is to

suggest that the main character is caught in contradictory circumstances, the writer would be advised not to state, “She was caught in contradictory circumstances.” If the author considered a certain supporting character to be nasty, that writer would be advised not to say, “In came the nasty….” Rather, the writer’s goal would be to convey the quality of nastiness through astutely observed or imagined manners, actions, and so on.

But certain things need to be told more directly, concisely, and briefly. A story might otherwise become interminable. So narrators tend to use essay-style exposition to sketch in background and to provide moments of decreased tension (since most narratives involve a flow of rising and falling tension). Another important issued connected to essay-style exposition is the question of narrator reliability. Just because information is provided in a seemingly authoritative manner does not mean that we should accept its intended veracity. Having a certain character state or tell something may be a way of *showing*, rather than *telling*: that is, the writer’s intention may be to suggest (show) that the speaker—whether a character or the narrator—is deceitful, misguided, mistaken, bombastic…. In other words, the goals of essay-style expositional passages in stories are not those of literal expositional essays, are not those of direct business-style communication. The reader is expected and invited to question what is being told and *why* it is being told. For more on this matter, see “narrator” and “point of view.”

> <PARA>I was just out of high-school at this time, and George had been working for three years in the Men’s Shoes in a downtown department store, so there was that difference. But we had never bothered with each other back in the city. We were together now because we had met unexpectedly in a strange place and because I had a little money, while George was broke . . .</PARA>
>
> <PARA>[The passage of exposition continues for another two-and-one-half paragraphs, blending into a description of the town they are visiting, itself introduced through essay-style exposition.]</PARA>

Narrative summary

Summary forms the basis for much exposition by helping sketch in history surrounding a place, person, or issue. In the following example, the summary is narrative in the strictest sense of summing up what happened to the participating characters.

> <PARA>We drove out of town to a farmhouse where a woman sold us a whisky bottle full of muddy-looking home-made liquor . . . .

Considerable time—perhaps years, decades or even centuries—may be compressed into a brief re-telling.

Narrator refers to the implied identity of the storyteller. Remember that fiction means a story is invented, and so is the voice of the storyteller. The narrator (whether that fictional voice has a name or not) and the actual author of the work should not be assumed to be one and the same. For various purposes, authors often create and inhabit fictional narrators who differ considerably from their creator.</PARA></EXT>.] s.]

<PARA><KT>**Point of View**</KT> refers to the perspective of narrative observation. Is a character *in* the story telling that story through the *first-person* point of view? If so, the narrator will refer to himself or herself by the pronouns "I" and "me." How involved in the action is this first- person narrator? Does a first-person *observer* or a first-person *participant* tell the story? Is the first-person narrator writing in a diary or journal, sending letters or e-mails, addressing someone else in a monologue? What is the narrator's emotional and social investment in the other characters, events, and outcomes?</PARA>

<PARA>If the narrator is not identified by name or first-person pronoun and is absent from events in the story, we deduce that the point of view is likely *third person*. If the main character is referred to as "he" or "she," then the viewpoint is third person. A third-person narrator may be *omniscient* (all-knowing), sharing the thoughts of all the characters, their feelings and experiences. More commonly, a third-person narrator shares the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of only one specific character, filtering the story through the perceptions of that character. This angle of narration is called *limited third person* (or *selected third person*). Sometimes narrative focus shifts to a second and even

a third character, sometimes moving back to the previous one(s). This method might be thought of as alternating selected third person.

<PARA>Within limited or selected third person, we can find varying degrees of proximity between narrator and character. The distance may be considerable, that is, the narrator describes what the character does, follows the character into private circumstances, but does not have full access to the character's thoughts and feelings. Or the distance may be so small that there is a substantial mingling of the narrator's and the character's language and outlook. This overlapping of narrator and character is often referred to as *free indirect discourse*.

<PARA>A character's or narrator's point of view may appear in a *stream of consciousness*, which presents the spontaneous mind moment by moment. The text replicates the erratic and eccentric flow of the individual's private thoughts and inner moods. This heightened psychological state, which includes random associations, sudden memory fragments, and even telepathic currents (depending on the beliefs of the author) unsettles narrative conventions of clear cause-effect in plot, unsettles the predictability we have come to expect in most characterization.</PARA>

<PARA>Fiction writers can also present their third-person narratives as *objective* or *detached* narrative points of view. In this case, the subjects are seen only from the outside, as they would be by a camera: clinically, sociologically, coldly. Ernest Hemingway frequently practised this spare, disassociating, sometimes alienating technique.

Another far less common technique is that of placing the reader in the story through use of "you" (*second person*). An example of this narrative method is Jay McInerney's 1984 novel *Bright Lights, Big City*. Monologue-style narratives, such as Albert Camus's *The Fall* (1956), or epistolary-style narratives (fictional letters), such as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748, an early novel), contain frequent use of the second person pronoun, since the speaker is addressing a fictionalized listener, or the letter writer is addressing a fictionalized reader. While these methods, the monologue or the letter, are fundamentally first person (since the speaker or letter writer uses "I" as the basic stance), nevertheless

the frequent use of “you” in these forms can heighten intensity and reader involvement. Detached or objective method, by appearing to remove a narrator and personal connection, can equally challenge our presumptions and comfort as readers.</PARA>

<PARA>An ongoing issue concerning narrative point of view is the reliability of the narrator. Reliability involves more than accuracy; it also concerns psychology and ethics. What are the narrator’s motives in telling a tale? Does the surface of the story differ from its undercurrents? To what purpose? Can we trust what we are being told? These questions go to the heart of narrative and representation itself.

<PARA>Closely related to point of view are ***voice*** and ***tone*****.** Through the writer’s choice of words, we learn about the narrator’s intellectual and emotional nature, level of formal education, cultural background, ethics, and individual speech mannerisms. All of these elements contribute to voice. Tone refers to the more specific emotional response and attitude of the narrator toward the subject: for example, resigned, angry, depressed, etc. (See our discussions of tone and voice in *AOW* Chapter 2, “Reviewing the Basics,” 25-32.)</PARA>

<PARA><KT>**Image**</KT> refers to any vivid detail that appeals to any of the five senses. Alice Munro’s “Thanks for the Ride” abounds in rich, sharp, distinctive images, from the opening “fly-speckled” signs (an appeal to the visual) to the concluding vision of Lois in her outlandish party dress calling out in a voice described as “crude,” “abusive,” and “forlorn” (an appeal to the visual and aural).” Imagery contributes to atmosphere and tone; often it also acquires the power of figurative language.

Figurative Language: In his book *The Best Poems of the English Language*, Harold Bloom describes the art of reading poetry by saying that “[p]oetry essentially is figurative language” (1). A figure or trope (turning) is a turning away from the literal. This general definition applies to all literature and most arts. Bloom refers to four fundamental tropes in literature: irony, synecdoche, metaphor, and metonymy. To deal with these four, it will be most helpful to discuss irony separately, then look at synecdoche and metonymy as types of symbols, and lastly look at metaphor and how it relates to symbol.

Irony pretends to indicate one thing while meaning something quite different, even opposite. We describe a situation as ironic if what occurs or what is believed contrasts with what we think should happen, according to logic and our ethical values or those indicated to be standard in the world of the story. With irony, an apparent or superficial meaning differs sharply from (and often is the opposite of) a deeper meaning. For example, in "Thanks for the Ride" we recognize irony in the fact that a rejected and exploited young woman (Lois), now jaded, lives in a town that claims to love its children.</PARA>

<PARA>Various forms of irony may be defined; broadly speaking, three common forms are *verbal*, *situational*, and *attitudinal*:

1. We see verbal irony in someone's saying the opposite of what she or he means

2. Situational irony exists when something happens that opposes what common sense indicates would or should happen.

3. We recognize attitudinal irony in one fictional character's thinking of or perceiving reality in a certain way when the reader and possibly other characters realize the opposite is true.

Symbol is an image that, through association, has come to stand for something else. Abrams points out that "in the broadest sense, a symbol is anything which signifies something: in this sense, all words are symbols" (206). In the study of language, however, words are commonly referred to as signs (signifiers with certain specially defined symbolic functions); in literary study, symbols are those images that gather particular attention and clearly pertain to theme. Literary symbols stand for themselves (a house is a house) as well as other things (a house may also refer to a country). The symbolism in this example works through ***synecdoche***, that is, the part (the house) is figuratively substituted for the whole (the country signified). For a compelling example of a house representing the country in which it is set, see Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*

(1852-53). The expression “all hands on deck” is a sailor’s everyday synecdoche, the part (the hand) representing the whole (the sailor).

Symbolic association may also occur through ***metonymy***, that is, one object represents another thing with which it is commonly associated. “Crown” or “scepter,” for example, may stand for “king”, or the more abstract idea of “monarchy.” A rose conventionally symbolizes love, because lovers traditionally exchange roses. Cultural, community, or personal practice creates these associations.

Culture and convention play major roles in the entrenchment of understood symbolic associations. Religions and philosophies become identified with certain images, such as the cross. Nations officially adopt symbols, such as the Roman and American eagle. The symbols then stand for certain core values and identities that the nation believes it embodies. Instituted symbols have understood interpretations that the images may not have in other cultural and literary contexts. The eagle, for example, may symbolize love in some Aboriginal cultures; Richard Wagamese appears to use the image that way in his novel *Keeper‘n Me* (1994). The nature of love signified by the eagle in that novel may indeed differ from the nature of love symbolized by the rose in certain other works.

While symbols as official emblems may seem fairly one-dimensional, most symbols, even conventional ones, have more than one association. Symbols often represent a complex of associated things. For example, through association, the labyrinth in ancient Greece represented the underworld, death, the womb, birth, spiritual or psychological growth, ethical conduct, and union with the unconscious or divine. When Medieval Christianity began to use this symbol, it revised some of these associations to fit within Catholic orthodoxy, adding, for instance, the specifically Christian association with salvation. Since writers are partly bearers of tradition (maintainers of conventional symbols) and partly forgers of new vision and experience (innovators), we can expect to find them exploring traditional symbols in new ways. Abrams offers the example of William Blake’s highly personal use of the rose in his poem “The Sick Rose” (circa 1773):

O Rose, thou art sick

The invisible worm

That flies in the night

In the howling storm

Has found out thy bed

Of crimson joy,

And his deep secret love

Does thy life destroy.

The poem presents us with a rose that loses certain conventional romantic associations while gathering other associations.</PARA>

Metaphor starts with symbols and returns to them; it is a symbol-conscious function, but one that plays against static equations. Metaphor typically is defined as an ongoing comparison between two unlike things that have a common characteristic, one that helps to actualize a writer's purpose. The word comes from Greek "meta" (beyond) and "pherein" (carry): "metapherein" meaning *transference*. So there is a suggestion of identification (one thing becoming another) and even going beyond words, entering into an experience that is no longer symbolic: one that *is*.

I.A. Richards introduced the term "tenor" to describe the subject referred to in the metaphoric comparison and "vehicle" for the image that does the referring . From Tennyson's fragment "The Eagle," consider this metaphor: "He clasps the crag with crooked hands." "Hands" is the vehicle, the image, used to characterize the tenor, the eagle's feet. Bloom provides another example, from Hart Crane: "peonies with pony manes." As Bloom observes, Crane enhances his metaphor with a pun (play on words) in the similar sound of "peonies" (here the tenor, the thing referred to) and ponies (the vehicle, the thing providing the description). If this were a simile, which uses "like" or "as," it would be expressed as "peonies with flowers, stamens, and pistils looking like the manes of ponies." If Tennyson's metaphor had been a simile, it would have been "an eagle with feet like human hands."

As you can see, metaphors call something by a figurative word, as when Hart Crane calls the curve of the Brooklyn Bridge its "leap," or when he calls the bridge both "harp" and "altar" (qtd. in Bloom 2). Crane doesn't say that the bridge is like a harp or altar (simile); he says it *is* harp and altar. There is a sense that the tenor and vehicle are coming together, and the reader with them, on a journey to something else.

In some cases this something else can be a new understanding of a symbol. In his poem, quoted above, Blake calls the rose "sick," transforming it through the metaphoric attack of the invisible worm. The symbol takes on new associations through the process of metaphoric identification with illness.

As one last example, the image of a house, sometimes associated with a country, is in certain other uses symbolically associated with the mind. According to psychoanalytical theory, the basement stands for the subconscious, while other levels stand for other parts of the psyche. A story about someone whose house undergoes change and whose relationship with the house changes could work metaphorically to explore and express new psychic meanings. By presenting a story about house renovation and renewal, the writer could, in effect, be calling the owner's psyche a house in rebirth. Isolated images of the house within such a narrative might rightly be considered as symbols, but the implied comparison of mind and house in renewal that runs throughout the story would serve as metaphor. Through its course, it would revise associations of certain key symbols in the comparison.</PARA>

Allegory is a precise and extended type of one-dimensional symbolism. Writers of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance typically presented characters and actions to stand for various spiritual states, experiences, and teachings as laid out in orthodox theology. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (1308-1321) is one such example. Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-1596) is another. Whether an allegory is religious, political, or topical, it tends to maintain strict equations—certain parts of the story (characters, settings, or incidents) standing for single referents known to readers through the established system or history being referred to. In a sense, allegory is a web of related metaphors that maintains the static and somewhat distant nature of its symbolic

associations. To today's tastes, allegory can seem little more than a literary game, though that view may be unfair.

Rhythm, says *The Harbrace Anthology of Poetry*, is "[t]he flow of stressed and unstressed syllables; the patterned repetition of beats." Poetry uses rhythm to greater or lesser extents, depending on the genre of poem, influences of the time, place, outlook, and sensibility of the poet. Western poets, trained to privilege science and distrust the ancient magical values of poetry, as well as seeking a more subtle, natural music, rejected or marginalized pronounced rhythm for over a century, but that trend appears to be somewhat waning. As Susan Ioannou writes in *A Magical Clockwork: the Art of Writing a Poem*, "sound stirs feeling at the deepest level" (73).

Metre is "a measure of the feet in a line of poetry, and …. the pattern of the predominant feet in that line" (*Harbrace* 413).

ᴗ / ᴗ / ᴗ / ᴗ / ᴗ /
Devo / tion, pa / tience, cour / age, for / titude

This line from Shakespeare (*Macbeth*, IV, iii, 94) illustrates his typical pattern of ***iambic*** pentameter. An "iamb" is one foot of two syllables; the first syllable in the pattern is unstressed, the second stressed (or accented). Notice that this pattern closely follows natural speech. "Penta" means five: iambic pentameter therefore is a line of five iambs.

Citing the American poet and critic Ezra Pound, Susan Ioannou writes that "most arts attain their effect by using a fixed element and a variable" (82). In the above example, a basic principle of variation emerges in that the metrical breaks do *not* follow the word breaks as in

ᴗ / ᴗ / ᴗ / ᴗ / ᴗ /
I see / the light / of night / upon / the sky

Comparing these two lines, one sees that the first offers more rhythmical definition through contrast, and more appealing complexity, by playing the breaks of accents against the breaks of words. The first line (Shakespeare) shows how elements of units can have two rhythmical allegiances at the same time. This "two-ness" of the line opens

up additional possibilities for relationships and meanings. The first line establishes a firm, almost hypnotic pattern yet guards against a singsong over-simplicity by its inherent variation of pattern laid against pattern. In certain contexts, the second line could be effective as well— its parts do not have full meaning apart from the whole, since they are rhythmically meaningful ultimately in a larger context.

The play of pattern and variation in poetry occurs when the poet varies metrical patterns for distinct purposes in certain parts of the poem. Rather than mechanically duplicate a set mould throughout, most poets will break the pattern at times, through a number of devices, including shifts to different patterns or to pauses—even silences. Entering into places where such variation occurs often helps us to go deeper into the poem's struggle with meaning and articulation.

In an essay on his poetic development, Daniel David Moses refers to his growing awareness of what the principle of variables amid the fixed elements meant to him: "Rests in music, clear colour in paintings, stillness in dance, silence in drama and poetry. Form versus content turned in my mind…into a process, a tension, a vividness, a constant shifting from foreground to background and back, a strobing of meaning, a concretion, a concatenation of sense…. Take a pause, take a breath, take a silence…. [W]hat better contrast than between words and silence!" (*Pursued by a Bear* 30 – 31). Moses' ideas here present a reminder to look for the variation—the contrast—the pause of departure that deepens the meanings and possibilities of the pattern, that intensifies through contrast.

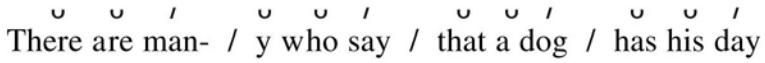
The following terms signify other metrical patterns commonly explored in **prosody** (the study of poetic effects) with some examples borrowed from *A Short Guide to Writing About Literature.*

Trochaic (one stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable)

/ ∪ / ∪ / ∪ /
Tyger / Tyger, / burning / bright

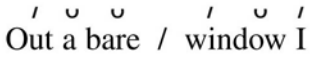
—William Blake

Anapestic (two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed)



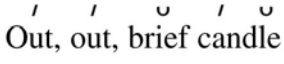
—Dylan Thomas

Dactylic (one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables)



—Janice Kulyk Keefer

Spondaic (two stressed syllables often used as a substitute—variant—for an iamb or trochee)



—Shakespeare

These metrical patterns have standard effects. Spondees traditionally express exclamation, intensity; dactyls traditionally express humour. But another way artists and poets play with norms and variations is to pursue a subject and purpose through an unexpected form, for example, by setting sad words to a bright tempo and happy tune. Popular musicians play with these opposites or reversals as well, as Bruce Springsteen does in the song “Born in the U.S.A.”

Scansion refers to the marking, analysis, and evaluation of metres and feet in lines of poetry.

Rhyme contributes to rhythmic effects by establishing a pattern that collaborates with accents and stanza schemes. It stresses certain affective sounds. Rhyme typically, but by no means always, occurs at the ends of lines. Single, or masculine, rhymes are single stressed syllables (*bill-fill*); double, or feminine, rhymes repeat identical sounds in both an accented syllable and the following unaccented one (*rhyming-timing*). Internal rhyme occurs when one or both of the identical or similar sounding stressed words are within a

line. Imperfect or near rhyme occurs if the consonants of stressed words match but the vowels simply approximate or even considerably differ from each other, and sometimes even if the consonants are simply similar.

Prosody refers to the systematic study of craft in poetry: a study of the principles and practice of metre, rhyme, and stanza forms. Prosody is sometimes also used to include the study of sound patterns and effects as well.

Verse comes from the Latin "versus" meaning "furrow," such as is made by a plow when it turns the soil of a field. Since furrows are made in rows or lines, "versus" meant line. Today the word means something written as poetry (written in verse). It also means unit, section of a poem, as in "the third verse" though literary critics prefer the word **stanza** to designate the clearly demarked subunits of verse.

Developing a Literary Analysis

There are numerous ways to develop a literary analysis, but a standard, recommended approach is to examine one or two elements of craft and how they contribute toward stating a meaning that you believe the author expresses through the work—a theme. Choose one or two elements that seem to you of particular interest or importance. Through your exploration of the selected technique(s) (See "Basic Literary Terms Defined" in this document, 6-24), see if your sense of a thematic statement expressed by the work remains the same or if you need to adapt it further.

Once you have completed this prewriting, you are ready to develop a paper arguing how the craft you have analyzed expresses the theme of the work (or *a* theme of the work). Your argument will not necessarily need to concede to and refute other interpretations, unless your view clearly departs from another articulated view of the work, such as a published scholar's or your teacher's or a classmate's.

According to this approach—examining how craft contributes to theme-- you should view theme in the way that you view the thesis of an essay: as the tallest tree in the forest. Your goal in this approach is to explain the literary process whereby the element you are examining relates to that tall tree—the theme. Be prepared for the prewriting and preliminary writing to take some time. <PARA><KT>Theme</KT> may be the last element you are able to define with confidence, but it is the most important one to keep in mind when you are writing about your selected text. We cannot isolate the theme in a story or poem as quickly or easily as we can the setting or the characters; we must interpret the theme. As we say in our introduction, if you have ever tried interpreting your dreams, you know that an insight may come to you in a sudden intuitive flash, but sometimes you will not feel confident about certain meanings of the dream until much time has passed. In most works of fiction, we can find two or even more possible themes, sometimes standing in apparent opposition to one other.

<PARA>“Thanks for the Ride,” for example, may seem to express an entirely cynical view of young male sexual behaviour (George and Lois’ summer “boyfriend”), yet many years after his seemingly empty encounter with Lois, Dick the narrator, remains sufficiently moved by Lois’ individuality, intelligence, and self-possession to write sympathetically about her—with undertones of real affection for her. Munro’s choice of narrator and point of view, telling the story years later, suggests that the incident was far from meaningless for Dick. Munro’s choice further raises the question of whether it was, or could have been, more meaningful for Lois than she realized at the time. If Dick’s involved narration represents, however faintly, an aspect of noble intention, then Lois’s poverty and slipping self-esteem add a tragic note. We miss this point if we focus only on the theme expressed by the rapacious males represented by George and, presumably, the summer boyfriend. When we find two or more themes contending in one story, we can respond in several ways: we can try to reconcile them into a new, perhaps deeper understanding of the subject, or we can assign one precedence over another in our argument, while we acknowledge presence of another theme. In any case, this is but one illustration of the ways in which literary works present us with challenges. The following sample analyses illustrate student essayists seeking to fathom personal, cultural, political, or spiritual meanings in literature and sharing that joy with us.

Practice Activity

Read Roch Carrier's "The Hockey Sweater" (*Acting on Words* 387-89). Decide what you think the story is saying (identify a thematic statement). Consider how you think the author has used craft to express a theme. Identify at least two elements of Carrier's craft that seem significant, and think about how they have been applied to shape meaning. Then read the following short analysis and compare your findings and evaluation to those of the student writer, Mary Ann Aucoin.

Examples of Literary Analysis</PARA></GLOSSET></BKRM>

The following two paragraphs have been adapted from student Mary Ann Aucoin's posting to her online discussion group. The assignment for this second meeting of her group was to select a reading, identify its argument, thesis, or theme, and provide a brief critical response. Aucoin decided to select a work of fiction; her response, therefore, took the form of literary analysis. Postings to the discussion groups must be no more than two paragraphs, so all Aucoin could really do was summarize the direction a longer essay might follow. Notice, however, how clearly she applies the recommended method of narrowing to one or two literary elements and dealing with their specific contributions to theme in the work as a whole. Notice her summarizing skills and command of rhetorical process description (recognizing literature as a process of various elements working together to express meaning.)

See "Basic Literary Forms Defined," "prose short story." You may also wish to review our analysis of narrative method in "The Hockey Sweater" in *Acting on Words,* Chapter 8, 114-16)

Symbols and Point of View in "The Hockey Sweater"

Mary Ann Aucoin

Roch Carrier's short story "The Hockey Sweater" tells how pride and culture affect the lives of everyone in a small community, including children who just want to play a game. Two elements of fiction that make this a powerful short story are symbols and first-

person point of view. The Montreal Canadiens sweater of the story symbolizes the pride the Francophones Quebec have in a popular hockey player—himself a symbol-- and in their culture in general. The Toronto Maple Leafs jersey, in contrast, symbolizes their rivals, on and off the ice, the English-speaking Canadians. The fact that the narrator is forced, by his mother, to wear the Toronto sweater because she did not want to offend an "Anglais" shows how fragile was the relationship between the French and English.

Drawing us into this political and cultural symbolism is Carrier's use of the boy's first-person narration. For example, when the boy is forbidden to take the ice because he is wearing the "blue" jersey of the enemy, the readers feel as though they are actually at the hockey rink, where most of the story takes place. Thanks to the immediacy of the boy, it is easy to picture the two teams dressed in the Canadiens' red, white and blue with the same number nine on their backs, all hitting the ice for a friendly game. When the narrator turns up at the game in the Toronto Maple Leafs jersey, his embarrassment is palpable, because we are "inside" him. The shock experienced by the rest of the players is driven home, because the narrator has made his world so real through simple, child-like expression. This short story is an excellent example of how skilled use of certain elements of fiction can make a strong political statement while still entertaining the reader.

Work Cited

Carrier, Roch. "The Hockey Sweater" in *Acting on Words: An Integrated Rhetoric, Reader and Handbook*. 2nd ed. Eds. David Brundage and Michael Lahey, Toronto: Pearson, 2008, 387-398.

Commentary on these two paragraphs

1. The title clearly expresses that the short analysis will focus on the contribution of two techniques, symbolism and point of view

2. The essayist begins by stating a dominant concern in the story; this might be taken as a summary of theme. This efficient beginning prepares the reader for an explanation of how craft furthers that theme.

3. Aucoin articulates her two main topics of study by stating the following: "Two elements of fiction that make this a powerful short story are symbols and first-person point of view." This sentence is her thesis statement, her controlling idea (power) and the causes of that power (symbols and first-person narration). For more on thesis statements, see *Acting on Words* 77-90.

4. Aucoin moves on to her first topic of craft, symbolism. The rest of the first paragraph goes on to discuss the sweater and Maurice Richard as related symbols.

5. The essayist ends her first paragraph returning to the important matter of how the technique (symbol) expresses the main concern of pride and culture, named in the opening.

6. Covering two elements of craft in one paragraph would be too much, so Aucoin begins a second paragraph. Her opening sentence serves as a bridge to show that the second point of craft, point of view, works to assist the previous topic discussed, symbolism. Having claimed that point of view intensifies the meanings of the symbols, the essayist provides examples of point of view achieving that intensification by shaping an effective relationship for the reader.

7. Aucoin's final thought sums up the importance of what she has analyzed and demonstrated.

Practice Activity

Now read the following literary analysis by Sergio Zenere. See if it modifies or supports your own response to "The Hockey Sweater."

Sergio Zenere, a citizen and resident of Italy, obtained his Masters degree in Political Science from the University of Quebec at Montreal, and has researched under Professor Maurice Basque at the Centre d'Études Acadiennes in Moncton, New Brunswick. Like French Quebecers, the Acadians had to deal with tremendous cultural struggle. In the following analysis, focusing on character and the psychology of minority feelings, Zenere draws upon his knowledge of Acadian views of Quebec to explore a certain understanding of national attitudes invoked through "The Hockey Sweater." (For more political and cultural background, see language support for "The Hockey Sweater" at this text enrichment site, under Reader.)

Zenere's main point in the following essay echoes an observation of Harold Bloom's: that an entire work can function as a symbol of its context. In his references to character and symbol in this story, Zenere is most attentive to the classical canons of invention (how broader social and political experiences have informed the writer) and memory (how the story makes reference to a broader context, and how that context might be further understood). For more discussion of the classical canons, see *Acting on Words*, 232-234 and 258-260.

Minority Feelings and "The Hockey Sweater"

Sergio Zenere

With streaks of ridicule and pathos, Roch Carrier's humorous and ironic story "The Hockey Sweater" (presumably autobiographic) represents a goldmine of details, a memoir on the public as well as the personal levels, ultimately nothing short of a "blast from the past" of the French-Canadian way. The story tells us much about French-Canadians and their relationship with English-Canadians (circa late 1940s-early 1950s) in a portrait that goes well beyond the language issue to involve self-esteem, perception, identity (re)assessment, status and peer pressure—all accomplished in terms both specific to French-Canadians and universal.

The author has a knack for intertwining and juxtaposing details (both specific and universal) in such a way that pathos, farcical narration, autobiography, and sociological analysis appear gift-wrapped into a whole without much nuisance. We start with a description of long childhood winters, and we are introduced to the characters: children who spend their time between the punishment of school (highly approved of by punishment-hungry parents) and the mustiness of Church at the hockey rink. No wonder children prefer playing hockey to anything else; equally no wonder peer pressure, denial and recognition all take place at the rink. However, all that might be a description common to many areas and classes of people from different cultures in that period, with the only exception that football or cricket might replace hockey. But the French-Canadian angle is unmistakable as well.

The author's mother is too proud to buy clothing items at the local general store (par. 4), so she buys through the pages of the English-speaking Eaton's catalogue. A crisis erupts when the narrator's Montreal Canadiens sweater wears out: for whatever reason Eaton's delivers a Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team sweater instead of the Canadiens jersey, probably because the mother had written Eaton's a letter, not understanding English order forms well. Anticipating peer pressure and highly in denial, the narrator pleads for an alternative to the shame of wearing the accursed Maple Leaf sweater; however, his mother alleges that M. Eaton, being *Anglais*, would probably be offended (par. 15) if they returned the otherwise nice and good-fitting sweater with the maple leaf Eaton loves so much. So the boy has to cope with the identity loss: he is to be a clone of Maurice Richard, alas, no more.

Despite this identity displacement, he still feels he has to be part of the gang, the community. But a much deeper crisis awaits him around the corner (par. 16): the first time he wears the Maple Leaf sweater, nothing goes right on the skating rink. He's told to bide his time to play; yet when the injury of another player seems to provide an opportunity, the referee gives him a dubious penalty. As a result, he throws a temper tantrum, only to have the vicar (presumably not much older than he) banish him ("my child" par. 17). He must to go to the Church begging for God's forgiveness. Here, Montreal sports culture becomes mixed together with

institutional religion, as both provoke "true believers" and therefore both adversarial attitudes and constant hopes for redemption, whether heaven or the Stanley Cup. In the end, he who wanted so badly to fit in is perceived as an outsider, a braggart siding with the opponents. The boy pleads for God to send moths to destroy the Maple Leaf sweater, bringer of such bad luck (par. 18).

The story delves into the odd cultural condition of French-Canadians in the Duplessis era. There is an outworn, subtle obsession with being provincial, the *attitude minoritaire*, the deference, the overwhelming and suffocating presence of the English-speaking winners since the *Plaines d'Abraham,* the subordinate role of an entire ethnic group in a territory—Quebec—they dominate demographically. While a child wanting to emulate a worshipped hero, such as "Rocket" Richard, is a common occurrence everywhere, it offers us in this case an idea of the quest for identity by French-Canadians. Despite all the recent cultural changes, the new *attitude majoritaire*, Bill 101, etc, notwithstanding, these days Quebec popular culture still seeks local heroes to worship (namely Céline Dion, Villeneuve, Stephan Dion) and tends even to cannibalize celebrities from other French-Canadian communities.

Acadian writer Roger Ouelllette has this to say, from an essay entitled "Relations Between Acadia and Quebec: It's Not All Black and White":

> L'Acadie a souvent l'impréssion d'être méconnue des Québécois ... aggravée par... l'impérialisme culturel des Québecois... à vivement annexer les produits de l'extérieur qui marchent bien chez eux ... : Antonine Maillet, Roch Voisine ou Daniel Lavoie.... Il est là le problème .... dans cette communication unidirectionnelle ... alors que les Québécois sont plus désinformés ... plus nombrilistes de notre côté de la clôture.[1] (129-132)

[1] Acadia often has the impression of being misunderstood by the Québécois… aggravated by the cultural imperialism of so briskly appropriating external products that play well at home: Antonine Maillet, Roch Voisine or Daniel Lavoie…. There is the problem…. in this one-way exchange… while the Québécois become more navel-gazing … less informed of our side of the fence.

Oullette's comments offer evidence that the "new" *attitude majoritaire*, humorously foreshadowed in the despotism of Carrier's referee and curé, might trigger equally perverse effects as the English-speaking domination. It is humorous yet telling to see how the boy deals with this "priest-ridden province" with the religion portrayed as some burdensome part of being French-Canadian at that time. We can guess that under the story's layer of humour, a storm was coming, which would rock the Quebec boat for a long time with unpredictable results. Both the cultural paternalism and the "holier-than-thou" attitude of institutional religions are equally made fun of. Indeed, this merry memoir goes beyond anecdotes to offer a wise yet highly satiric portrait of what it meant being a young French-Canadian (or French-Canadian in general) in the Duplessis era.

Works Cited

Carrier, Roch. "The Hockey Sweater" in *Acting on Words: An Integrated Rhetoric, Reader and Handbook*. 2nd ed. Eds. David Brundage and Michael Lahey, Toronto: Pearson, 2009, 387-398.

Ouellette, Roger. "Tout n'est pas Noir et Blanc Dans les Relations Acadie-Québec." *Revue Egalité*. 33. 1993. 125-132.

Focus questions

1. The essayist spent some years in Quebec while working on his MA in history, but his perspective is also that of a European observer. Comment on this perspective, its possible strengths and limitations.

2. Zenere's thesis contends that Carrier's fictional memoir reflects minority psychology with particular attention to that perspective's potential to reverse from unjustly downtrodden to oppressive. Around the time of the last Quebec referendum on separation, playwright Renée Daniel Dubois suggested that Quebec nationalists were no longer in front of the tanks, like the protestors for liberty in Tiananmen Square, but now were driving the tanks. Insofar as this

reversal may be true, is it culturally, politically unique to Quebec? Zenere puts stress on the universal dimension of the memoir. To what extent is the story about basic human nature? To what extent do other parts of Canada experience similar degrees of minority feeling and practice similar forms of cultural chauvinism? Explain.

3. Outline the above essay. Are there any sections that you, as potential editor, might suggest enlarging or reducing? See Acting on Words, Chapter 6, 76-95, for discussion of outlining.

Practice Activity

Before reading Kerry Li's following analysis of Alice Munro's short story "Thanks for the Ride," read the story yourself and decide what answers you might give to the following question:

How do the meanings of the title "Thanks for the Ride" relate to a detailed examination of the character of Lois?

Li's answer, as you will see, combines a study of character and metaphor.

Character Complexity in Alice Munro's "Thanks for the Ride"

Kerry Li

"*and I am perpetually awaiting…*
a rebirth of wonder…"
- *Lawrence Ferlinghetti,"I Am Waiting"*

Lois is a character whose driving force is to seek out moments of wonder. She has lost her innocence and is now doomed to be forever chasing it. Alice Munro examines Lois and no one else. Even the title of the piece is hers, the last line spoken from Lois' lips as the boys drive on towards a better, brighter future that she will never have. Munro's remaining characters are primarily a tool for a reader to better understand

Lois' circumstances and her connection to them. What is the significance of this sole focus? The significance is that all the puzzling contradictions and peculiarities of Lois, and therefore this story, are best explained in those four words: "Thanks for the Ride."

There are several meanings of this title that provide the clues into Lois' world. To begin with, the term "ride" can be seen as a metaphor for life's journey; it also more disturbingly indicates of the rides where a person is not steering or in full control. The context and tone in which Lois delivers her last line represent her contradictory personality. Finally, "Thanks for the Ride" signifies a completion and it is a simple fact that all endings have had some sort of a beginning. Lois' adolescent journey in life is such a series of sudden starts and stops, a steady pattern which enables her to break up the monotony of her deprived life. The title "Thanks for the Ride" offers a window into Lois' characterization and the deeper recesses of her mind.

This phrase is often used as a colloquialism and represents a shared experience with the person to whom it is directed. By the same token, the word "ride" could stem from another commonly used phrase, "Life is one big rollercoaster," which reinforces the point that this particular ride is one of many in Lois' personal journey. Munro alludes to Lois' search for some kind of experience, for a rebirth of wonder, when she is first approached by the others: "Adelaide yelled and the girl came unhesitatingly, unhurriedly to the car" (par. 37). The manner in which she reacts to this new element in her life is one of readiness and acceptance, with no trepidation. After some time passes, the young narrator himself recognizes, in an abstract fashion, Lois's almost clinical thirst for another moment, the next "ride," causing him to feel like a mere player in her existential game: "… I did not want to talk anymore, having discovered another force in her that lay side by side with her hostility….just as enveloping and impersonal" (par. 103). We also clearly understand that "ride" holds sexual connotations; however, the well-worn sexual metaphor itself pales in comparison to the other underlying themes surrounding the term. From dissecting both the literal and figurative meanings behind the title, one can see how it reflects Lois' desperate quest for "rebirth," one that Munro suggests will likely not be fulfilled.

It is inevitable that the narrator is fascinated and yet baffled by the girl. Lois is an intriguing personality, atypical. She confuses him with her conflicting emotions and

outlooks on life. She says yes to getting in the car and yet her face says no. She is cold, hostile and derisive and yet invites him to her home and states, in a "clear, stilted voice: '*I would like you to meet my family*'" (par. 45), what may be either a sad ploy for respectability or a mockery of Dick's purely sexual intentions. How does anyone make sense of an enigma such as this? One can only project the possibilities.

Munro makes it clear that Lois is intelligent, yet deprived. It is hinted that skeletons may be buried in her past as well, when the narrator enters her residence and has the unsettling impression of dirtiness when it is actually clean. Lois seems to be fully aware of her deprivations, and there is a sense of resignation to it never changing, oddly coupled with a need to seek out a temporary escape from the resulting feeling of hopelessness. Life is all about the moments for this girl, some real and spontaneous and others part of some choreographed pseudo-reality, moments never to be permanent because there is something within her prevents the possibility.

So why does Lois continue to subject herself to experiences that offer temporary gratification, if that? The reason she keeps getting on and off the ride is because she hates living the very life that she cannot leave, since she must help support her family. She is also afraid, perhaps because she lacks the integrity and self-confidence to rise above her adversity. She has lost a father some time ago, to a terrible and freakish accident. Her mother and grandmother are all that remain in her life, a constant reminder of where she is from, and their own menial existence is a permanent reflection that sets a limit to her potential. This is portrayed through her date's impression upon meeting them: "…[S]omething about these people. I thought: my mother, George's mother, they are innocent. Even George, George is innocent. But these others are born sly and sad and knowing (par. 54)". Perhaps this explains her puzzling need to introduce him to her lifeline: in order to validate her perceived hopeless and pre-destined existence through a stranger's eyes.

In conclusion, the title "Thanks for the Ride" is a fitting and bittersweet representation of the story's muse, Lois. The words themselves and the context leading up to their delivery are windows into Lois' mind, body and soul. These windows show a person without fear of any situation she imposes upon herself, and yet in ironic testament to her contrasting personality, fear and cynicism keep her from breaking the cycle. This

morose redundancy that Lois allows her life to become is most poignantly expressed by the narrator following their rendezvous: “To find our same selves, chilled and shaken, who had gone that headlong journey and were here still. To go back to the car and find the others sprawled asleep. That is what it is: *triste. Triste est*” (par. 107). It is perhaps even more sad to leave this story aware that Lois knows who and where she is, and yet is still unable to discover what she needs to break from her “ride”, her constrictions of both self and circumstance.

Work Cited

Munro, Alice. “Thanks for the Ride” in *Acting on Words: An Integrated Rhetoric, Reader and Handbook*. 2nd Ed. Eds. David Brundage and Michael Lahey, Toronto: Pearson, 2009, 377-386.

Focus Questions

1. Has Li covered the various metaphoric associations of “ride” that you inferred the story? Compare your answers with those of your course-mates.

2. Has Li discussed motives and dimensions of character that match your own interpretations of Lois? Compare your answers with those of your course-mates.

3. Compare this analysis of “Thanks for the Ride” with that of Galina Rison (which follows). What are the main similarities? What are the main differences?

The following student essayist, Galina Rison, analyzes the action and symbolism in Alice Munro’s short-story “Thanks for the Ride.” She not only interprets the protagonist’s actions but also infers from what psychological motivations they stem. She speaks for Munro’s Lois by reading statements from her actions, her tone, and her dress.

If you have not already read “Thanks for the Ride,” do so before exploring the following analysis. Write down your initial impressions of meanings and methods in that story and compare your thoughts to those presented here by Rison. Your ideas about the short

story together with our suggestions elsewhere in this document should sharpen your response to Rison's analysis.

The Theme of Defiance in Alice Munro's "Thanks for the Ride"

Galina Rison

In her story "Thanks for the Ride," Alice Munro describes an episode in the lives of several young people. The central character of Lois is described by the observations of another character, Dick. Using Dick as retrospective narrator, Munro paints a picture of her setting. Mission Creek is a dumpy little town, dusty, empty and faded. The grey, nondescript surroundings and a desperate, narrow-minded, hopeless mother are factors of Lois' life. Unlikely to be content with such a life and refusing to settle, as so many might do, into passive resignation, this naturally bright and intelligent girl feels defiant. Detachment and ostentation play a crucial role in revealing the character of Lois in rebellion against her lot as a one-night girl for rich young men. As the story progresses, Lois' rebellious nature is conveyed by her mocking of ceremony, her exaggerated politeness and ostentatious dress contrasted to the raw underlying anger that flashes through on way to the culminating cry.

It is first helpful to establish a little more about Lois's situation. She appears to have two main antagonists. The first is her mother (supported by the grandmother). The mother is so humiliated by their life that she is grateful to Lois' summer boyfriend for presenting her with a second-hand piece of china. The mother's motto is, in essence, to kneel and be grateful. That is not what Lois does. She keeps the second group of antagonists-- those rich guys-- in contempt. She mocks and ridicules them, but does concede to a certain form of relationship. Being a natural girl, she is no novice in the art of love; like many other small-town teenagers, she started her experiences early. But unlike many of them, she is able to surrender herself entirely to the act of physical love. As Dick says about her, she is a "mystic of love" (par. 108). But notably, not before and not after her intimacy with Dick in the barn, does she look into his eyes. That is extremely significant. The whole antagonism, for Lois, is between poor small-town girls and rich young men from the beach cottages. In such relationships, to like or not to like

each other is not even an issue. The purpose is just strictly sex and the understood perks to be acquired thereby.

When Dick first sees Lois, she smiles “rather coldly and politely” (par. 37). She does not look at her new companions. Immediately, she makes herself emotionally distant. She is perfectly aware of the purpose of the invitation. She does not say much in this scene, but her mouth is expressive without words. “There was derision, and also great gravity, about her mouth” (par. 44). Derision is intended for Dick and for the purpose of the proposed ride. Gravity is a part of Lois’ mockery of Dick and her mother. While at her house, the picture she is trying to present is of a good girl bringing her boyfriend to meet her family. Dick at this moment is quite puzzled; he can’t make out why she would want to ridicule him if she has agreed to go out with him for the night. For him, the fact that she has not once looked into his face, means that she does not care, that she is plunging herself into the upcoming trip with her eyes open. Nevertheless, she does care enough about herself, her life, and what she does in this life, to take the trouble to set up an artificial scene in her mother’s house in order to ridicule him, and also, in some way, her mother.

Like her exaggerated reserve, Lois’ ostentatious attire is extremely significant. For a night tumble in the fields, she puts on “a dress of yellow-green stuff - stiff and shiny like Christmas wrappings” (par. 58). Her mother totally misconstrues the meaning of the dress. She plays along with Lois’ set-up scene of a formal boyfriend / family introduction. She rushes to explain that Lois “went all the way to London” (par. 59) to buy it. This dress, so completely inappropriate for a sexual escapade through fields, is part of a campaign of mockery. Her apparel exclaims, “See? I am all dressed up for you!” When Dick questions her as to the purpose of the dress, she answers in a “low and scornful” (par. 66) voice, and then starts to laugh. This sudden, out of place and scornful laugh speaks as much about Lois’ feelings at the moment as if the author has described them in full sentences.

The scene in the car with the bottle, showing alcohol as an essential prelude to youthful love games, provides further tension between detachment and passion which is anger but also sexual passion. The other young people welcome the alcohol to shed the leftovers of convention: to become just simple biological beings, “Omne animal” (par.

106). But Lois refuses to play along. Passing the bottle back to her companions, she stubbornly thanks them each time. Again, she is completely emotionally distant from them all. Only her body is there to participate in the game. It is essential for her to keep her heart and soul away from that bodily affair. Talking is "not so little a thing to her as touching" (par. 68). So she uses her outwardly verbal politeness as a shield. Her thank-yous are signs of her emotional detachment.

In the next scene, a conversation between Dick and Lois about her summer boyfriend, her voice becomes thickened with sarcasm. The derision here, now under the influence of alcohol, reaches its most acute stage. The sarcasm in her voice and the sudden shedding of her ostentatious politeness are the signs of her true feelings that so suddenly come out in the open. She points out to Dick that when a boy and a girl go for a short fling, they do not even think of liking or not liking each other. When Dick asks her whether she liked her ex-boyfriend, she says, "Oh, sure! I should, shouldn't I? I should just get down on my knees and thank him. That's what my mother does" (par. 83). Sarcasm here, which is an angry irony, serves Lois to imply something totally opposite from what she actually says. It is also remarkable that when her outburst is over her voice becomes "flat and small" (par. 97). Her remoteness and her fury go hand in hand.

While Lois' expressive voice serves as a mocking tool, her dress continues as a symbol of challenge: she challenges her mother and Dick. She knows about her mother's vanity for nice things, how much she likes them and notices them when they are in the possession of other, more worldly-lucky, people. Lois herself is not indifferent to nice things. When she and Dick are out in the fields, she frets about her good dress being covered with burrs. She shakes them off carefully so as not to pull any threads. But unlike her mother, Lois uses her nice things defiantly to snub rich guys who forget the name of their girls after the summer is over; as she herself says, she wants to show them. In the scene that immediately precedes the implied sexual encounter in the barn, Lois' defiance against long-suffering humiliation rises again. "The drunken, nose-thumbing, toe-twirling satisfaction could not now be mistaken as she stood there foolishly, tauntingly, with her skirt spread out" (par. 99). She keeps touching the skirt of her dress, spreading it out flat in her hands, or simply holding it. Even just before she slaps Dick on the face, she has to first let go of the skirt.

Only during the act of love is Lois natural. Because of Lois, because of her ability to totally surrender herself, Dick is able to commit "[t]hat headlong journey" (par. 107) into his first sexual experience.

Immediately after they have left the barn, Lois' hostility and coldness come back. She again places a distance between herself and Dick. In the scene that precedes the finale, it is not Lois' voice that places the distance but the total lack of it. Her silence and her coldness stop Dick from performing a farewell kiss, a "fraudulent and theatrical … final gesture" (par. 119). Her silence allows Lois to end this short encounter on her own terms. At the very end of the story she speaks up again. Here, in the very last scene, her ostentatious politeness, her outlandish dress, and her sarcastic voice operate in a final convergence. Lois flattens the skirt of her dress, without again looking at Dick, gets out of the car, and in her "loud, crude, female voice, abusive and forlorn" (par. 124) cries to them, "Thanks for the ride!" (par. 125). Throughout the story, by expressing either nothing or a derisive opposite meaning, Lois is effectively saying, "You want me? You will get me. But I am going to be cold; I am not giving you even part of my heart and soul. You get my body only because, as it happens, it also requires sex – but that is all." That is Lois' statement. Thus, the rich and distinctive images in the story reveal the complex character of Lois and the main theme of her defiance against her fate. Alice Munro skillfully impregnates simple details with meaning; to one short word she gives the power of a symbol. That is the stroke of a master.

Work Cited

Munro, Alice. "Thanks for the Ride" in *Acting on Words: An Integrated Rhetoric, Reader and Handbook*. 2nd ed. Eds. David Brundage and Michael Lahey, Toronto: Pearson, 2009, 377-386.

For Further Thinking

1. Does Rison's essay provide a strong controlling idea? Where do you think her controlling idea is introduced? Where is it reinforced? What reasons (supports) does she use to back up her controlling idea, and thereby present a thesis? (*See Acting on Words* 76-91 for discussion of thesis statements.)

2. Make an outline of Rison's essay. Does the controlling idea contain supporting reasons and does the outline of the essay reflect a sense of supporting reasons? Explain. *Acting on Words*, Chapter 6, discusses outlining.)

3. *AOW* strongly advises you to use no fewer than six sentences per paragraph of scholarly writing. The penultimate paragraph of this essay is just two sentences long. Can you suggest reasons to justify that departure from standard form?

4. What techniques does the author deploy to integrate citations into her essay? When is her use of quotations most effective? When are they least effective?

5. In what ways is "The Theme of Defiance in Alice Munro's 'Thanks for the Ride'" a rhetorical analysis? In what ways isn't it?

6. Literary Studies instructors caution you, when analyzing fiction, to avoid producing a plot summary. It seems that in her essay "The Theme of Defiance," Rison has, to a considerable extent, followed the action of the story. Has she fallen into the trap of "mere plot summary," or, given her concern and her method, has she made a justified choice of organization? (It may be worth considering that a highly detailed analysis of a poem, called an exegesis, works in order from start to finish through the lines and stanzas of the poem under study, with a specific focus on certain technical functions.)

7. Munro typically writes from the point-of-view of a female narrator. In "Thanks for the Ride" she writes from the point-of-view of a male. For what reasons might she have made this choice for this particular story?

8. Write an essay response to Rison's analysis, offering clear explanations (with supporting detail) of how your interpretation amplifies or varies from hers.

Sample Essay Questions for Literary Analysis—Short Stories

Your instructor may provide you with specific topic questions helping you to explore a certain element or two of craft/technique in one or more works. Most questions for essays of literary analysis essentially promote the standard approach of examining how a certain literary element expresses and furthers theme. Here are some typical essay questions:

1. Examine imagery in Alice Munro's "Thanks for the Ride." Using two or three repeated images, demonstrate to what extent imagery contributes to meaning in the story.

2. Reflect upon meanings of the title "Thanks for the Ride" in relation to a detailed examination of the character of Lois.

3. Describe as closely as you can the narrative method of the poem "Ozymandias" (on page 44 of this document). What point of view does Shelley use in his poem, and what is the significance of that point of view?

4. Define and compare the tones and moods of "The Hockey Sweater" and "Thanks for the Ride." What differing outlooks and themes seem connected to these moods? Explain.

Analyzing a Poem

See our brief definition of poetry under "Basic Literary Forms Defined" earlier in this document. Analysts of poems may apply prosody (examination of metre, rhythm, stanza form, and/or sound)—highly technical and detailed matters of craft — or they may take an approach more typical in the analysis of prose narrative, such as focusing on situation, character and/or theme. The following analysis uses the latter approach, one suiting the subject, since the poem under study tells a story and places considerable importance on an element of fiction—narrative point of view. We now provide a little information concerning the poet and poem, followed by the short poem itself and then the sample analysis.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) — the husband of Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*—remains a major voice of the British poetic tradition. Classified by literary critics as a Romantic, part of a nineteenth century movement that rebelled against neo-classical constraints, Shelley is sometimes criticized for overly ornate language and fanciful ideas; but he is also recognized as a master craftsman, whose skills drew upon his remarkable dexterity in other languages. In keeping with the Romantic revolutionary consciousness, Shelley defied authority that he considered oppressive and was not afraid to question conventional beliefs and practices, even when the consequence was expulsion from Oxford University. The following much-anthologized poem tells of a certain tyrant and the ruins of a statue he had commanded be built to his greatness. Consider your own responses to this poem, then compare those to the literary analysis that follows.

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half-sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

(1818)

Practice Activity

Before reading the following analysis, consider how you would answer the following question:

> What point of view does Shelley use in his poem, and what is the significance of that point of view?

Stone, Sand, and Syllables:
A Legacy of Language in "Ozymandias"

Michael Lahey

Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias" (1818) tells of a tyrant who has built a magnificent city and has then ordered a gigantic, domineering statue of himself to represent his achievement long after his death. This mighty statue, surviving for many years, possibly centuries, is now disintegrating in its last pieces in the indifferent desert. Although this poem seems to warn against the corrosiveness and emptiness of all vanity, even the vanity of conquerors who build ancient cities, the poem's underlying meaning is really much more ambiguous than such easy sermonizing. Rather than a straight-forward caution against arrogance, the poem—its title even—ironically shows how the legacy of Ozymandias still lives on, but not on his own imperious terms.

"Ozymandias" contains several illusions and reversals of presumption. The poem significantly opens with an important structural surprise—a speaker ("I") who immediately tells the reader that the entire poem is someone else's experience and observation: "I met a traveler from an antique land who said . . . ." Usually, speakers (in poetry) and first-person narrators (in fiction) represent at least part of their own concerns, involvements and memories. Here, however, the speaker reports an experience second-hand: a poem about a random conversation about a stranger's experience. Despite the distancing effect of this frame narration (a speaker representing another speaker), the specific language of the poem that follows still makes readers feel as though they are present in this represented desert moment, the sand blowing back and forth. The fact is, however, the reader does not even know where this specific setting, this "antique land," is. Just as Ozymandias' boastful stone plaque commands people to "[l]ook on my works, ye Mighty, and despair," but points to nothing—to emptiness—the speaker's poem is only questionably there on its own terms. Instead, the poem is someone else's talk—either quoted or paraphrased or a dubious combination of the two —with only an uncertain degree or influence of the speaker's voice, the most important aspect, to comment on or conclude after the traveller's words.

Another quiet illusion of "Ozymandias" is that it supposedly reveals the folly of this despotic conqueror. Even though Ozymandias' great empire is gone, leveled by sand and wind, these last desert remnants of his presumed defeat to time and eternity still manage to stimulate the traveler to tell—and vividly—what he saw. Despite the nearly complete erosion of Ozymandias' architectural vision of himself, his legacy nonetheless lives on through the traveller's talk, then through this terse writing: this poem. The literary work entitled "Ozymandias," which has been published again and again internationally, thus contradicts its own apparent "lesson" or implication about the inevitable obliteration and insignificance of all people, whether powerful or powerless. The poem instead ensures that some people's words and deeds persist through history, as the tourist's sighting becomes the conversation that becomes literature. Since the poem replaces the statue, as language hardens into the permanence of writing, Ozymandias' memory survives, but not on the tyrant's original or forecasted terms.

Another significant complication about the nature of presumptions in "Ozymandias" occurs at the level of represented "voice," the source of any poem's literary language. Since Shelly's anonymous speaker is so quick to attribute the poem's language to the anonymous traveller, the reader must ask, exactly whose poem, whose language, is this? By the second line, the poem seems to become exclusively the traveller's expression rather than the speaker's. The punctuation of the colon conspicuously signals this shift—"[w]ho said: . . . . " However, we can never be sure exactly how much of the poem emerges from the speaker's own language (when he either improvises from or perhaps loosely paraphrases the traveller) or the traveller's original language and specific imagery of the desert scene. In this tangled manner, the poem unfolds through a strange, slightly uneasy and uncertain co-authorship. In fact, "Ozymandias," despite its direct, clear even deceptively simple language, exists as an indeterminate fusion of the words of not only *two* people (one person stating, but possibly embellishing and improving in eloquence what another has said), but *four* people, when the reader considers Ozymandias' own words quoted in the poem and originally "written" in stone by the obedient sculptor. While Ozymandias, the tyrant, was deeply invested in his sole ownership of territory, property, and achievement ("my works"), the poem that chronicles him has such an at once interlocked and diffuse authorship that it cannot be considered any one person's work or utterance, any one person's property.

Yet the most subtle reversal of presumption involves the undeniable reversal of power the poem performs. Power and authority move *from* the tyrant with his city, people, soldiers and resources *to* the sculptor with only his chisel and skill *to* the anonymous tourist *to* the speaker controlling through poetic writing the memory and meaning of Ozymandias' works and words. Notably, the speaker also shapes the several meanings involved in the act of writing about this Ozymandias: for instance, the meaning of collaborative writing, or of transforming history in its "messiness" into literature in its relative "neatness," or of offering a supposed lesson on colossal vanity even as that very lesson secures some cultural power and capital for the poet, Percy Bysshe Shelly. Shelly's famous poem, then, not only surprisingly affirms this dead tyrant's fantasy of historical immortality by representing him, but also—and arguably more powerfully—asserts its own immortality as a work of art, as authority shifts from tyrant to poet. Art,

more than the immediacy of tyranny or even the longer crushing stretch of imperialism, shapes Ozymandias' persistence over time and precisely on an artist's terms. The poem's strongest irony (which can be defined as the distance between intentions and effects) is this reversal of power positions, where the formerly most dominate figure is now powerless to others' lasting representations.

Focus questions

1. In your own words, re-state the thesis of this essay. Include the controlling idea and supporting reasons as part of the thesis assertion. If necessary, see Chapter 6 *AOW* for more on thesis statements.

2. What main rhetorical elements does Lahey consider? Does he follow our advice to show how a certain element of craft contributes to the meaning of the work (the thematic statement)? Explain.

3. How thorough and effective do you consider his analysis of these elements to be? Why?

4. What standard(s) of evaluation has Lahey applied?

5. How effective is Lahey's application of his standards of evaluation? Explain and illustrate.

6. In 2005, University of California Pulitzer prize winning geography professor Jared Diamond published a book called *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. The epigraph Diamond chose to introduce this study of "failed" and "successful"societies ancient and modern is the sonnet "Ozymandias." Read Diamond's book and evaluate his use of the words "failed" and "successful." Does he demonstrate an overly pat understanding of the words, a reductive, one-sided interpretation akin to the conventional

interpretations of “Ozymandias” that Lahey describes? Or does Diamond seem to argue a convincing outlook?

Analyzing a Song

Songs, like poems, provide fine subjects for rhetorical analysis. You may wish to consider the interplay of the music with the words, or—as the author of the following analysis—concentrate simply on the lyrics. If you choose to analyze a song lyric as an assignment in rhetorical analysis, check with your instructor first to be sure the subject seems sufficiently rich for the exercise. Song lyrics do not necessarily function successfully apart from their arrangements (or in some cases even with their arrangements). For an analysis of “The Card Cheat” by the Clash, see *Acting on Words* 92-94. Some questions about that essay follow in this document. Also in this document is a student analysis of “Can’t Stop the Prophet” by Jeru the Damaja (Kendrick Jeru Davis) and tips on how to quote from poetry illustrated through a discussion of “Oops! I Did it Again” by Britney Spears. Copies of these lyrics are easily accessible by searching internet.

Practice Activity

Find the lyrics for “The Card Cheat” and “Can’t Stop the Prophet.” If possible, listen to those two songs as well. Decide what thematic statement you believe the lyrics are making, and identify at least one element of craft that plays an important role in expressing that thematic statement in each song. For each song, outline an essay of 750-1,000 words in which you demonstrate how craft contributes to the meaning of the lyric.

Discuss your outlines with course-mates and your instructor. Then compare your ideas to those that are expressed in one of the following two analyses by Mark Simpson and Rebecca Jenney.

Betraying the Spirit of Punk? “The Card Cheat”

Mark Simpson

This essay appears in *Acting on Words,* pages 92-94. Once you have read and contemplated Simpson's analysis, consider the following questions:

1. Does Mark Simpson follow our advice to focus on one or two elements of craft? If so, which one has he chosen? Read the lyrics, better yet, listen to the song, and then discuss with course-mates and instructor whether you think Simpson has chose the best element of craft to study, and why?

2. Does Simpson direct his analysis ultimately to a statement of theme that he finds in the lyric or ultimately to something else? Explain.

3. As the essay introduction suggests, metaphors of gambling, card games, dealers, and card-sharks abound in popular songs. Suggest some reasons why this may be so.

Superhero Rap: "Can't Stop the Prophet" Talkin' to the People

Rebecca Jenney

[Note that Jenney follows APA documentation style.]

During the twentieth century, the United States of America gave birth to many new styles of music. The early part of the century saw the beginnings of jazz and blues, which eventually morphed into soul. After that came the sounds of funk and disco. The later half of the century saw the many styles of new music unite and transform into the modern day phenomenon known as rap music (or hip-hop). At first, many people thought the new sounds were simply a silly trend that would one day go away. However, rap music's popularity only gained momentum and is now one of the biggest money makers in the industry. When rap emerged many people considered it to be music for urban-dwelling

Black people. This attitude has also changed as the hip-hop nation now embodies many cultures and countries around the globe.

Those who dislike the music label it as incessant noise. Much of the mainstream rap music that is seen on cable television is considered repetitive and unoriginal. Even many of those who enjoy rap music agree that conventional rap is not very good as it is produced by record executives who do not understand the rap culture; they just want to make a profit. One rap artist says, "As with most big business, it is always solely about the money, and whenever that's the case, then usually the art is compromised" (Dee, 2003, p. x). What is considered by many rap artists to be real rap music is labeled as the sound of an underground society and has quite a different message from the rap portrayed by mass media. The rapper also points out that "the hip-hop media portrays the streets as a one-dimensional entity of drugs, sex, and violence spawning (rappers) that convey the attitudes of the streets through non-productive, profane, profanity-laden lyrics" (Dee, 2003, p. 34). People who do not comprehend underground rap music dismiss it as ignorant nonsense, but upon close inspection some of it can be deciphered as modern-day poetry.

One of today's underground poets is Kendrick Jeru Davis, from Brooklyn; he goes by the rapper name of Jeru the Damaja. He portrays positive messages to his peers in an intelligent and amusing way. His use of street slang is an effective way of communicating with the large communities who speak the same language. Pioneer rapper Kool Moe Dee agrees:

> Jeru the Damaja is that unique emcee that uses the classic braggadocio rhyme style infused with positive messages. The best example of this is heard on the cartoon-like, superhero song 'Can't Stop the Prophet.' This is one of the best concept records in Hip-hop history (2003, p. 33).

Analyzing this song reveals how it is so effective in portraying the writer's message.

In his song, Kendrick refers to the hero as "The Prophet." The dictionary describes a prophet as someone who "tells what will happen or…who preaches what he thinks has been revealed to him" (Avis, 1973, p. 887). The author establishes his character as the narrator who is on a mission of enlightening the people in the ghettos of New York City. Also, since many religions contain references to prophets, the author

institutes that the main character is a skilled hero sent by a higher power to spread his message. The quest of the prophet is almost a reflection of the author's real life mission because even though "like many of the real [rappers] he did not see a lot of mainstream success… [p]art of this was by design…musically and lyrically Jeru was only concerned about the streets" (Dee, 2003, p. 33). The prophet is a brave character who embarks on his mission even though he knows about the danger of his pursuit.

The writer makes the main character of the story seem like a comic book super-hero through phrases such as "I leap over lies in a single bound" and "battling my arch nemesis Mr. Ignorance" (Davis, K. 1994, track 7). The prophet talks about the super-powers he uses against the enemy when he mentions that his weapons are "sharp steel book marks" and he has "lightning speed like the flash" and a "seventh sense" that "senses danger" (track 7). The author also reveals he has the capability to perform "dim-mak poison hand touch of death" (track 7). This is a reference to "one of the most treasured secret and forbidden techniques ever devised in Chinese kung-fu" (Hsiek, 1989, p. i). Since the martial arts are considered a form of knowledge, the writer encourages the concept that any form of education is beneficial to oneself and the community.

Creating comic book heroes and villains is a great way to relate to youth as many of them will be familiar with the cartoon magazines. The personification of Ignorance makes the concept of being uneducated seem a threat. Jeru also personifies emotions like hatred, jealousy, envy, deceit and fear, which define the bad characters in the story. These negative feelings are soldiers in the army employed by Mr. Ignorance whom, the prophet claims, is "running rampant" (Davis). Thus, Jeru establishes both the conflict of man versus man and man versus himself, while entertaining the listener.

The poet builds his story by having the hero talk to other characters around the city. They help direct the prophet to where Mr. Ignorance is hiding. At the same time, the conversation between individuals assists the author with a smooth transition between stanzas. He also infuses his story with reality, however, by including local details, the Hoyt and Schermerhorn A-train stop, the library and the barbershop.

Another of the reasons that this song is so effective in connecting with the listener is because the author communicates to the people on their own level utilizing their own language. The rapper's street slang is a way in which he relates to his intended listeners.

. For example, the word “Yo” is used quite a bit throughout the story. Although “Yo” is not in the English dictionary, it is part of what is arguably a new language Ebonics, traditionally used by African Americans in the inner city. An Ebonics dictionary labels “Yo” as “A declarative or imperative exclamation, whether alone or within a sentence” (Urban Dictionary, 2006). Jeru uses many words from Ebonics including “buggin” (freaking out), “illin” (doing things you should not be doing like drugs or vandalism) and “nigga” (from one black man to another: meaning brother or friend) (Urban Dictionary, 2006). These slang words help maintain that he is talking with the people on their level.

The main concept of the song is that the prophet is taking matters into his own hands to eliminate ignorance from the ghetto. Many of the black people in poor areas feel that the police are trying to oppress them instead of attempting to serve or protect them. When this is the case the public must then serve themselves. This opinion is reiterated by a former gang member; Monster Kody Scott, who said that “When the police and other government agencies don’t seem to care about what is going on in our communities, then those of us who must live in them must take responsibility for their protection and maintenance” (Shakur, 1993, p. 379). This is exactly what the prophet seems to be doing. The prophet also hints at police repression when he says “they hit me with the dart filled with the pork chop serum” (Davis). This is reference to the classic association between the police and pigs and, in fact, the music video gives pig faces to Mr. Ignorance and his company.

The story has a great concept and addresses three negative effects on society resulting from lack of knowledge: teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and gun violence. In his lyrics, Davis asserts that these problems arise from ignorance, but he expresses this in a way that easily captures his target audience. The author’s message is strong and is executed effectively. The best part about it is that “he approaches it poetically. He doesn’t just rhyme, he’s actually doing it in a poetic format” (Dee, 2003, p. 35). Such praise from the rapper’s peers reinforces that Jeru’s lyrics are nothing short of a masterpiece tooled within the modern-day art form known as rap music. He ends the adventure in classic comic book fashion as he makes a suggestion about the next sequel, enticing the listener who is yearning for more.

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Focus Questions

1. In your own words, re-state the thesis of this essay. Include the controlling idea and supporting reasons as part of the thesis assertion. If necessary, see Chapter 6 *AOW* for more on thesis statements.
2. What main literary elements does Jenney consider?
3. How thorough and effective do you consider her analysis of these elements to be? Why?
4. What standard(s) of evaluation has Jenney applied?
5. How effective is Jamieson's's application of her standards of evaluation? Do any points seem to need further explanation? Explain and illustrate.

Oops! I Quoted Her Again: How to Quote from Poetry

Chapter 19 *AOW* provides detailed help with how to cite sources. Further information is provided in "The Basics of Documentation" at the Athabasca University Write Site at http://www.athabascau.ca/html/services/write-site. Citations include summarizing ideas, paraphrasing passages, and integrating direct quotations. When the lines you wish to quote come from poetry or song lyrics, additional questions arise due to poetic line endings and other distinctive features of verse. In the following short analysis, a colleague who wishes to remain anonymous demonstrates how to quote from poetry.

Not long ago, university texts would never have published work by or about popular singers. However, prejudices mellow (or trends prevail), and recently both Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen have been touted for Nobel Prizes in literature. If Britney Spears beats them to it, perhaps our modest colleague will simply have to step forward. The lyrics to "Oops! I Did it Again" are easily available on internet. If you can, read the lyric and/or listen to the song before reading the following illustration of quotation style. The cited numbers refer to lines of the lyric.

"Oops! I Quoted Her Again"

In "Oops! I Did it Again," Britney Spears creates an intensely vulnerable speaker unable to mask her feelings of self-disgust. The repetition of the casual phrase "Oops! I did it again" lends a deceptively lighthearted tone to Spears' heartfelt lyric, in which she shows a genuine fear that she will "lose all [her] senses" (6). By ending the first stanza with the line, "That is just too typically me," Spears suggests that the speaker's callousness toward her spurned lover stems from self-repugnance (7). The pattern repeats itself in the second stanza:

> I'm dreaming away
> Wishing that heroes, they truly exist
> I cry, watching the days
> Can't you see I'm a fool in so many ways (10-13)

The garbled syntax, along with the caesuras in lines 11 and 12, underscore the speaker's sense of helplessness before her own failings. In four short lines, her sense of herself diminishes rapidly from dreamer to fool. Unable to withstand the pressure of being placed on a pedestal, she cries desperately: "You think that I'm sent from above / I'm not that innocent" (20-21). The speaker begins by accusing her lover of misrepresenting her, but her accusations quickly turn inward. Repeatedly, she shifts the blame onto herself, betraying an underlying self-loathing that proves impossible to escape.

Writing a Film Review

Joyce Miller

In the following instructions, Joyce Miller provides basic guidelines in how to analyze a film or TV narrative. Depending on your particular interests, you may wish to supplement this information by researching technical procedures specific to the field, such as camera, editing, and computer assisted methods.

Writing a film review is something almost anyone who has seen a movie has begun. You discuss at length the believability of the plot and the acting, the effectiveness of the special effects, and-- if applicable-- how the film compares to the book.

Writing a critical film review for a wider audience than the friend you saw the film with is much like a literary analysis. You need to examine the parts and interrelationships of the film (employing analysis, process description, summarization, and evaluation). Based on this examination, you reach an evaluation of the merits of the film. Like all good literary analysis, your review will be a form of argumentation, persuading your reader of the merits and insights of your evaluation (See Chapters 14, 15, and16 of *Acting on Words* for the basics of analysis and argumentation). You will, of course, need to make some adaptation to address the unique qualities of film.

Because review writing involves both analysis and an element of argumentation (you wish to sway the reader with your evaluation), you must therefore take into careful

account your own reading audience as well as the audience for which the film is intended, the dramatic and technical elements of the film, and the goals of the filmmakers. Failing to consider all these aspects means you may fail to give the film a fair and meaningful review.

Reviews written for daily newspaper audiences tend to be light, breezy and conversational. Basically consumer reports, they give quick-sketch impressions of the important aspects of the film reviewed so that readers will know whether they want to spend the money and time to go see it. Such reviews may seem persuasive in stating their verdict, but they usually lack the in-depth analysis needed to support their opinion. They do not go into enough analytical depth to serve as proper models for the review you should be attempting for purposes of scholarly evaluation.

Reviews for magazines like the *New Yorker* and weekly newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* or the *New York Times* supplement are more in-depth. They deal thoroughly with one or two aspects and are often more analytical than persuasive. Reviews for academic journals are similar to this approach, but they assume more specialized knowledge on the part of the reader. They may critique one film within the context of a body of work or argue the validity of a certain interpretation. They, too, usually stress analysis over evaluation. We suggest you base your review on the type described in this paragraph. It may not be necessary to place the film in a broader critical context, but at least aspire to the more thorough examination given in the above weekly supplements. The rest of this discussion will deal with the more analytical, in-depth type of review.

Steps to Writing a Successful Analytical Review

1. If you are to write a responsible film review, it is necessary to do some homework. If the film is based on a play or a book, read the original so that you can draw comparisons.

2. Research the director. In film, the director is the primary artist. The director is responsible for all creative aspects of the film, including the acting, the script and the '"look." Of course, the director does not usually do any of these, but oversees a sometimes vast company of people who do. The director chooses the actors and often prefers to work with the same cinematographers and editors. A director with power in the industry can hire and fire writers at will, sometimes going through several on one project.

3. Watch other films by the same director (if this is the director's first feature film, take that into account). Note whether he or she usually works with the same writer, editor or cinematographer. Each of these people has a major impact on the finished film. Note whether the director seems to have favourite themes, motifs or styles. Read reviews of previous work. Find out if this director's films are usually blockbuster hits or ones that appeal to a smaller, specialized audience.

4. View the film more than once. This way, you can allow yourself to simply experience it the first time and then watch it critically the second time, avoiding the problem described by E.B. White in "The Critic":

> The critic leaves at curtain fall
> To find, in starting to review it,
> He scarcely saw the play at all
> For watching his reaction to it.
>
> (qtd. in Hudson 44)

5. As soon as you leave the theatre, jot down your thoughts and reactions. Even if you watch a video or DVD, wait until it is finished before you start making notes. If you start and stop the tape or make notes in the dark you may find your review plagued by the "E.B. White Effect." A film is meant to be experienced as a whole, and you must allow yourself to have that experience before you can be fair to it. If you have watched it with an audience, compare your reactions to theirs. An exploration of why your response

seemed to be the same or different from everyone else's may become the basis of your review.

6. After you have noted your impressions, think about why and how the film elicited these responses. This may be a good point to watch it a second time. Aspects to consider include theme, plot, characters, tone and spectacle. We now provide more instruction on these.

Aspects to Consider

The categories of theme, plot, characters, tone and spectacle were set out by Aristotle in relation to live theatre 2500 years ago, but they are applicable to film criticism today. You will have a stronger review if you look at the categories most relevant to the film you are reviewing rather than trying to deal with all of them. You may find these discussed in detail in any standard book of literary terms, but there are special considerations when you apply them to film.

Theme

Identify a major theme, just as you would with prose fiction. Then consider all the ways the film supports the theme, especially through the following elements.

Spectacle

Because film is primarily a visual medium, spectacle is tremendously important and will inform your discussion of all other elements. In conversation, we use "spectacle" to refer to explosions, car crashes and other showy special effects. In criticism, it has a broader meaning. Aristotle uses "spectacle" to refer to all aspects that make the experience of viewing a performance different from reading the same work on the page. For example, if you were to read Shakespeare's *Richard III*, you might imagine the characters in Elizabethan costumes roaming around a dark stone palace. But the director of a recent film version set the action in Nazi Germany, with the characters wearing clothing from the 1940s. In theatre, "spectacle" refers to set, costume and interpretation of the script. In film, it also includes art direction, cinematography, soundtrack and editing. The

director oversees all of these elements, but the artists who actually implement them influence the end product.

Art Direction

The art director creates the look of the world the camera will shoot. This includes sets and location choices, costumes and hairstyles, and props - everything from purses to vases on tables to cars and furniture.

Cinematography

The cinematographer is responsible for filming the world created by the art director in a way that is appropriate to the vision of the director. The cinematographer can be tremendously influential, or little more than a camera operator, depending on reputation and relationship with the director. The cinematographer lights interior sets, chooses appropriate filters for outdoor scenes and composes the shots. Any one of these can drastically affect the emotional quality of the finished film. The same scene shot under cool or warm lighting will give you an entirely different feeling about the event. A character crying shot from a high angle (so the viewer looks down on him or her) will probably look helpless, pathetic and childlike. The same scene shot from a low angle (so the viewer looks up at the character) will likely result in the character appearing noble and strong despite the tears.

Soundtrack

Most American filmmakers aim to use music and sound in a way that will enhance the mood of the film without distracting the viewer from the image and the story. The lush, swelling mood music of *Titanic* is a prime example. On the other hand, for some films directors prefer a jarring, in-your-face soundtrack such as that used in *Romeo + Juliet* (1996, starring Leonardo DiCaprio). Or they may fill the film with popular songs that suggest the period, complement the events, jar against them (*A Clockwork Orange, 1971)* or comment on them.

Editing

In the editing process, the director and editor decide how to join together the cinematographer's film footage. The director may choose to make the film flow smoothly from shot to shot in a way that subtly enhances the narrative (*Titanic, 1997*). This style is the prevalent one in Hollywood. An approach that has become popular recently is choppy, fast editing that mimics the style of music videos. *Pulp Fiction (1994)* is edited in this style. Especially in your second viewing, note how the editing contributes to or distracts from the plot.

Plot

Deal with plot as you would when critiquing prose fiction. Keep plot summary to a minimum. Assume that your reader already knows the plot and when you do refer to the plot, it is as a helpful reminder. Your goal is not to describe the plot but to explore the meaning of some circumscribed aspect of it.

Character

The major difference between film and written fiction is that all character analysis must be done from the outside. Inner life is revealed through the actions of the character along with mannerisms and vocal inflections chosen by the actor as well as clues in the set, costume, soundtrack, editing, and comments of other characters. One exception occurs when the filmmakers choose to show us the dreams or fantasies of a certain character; nevertheless, as a general rule, film reveals character from the outside, according to what the character does or says or according to what is said about that individual.

Be careful not to confuse the actor with the character. Refer to the character by the character's name, not the actor's. If you wish to discuss acting, refer to actors by their surnames, in keeping with MLA or APA style. Acting is an element of spectacle; it makes the difference between reading about the character and viewing her or him. If you wish to evaluate acting, imagine other ways the character might have been portrayed given the same script and overall style of the film. Remember that the director is ultimately responsible. Actors may play roles in a manner that annoys you because they

were directed to play it that way. Compare this performance to their work in other films. If they seem more capable in others, it may be the directing at fault, or they may have been miscast in a role that does not suit them. Because our society is so focused around the cult of the actor, it is common to mistakenly blame the lead actor for the overall quality of the film. Although actors seem important on the screen, their influence is usually minor.

Tone

In film, tone is also primarily communicated through the elements of spectacle. Maintaining a consistent tone is a challenge given the enormity of the task of filmmaking. Inconsistency of tone is often a problem point, although some films purposely vary wildly in tone. *Independence Day (1996)* begins in the tone of a standard "disaster" movie. The world seems doomed, not just because of the narrative, but because of the look, sound and "feel" of a realistic, and rather cold, USA. Two thirds of the way through, the film kicks into an action adventure where suddenly heroes can blast into space and do superhuman things to bring about a contrived happy ending. All elements of the film shift to support the new tone. This was a deliberate choice by the filmmakers. To millions of audience members it was successful, but a critic might not find it so.

Bring Your Insights to a Critical Position

After you have sketched out your thoughts in these areas, draft out your review. Be sure your thesis is clear and complete, whether you choose deductive or inductive placement, a direct list or general approach (see *Acting on Words* 77-91). Be sure that you are fair and that your claims are supported. Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) posed three questions that art critics should ask about the work they critique. These are applicable with some adaptation to a film review:

1. What is the artist attempting?
2. Did he or she succeed?
3. Was it worth the effort?

(qtd. in Hansen, 254)

1. Consider what the artistic team is attempting. It is unfair to criticize *Star Wars* (1977, re-issued as *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope, 1997, 2004*) for being unrealistic when it is clearly intended to be a fantasy. In our opening comments, when we spoke of a film being "believable," we meant within the world created by the work, not as an example of what we might see in our community or the wider world. The poet and literary critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) spoke of a successful storyteller's ability to induce in us, the audience or reader, "a willing suspension of disbelief." When a *Buffy the Vampire* episode succeeded, it was because everything in the episode made it all right for us to accept an appointed teenage female monster slayer. Not everyone gives such shows the chance to suspend their disbelief, but do not lash out at a film simply because it does not fit your expectations or because it is not your favourite genre.

2. Once you have carefully considered what the filmmakers were attempting, you are better equipped to evaluate the film using fair criteria. You might not enjoy Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams* (1990), but you might recognize it as a triumphant work in recreating the lovely and disturbing images of the world of dreams.

3. This is the most subjective of all Goethe's questions, and you must use care when answering it. Film reviewers certainly do use their own response as one part of the answer, but also consider the audience it was made for as well as the value of artistic achievements that might not have broad appeal.

These questions can help you to be fair in your evaluation of the aspects of the film, as they focus you on the goals of the filmmaker.

In summary, film criticism is similar to other literary analysis, but adapted to encompass the unique aspects of the medium. A film review evaluates a film using criteria that is fair given the purposes of the filmmakers. A film critic must write with the audience in mind: not only the reading audience, but the viewing audience of the film.

Analytical Review of a TV Series-- Example

Characters in films and TV shows speak dialogue; the programs themselves, in most cases, unfold according to written directions in scripts; and the visual medium (whether film or video) possesses its own language, methods and principles that have been lavishly defined and illustrated over the years by numerous film studies critics and theoreticians. Consequently, it is certainly possible to write a rhetorical analysis of a film or TV program, such as the one that follows. In fact, responding in a similar vein to a particular film or TV show may provide an interesting way for you to explore this specific form of literary analysis.

Starving Woman/Stuffed Man in *The Sopranos*

Joyce Miller

As one of the more thoughtful shows on television over the past decade and still widely watched on DVD rentals, *The Sopranos* layers many motifs into its satire on North American society. For example, images of nature, introduced by the ducks that visit Tony's suburban swimming pool, can be found in every episode of the first season. Images of women in the form of statues as well as characters are also dominant. One of the show's meaningful motifs seems to have been relatively overlooked thus far: food and its relationship to culture, gender, and the violence that underlies the world of the characters (and by extension, our society).

The show's location within Italian-American culture allows it to explore both the Italian celebration of good food and the American uneasiness with food as a dangerous substance, liable to destroy health and happiness. The resultant dichotomies range from humorous to tragic. In the first season, Tony presides over a family dinner that includes

his murderous mother and scheming Uncle Junior. This particular treatment uses humour. In the second season, in a contrastingly grim mood, the heartbroken informer Pussy breaks down at AJ's food-laden confirmation party.

With few variations, the men in the show are overweight and the women underweight. Although this may be due partly to the look favoured by commercial television producers, it is made too dominant to be dismissed. Tony deals with friends and enemies over food, and bonds uneasily with his son over ice cream sundaes. Weight-related references are made about almost all of the men. On the other hand, Dr. Melfi has to leave a family meal in one episode and is evicted from a restaurant in another. Carmela constantly prepares and offers food and sits down with friends in restaurants but seldom eats. Her starvation is made explicit in her first-season relationship with her priest; the two of them prepare meals together and presumably eat, but she is starving sexually and spiritually, and he cannot satisfy either of these hungers. Tony's sister Janice is the only overweight major female character, and the only one to openly acknowledge and participate in the violence that sustains them.

At the heart of the show is brutality, and every act of every character is in some way a response to this. Aside from Janice, the women hold themselves apart from the violence and judge the men for participating in it, yet they cannot deny its essential role in their lives. In an early episode, Tony's mother parallels this when she angrily refuses the candy he has brought her, even as she manipulates him into leaving some with her. The men, in order to uphold their code of honour, glut themselves with food as well as violence. The meals they take together are rituals that precede and follow the often-ritualistic acts of violence. Meals with their families reaffirm that what they do is right. Although they recognize their problems with both weight and violence, they cannot make the enormous shift that would be necessary to change. Because of the tight relationship between food and violence, they cannot stop eating without risking their lives.

If we, as viewers, accept that *The Sopranos* is a satire of our society, then we must acknowledge its dark vision that in a world fed by violence, neither gluttony nor abstinence is a choice. Both are reactions dictated by the roles we are born into. Even if we have the will to change, the way of change is hidden, if it is there at all.

Focus questions

1. In your own words, re-state the thesis of this essay. Include the controlling idea and supporting reasons as part of the thesis assertion. If necessary, see Chapter 6 *AOW* for more on thesis statements.

2. What main rhetorical elements does Miller consider?

3. How thorough and effective do you consider her analysis of these elements to be? Why?

4. What standard(s) of evaluation has Miller applied?

5. How effective is Miller's application of her standards of evaluation? Explain and illustrate.

A Final Word on Why Study Literature

In a recent issue of *Academic Matters*, UBC Professor William Rees makes the following observation: "People generally believe that modern nations are no longer the slaves and dupes of myth-- humanity has long moved beyond the groundless fears, falsehoods and unscientific beliefs that distorted reality and shaped the lives of earlier cultures" (9). He goes on to the following further comments:

> But for all the achievements of modernity, it is time that we acknowedged an increasingly evident paradox. This may well be the age of science, but this fact has not prevented us from being as myth-bound as any preceding culture…. The assertion that ours is a myth-free culture may actually be one of our most important cultural myths! (9)

Indeed, in his final sentence of *A Defence of Poetry* (para. 48), Percy Bysshe Shelley declares that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." As a poet—by

which he meant "story-maker"—Shelley realized the enormous impact of oral and written literatures on how we understand the world. In "Jerusalem," Chapter 1, lines 20 – 21, British poet William Blake (1757-1827) writes,

> I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans

What these ideas point to is the power of metaphors, images, and represented identities in the stories we acccept and tell: the power of these influences may be all the greater if they go unnoticed. America, for example, has gone over a hundred years without really acknowledging the effects upon individuals and society of depictions of Aboriginals in Hollywood movies and other media. In her book *"Indian" Stereotypes in TV Science Fiction*, Sierra Adare explains why she is passionately concerned about these stereotypes:

> … I am so passionate because these careless and universally acccepted stereotypes do damage. Negative "Indian" stereotypes do physical, mental, emotional, and financial harm to First Nations individuals (2).

She goes on to provide examples and evidence. This one example should be sufficient for now to reinforce that stories are not "harmless entertainment" as Hollywood and so many others like to say. They shape our lives, whether we admit it or not. We know people by the stories they tell and live by. Surely this makes the study of literature a study with profound implications.

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