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SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT 1 - American Literature – SHS1302

POETRY

1. Emerson: *Brahma*

Greatly influenced by a sacred text of Hinduism, Katha-Upanishad, “Brahma” is a philosophical explication of the universal spirit by that name. The poetic form of elegiac quatrain is used to represent the solemn nature of the subject. Throughout the poem, Brahma appears as the only speaker, sustaining the continuity of the work. That the spirit is the only speaker signifies not only its absolute nature but also its sustaining power, upon which the existence of the entire universe—metaphorically, the poem—is based.

This poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson is written from the perspective of the Hindu spirit, Brahma, as indicated by the title. Brahma is a sort of universal energy, and in this poem, he addresses the lack of understanding humans have of what he is and can do.

He begins by stating that any "slayer" who really believes that he is killing, and equally any "slain" person who truly believes he is dead, does not understand the "subtle ways" of Brahma, who stays, turns, and returns continually.

Brahma goes on to explain his universality in terms of opposites. To him, "shadow and sunlight" are the same thing, and gods thought "vanished" by others are visible to him.

Those who do not pause to consider Brahma have thought poorly and made bad decisions. Brahma explains that he is everything—he is doubt, and he is the one who doubts; he is the hymn sung by the Brahmins. It is Brahma who is encapsulated by every human experience, and Brahma who is praised by those who are seeking spirits.

The "strong gods," Brahma says, yearn to live where Brahma lives—which is to say, everywhere. At the end of the poem, Brahma urges the reader, a person who loves "the good," to seek out Brahma and pursue him, rather than "heaven." We can recognize the sentiment here from other transcendentalist poetry of Emerson's—he is urging the reader to seek satisfaction and, indeed, selfreliance on earth, in this life, rather than living for some far-off spiritual future.

“Brahma” is an excellent reflection and representation of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s work as a whole. Though he is more widely known as a writer of essays, several of his poems may be seen as keys to his use of style and theme in all of his work, and this is one of those poems. Stylistically, he uses the same spiral or circular method that he does in his prose, rather than the more straightforward linear development used by most poets of his time. Thematically, he insists on the same spiritual and physical unity and harmony in the universe, expressed in a similarly intensive and dense language, as he does in his essays. These qualities demand much from the reader.

“Brahma” is a poem of sixteen lines, divided into four quatrains. In order to understand and appreciate this poem fully, one must know something about Eastern religion, especially Hinduism. In Hindu theology, Brahma (or, more commonly, Brahman) is the supreme spirit or divine reality in the universe, the eternal spirit from which all has come and to which all shall return (similar to what

Emerson more commonly called the Over-Soul). The “strong gods” (line 13) are secondary gods who, like all mortals, seek ultimate union with the supreme god, Brahma: They include Indra, the god of the sky; Agni, the god of fire; and Yama, “the red slayer” (line 1), or god of death. The “sacred

Seven” (line 14) are the highest holy persons or saints in Hinduism, who also seek union (or reunion) with Brahma.

In *stanza 1*, Emerson insists that in the creative spirit of the universe, nothing dies; if death thinks that in fact it kills, or if those who are killed think that they are really dead, they are wrong, for death is maya, or illusion. Brahma is subtle; the patterns of life and death, of eternal return, are not always obvious to the human eye or mind. Through the intuition, however, a person can see and understand his or her role in these patterns and can accept and learn from them.

In the *stanza 2*, the reader discovers the essential unity of opposites—what Emerson called polarity. The physical and spiritual are intimately intertwined, with the physical being the concrete representation in the material world of the spiritual, which alone is real. In Emerson’s terms, “both shadow and sunlight are the same” (line 6); in other words, light and dark, good and evil, life and death, happiness and sadness, and “shame and fame” (line 8) are all the same. They are illusions which mortals believe to be real but which are not. In the same way, all human experience is one

and is eternally present; what is “far or forgot” (line 5) is in fact near, and both past and future are encapsulated in the present moment.

Stanza 3, suggests that one can never escape this creative energy, since it is present everywhere in the universe. Humans ignore it at their own peril, since it alone is real, and it encompasses both “the doubter and the doubt” (line 11). It is the song of creative joy sung by the Brahmin, the highest caste in Hinduism. Fortunately, however, even if one does ignore the creative spirit, it remains present in one’s life, and eventually one’s spiritual eyes will open and one will recognize it. Both the person who doubts and the doubts themselves are essential parts of the universal plan.

Stanza 4 states that all seek union with this eternal spirit—whether lesser gods, saints, or those persons who are considerably farther down on the spiral of spiritual enlightenment. If one loves the good, regardless of one’s faults, one shall find it. Even if one is insecure or “meek” in one’s beliefs, one should turn away from the illusion of the Calvinist Christian heaven, where entrance is limited to the very few elect, and all others are rejected and damned. One should seek the Brahma, or OverSoul, the eternal spirit of creativity and life in the universe, from which all have come and to which all will return.

Theme

In this poem, spoken by the Hindu deity, Brahma, Emerson conveys the theme that the human soul is immortal. Likewise, the poem captures the idea that it is not the physical world that is significant but, rather the spiritual, and, as a result, humanity's concepts of near and far or light and shade are illusory. The one who kills a body, a "slayer," does not truly kill, as the soul continues to live on even after the body is gone (just as it existed prior to the body's creation), and the slain is not actually destroyed because his soul is also immortal; we only believe that we kill or are killed because we do not know "the subtle ways / [Brahma] keep[s], and pass[es], and turn[s] again" (lines 3-4). Moreover, concepts invented by humanity to understand our physical world are only illusions because they do not exist for the immortal soul. Brahma says that "shame and fame" are "one" to him, just as "Shadow and sunlight are the same" and "Far or forgot to [him] is near" (lines 8, 6, 5). These ideas extend both from Emerson's study of Hinduism as well as from his transcendentalist philosophies.

Forms and Devices

“Brahma” reflects Emerson’s periodic use of the standard poetic meter and rhyme of his time: The four quatrains are in iambic tetrameter, and his use of coupled rhymes (*abab*) is a reflection of his thematic sense of the inescapable polarity in the universe.

The central figure in the poem is the speaker, who is Brahma, or the Over-Soul, the creative spirit in the universe. Having the Brahma as the speaker allows Emerson to posit the unity within the world’s polaric structure; though contradictions seem to exist, he suggests, they are in fact meaningful paradoxes and not meaningless contradictions. Emerson makes extensive use of irony in his poetic strategy; he indicates that death is not really death, that shadow and sunlight are the same, and that both the doubter and doubt are contained within the Brahma, to which all persons aspire to return. There are other ironies as well: It is clearly implied that it is the abode of Brahma (line 13) which is to be sought rather than a Christian heaven and that those who adopt the Darwinian perspective of the survival of the fittest miss the realization that, in reality, all survive.

Emerson has, in “Brahma,” used a series of images borrowed from Hindu scriptures (many of which he translated in the issues of the Transcendentalist magazine *The Dial*, which he co-edited with Margaret Fuller for two years and then edited himself) to reflect the coordinated pattern and unity in the physical universe, which is itself a reflected pattern of the same unity in the spiritual universe.

2. Emily Dickinson: *Because I could not stop for Death*

In “Because I could not stop for Death,” one of the most celebrated of any poems Emily Dickinson wrote, the deceased narrator reminisces about the day Death came calling on her. In the first stanza, the speaker remarks that she had been too busy to stop for Death, so in his civility, he stopped for her. In his carriage, she was accompanied by Immortality as well as Death. Many readers have wanted to know why Immortality also rides in the carriage, but when thinking of the courting patterns in Dickinson’s day, one recalls the necessity of a chaperon. In any event, Dickinson

considers Death and Immortality fellow travelers. This interaction with Death shows the complete trust that the speaker had placed in her wooer. It is not until the end of the poem, from the perspective of Eternity that one is able to see behind the semblance of Death. Far from being the gentlemanly caller that he appears to be, Death is in reality a ghoulisn seducer. Perhaps Dickinson, in her familiarity with the Bible, draws upon Satan's visitation of God in similar pose as a country gentleman. In this way,

Dickinson's poem resembles the Gothic novel, a popular Romantic genre given to the sinister and supernatural.

In the second stanza, the reader learns that the journey was leisurely and that the speaker did not mind the interruption from her tasks because Death was courteous. Along the way, they passed the children's school at recess time and fields of ripened grain. They even passed the setting sun—or rather, it passed them, so slow was their pace. With the coming of evening, a coolness had fallen for which the speaker found herself unprepared with regard to clothing. They drew near a cemetery, the place where the speaker has been dwelling for centuries. In the realm of Death, time has elapsed into centuries for the speaker, though it seems shorter than her last day of life when she first "surmised" that her journey was toward Eternity.

Forms and Devices

Tone, or the emotional stance of the speaker in the poem, is a central artifice in "Because I could not stop for Death." Though the subject is death, this is not a somber rendering. On the contrary, Death is made analogous to a wooer in what emerges as essentially an allegory, with abstractions consistently personified. Impressed by Death's thoughtfulness and patience, the speaker reciprocates by putting aside her work and free time. Judging by the last stanza, where the speaker talks of having "first surmised" their destination, it can be determined that Death was more seducer than beau. The tone of congeniality here becomes a vehicle for stating the proximity of death even in the thoroughfares of life, though one does not know it. Consequently, one is often caught unprepared.

The journey motif is at the core of the poem's stratagem, a common device in Dickinson's poetry for depicting human mortality.

Stanza 3 offers an example of Dickinson's substantial capacity for compression, which on occasion can create a challenge for readers. This stanza epitomizes the circle of life, not so much as to life's continuity despite death, but more in fusion with the journey within the poem—life as procession toward conclusion. Thus, “the School, where Children strove” applies to childhood and youth.

Dickinson's dictional acuity carries over to “Recess—in the Ring.” Early life, with its sheltering from duress and breakdown and death, its distance in experience from the common fate, is but a deceptive lull—its own kind of seduction and, hence, recess from decline. Yet children are said to be in the “Ring.” Time is on the move even for them, though its pace seems slow. Ironically, the dictional elements coalesce in the stanza to create a subrendering of the greater theme of the poem: the seduction of the persona by Death. The children are also without surmise, and like the speaker, they are too busy with themselves (as represented in the verb “strove”) to know that time is passing.

Dictional nuance is critical to the meaning of the last two lines of the third stanza. The word “passed” sets up verbal irony (the tension of statement and meaning). The carriage occupants are not merely passing a motley collection of scenes, they are passing out of life—reaching the high afternoon of life, or maturity. Maturation, or adulthood, is also represented in the “Fields of Gazing Grain.” This line depicts grain in a state of maturity, its stalk replete with head of seed. There is intimation of harvest and perhaps, in its gaze, nature's indifference to a universal process. Appropriately, the next line speaks of “the Setting Sun,” meaning the evening of life, or old age.

Reiteration of the word “passed” occurs in stanza 4, emphasizing the idea of life as a procession toward conclusion. Its recurring use as a past-tense verb suggests the continuation of an action in the past, yet the noncontinuance of those actions in the present in keeping with the norms of the imperfect tense. Human generations will collectively engage in the three life stages, dropping out individually, never to engage in them again.

Dictional elements in stanza 5 hint at unpreparedness for death. The persona's gown was but “Gossamer,” a light material highly unsuitable for evening chill. For a scarf (“Tippet”), she wore only silk netting (“Tulle”).

The poem is written in alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines, with near rhyme occasionally employed in the second and fourth lines. Regular rhyme occurs sporadically and

unexpectedly in its spatial distancing. The use of the dash in the stanza's concluding line compels the reader to pause before entering into the monosyllabic prepositional phrase in which there is a heaviness that suggests the grave's finality. The seemingly disheveled rhyme scheme in actuality intimates one of the poem's central themes: unpreparedness.

Dickinson takes a traditional approach to the **rhyme** and **meter** of the poem. The poem uses **common meter**, a classic ballad form that employs alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter. As in many ballads, the stanzas follow an **ABCB rhyme scheme**. Dickinson's formal choices give the poem a lilting, songlike effect that conveys the poem's narrative arc and accentuates the leisurely, mannered tone. Over the course of the poem, however, Dickinson includes a **notable exception to each formal pattern**:

- In the fourth stanza, the meters of the first two lines are switched, producing a jarring effect. In that moment, the speaker undergoes a change in perspective; having claimed that “we passed the Setting Sun,” she shifts to “Or rather — He passed Us —.” Dickinson conveys the speaker's feeling of surprise and reorientation by introducing a shortened, three-beat line at the start of the fourth stanza.
- In the final stanza, Dickinson subtly subverts the rhyme scheme. Unlike in the previous stanzas, the first and third lines share a light but resonant end rhyme of “yet” and “heads.” This end rhyme gives the final stanza a greater and more cohesive musicality than the prior stanzas. As a result, the poem concludes on a stirring, sonorous note.

Two notable devices Dickinson uses in “Because I could not stop for Death—” are **concrete diction** and **alliteration**. These two devices, which Dickinson often employs simultaneously, contribute to the poem's distinctive tone and texture.

- Dickinson's poem confronts **abstract** subject matter—namely “Death” and “Eternity”—but she explores these abstractions through **concrete language**. From the start, Death itself is figured tangibly as a gentleman in a carriage. The speaker's journey towards her own death features a series of concrete scenes, including children at play, fields of grain, the setting sun, the speaker's “Gossamer” and “Tippet,” and finally a house-like grave. Dickinson thus gives the speaker's spiritual transit a physical, tangible grounding.

- Dickinson frequently employs **alliteration**, producing phrases that both catch the eye and appeal to the ear. In many cases, the poem's alliterative phrases are also comprised of **concrete diction**: "At Recess — in the Ring"; "the Fields of Gazing Grain"; "the Setting Sun"; "For only Gossamer, my Gown"; "My Tippet — only Tulle"; and "Horses' Heads."

Dickinson's use of alliteration gives these concrete phrases even more physicality, allowing them to evoke sounds as well as sights.

Dickinson imbues the things in her poem with **symbolic significance**, even as she grants them a tangible and sensory existence.

- For example, the third stanza offers a triptych of scenes which together symbolize the three stages of human life. The children at play symbolize infancy and youth, the "Fields of Gazing Grain" suggest the labors of adulthood, and "the Setting Sun" intimates old age. Furthermore, the children's leisure and the fields' labor mirror the speaker's own "labor" and "leisure" from the prior stanza. In some sense, she witnesses her own life dramatized in the scenes outside the carriage window.
- In the following stanza, the speaker's "Gossamer" and "Tippet" symbolize the ritual act of mourning. The speaker personalizes the act of mourning by offering her own clothes—her "Gown" and "Tulle"—as makeshift funeral fabrics. This personalization is fitting, for it is the speaker's own death she ritualizes. Furthermore, this informal solution aligns with the poem's broader tendency to treat Death—that direst of subjects—with a curiously light touch.
- In the penultimate stanza, the speaker describes a grave—likely her own—as "a House that seemed / A Swelling of the Ground." This metaphorical treatment of the grave suggests that the speaker feels welcomed by Death. Within the conceit of the poem, Death is a gracious coachman. This beneficent relationship with Death is extended by the symbolism of the grave-as-house, which casts Death in an inviting light. From such a perspective, Death is home.

Themes

Death is a frequent concern of Dickinson's poetry. Often as a means to its exploration, she will seek its objectification through a persona who has already died. In other poems, she is quite sensitive to the fact of death and its impoverishment of those who remain. In some poems, she is resentful toward God, who robs people of those they love and is seemingly indifferent to such loss.

One cannot explore the catalyst of life events behind Dickinson's marked sensitivity with any certainty because she lived a remarkably private life. For her, death was only one more form of distancing.

Emily Dickinson was very familiar with death. Thirty-three of her acquaintances had died between February, 1851, and November, 1854, including her roommate at Holyoke College. Her mother's family seemed predisposed to early deaths. Then the momentous death of her father occurred in 1874. In 1882, eight years after the death of her father, she wrote that "no verse in the Bible has frightened me so much from a Child as 'from him that hath not, shall be taken even that he hath.' Was it because its dark menace deepened our own Door?"

Some may see this poem as conciliatory, even Christian, given that Immortality rides in the carriage and that the persona speaks of Eternity in the end. Death, by this notion, becomes God's emissary taking one into Eternity. For others, however, there is no resurrection, no specifying of an afterlife. Immortality is employed ironically, not to suggest everlasting life, but everlasting death. As a consort of death, one need not be puzzled by Immortality's presence in the carriage. This is the import of the final stanza, when the speaker exclaims, "Since then—'tis Centuries—and yet/ Feels shorter than the Day/ I first surmised the Horses Heads/ Were toward Eternity." There is a sense that the journey has never ended and never will. There is much eternity up ahead, for death is a realm without temporal-spatial parameters.

The truth is that life is short and death is long. Perhaps in this sobering truth one may find that Dickinson's poem is as much about life—about how one ought to redeem it from the banal—as it is about death.

3. William Butler Yeats : *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*

Introduction:

First published in the collection *The Rose* in 1893, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is an example of Yeats's earlier lyric poems. Throughout the three short quatrains the poem explores the speaker's longing for the peace and tranquility of his boyhood haunt, Innisfree.

“The Lake Isle of Innisfree” suggests that a life of simplicity in nature will bring peace to the troubled speaker. However, the poem is the speaker’s recollection of Innisfree, and therefore the journey is an emotional and spiritual escape rather than an actual one. Innisfree may be a symbol for the speaker’s passed youth, which the speaker is unable to return to in the “real,” or physical, world. Emotionally, the speaker can return again and again to the tranquility of Innisfree.

Line 1

In this line Yeats establishes the opening tone as well as the refrain of the poem. The poem focuses on Innisfree as a place of escape for the speaker.

Lines 2–4

Here the speaker describes Innisfree as a simple, natural environment where he will build a cabin and live alone. Note the rich description in these lines. The language is specific. The speaker does not merely mention that he will build a cabin, but also that it will be made of “clay and wattles.” The speaker also specifies that he will have “nine bean-rows,” instead of simply a “garden.” These are images that conjure up in the mind of the reader concrete visual features of Yeats’s poetic fantasy. Notice also the particularly interesting image of the “bee-loud glade.” This image invests Innisfree with a magical air.

Lines 5–6

In these lines Yeats introduces the connection between peace and Innisfree in the speaker’s mind. The first line of the second stanza repeats the same meter employed in the first line of the first stanza. The reader can sense a refrain developing. The line “And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow” is composed almost entirely of iambic feet. This means that one unaccented syllable is followed by an accented syllable. The iambs are interrupted in the middle of the line by an amphibrach with the phrase “some peace there.” An amphibrach is composed of two unaccented syllables sandwiching an accented one. It is used for emphasis. The amphibraic foot in the fifth line corresponds with the similar foot in the first line. This may be used to emphasize the metaphor that Innisfree represents escape for the speaker. Line six contains a good example of figurative language. Yeats wants to explain that the abstract idea of “peace” is abundant from morning until night in Innisfree, but instead of relying on that cliché, he transforms morning into

the image of veils from which peace falls. Night has also been transformed into “where the cricket sings.”

Lines 7–8

Here Yeats continues with transforming midnight and noon into almost eerie images. Evening becomes a dark image of the sky filled with the wings of birds.

Lines 9–12

In the last lines of the poem, the speaker stands in the street surrounded by gray pavement. This image, which is hard and silent, contrasts with the soothing, soft image of the water. The speaker continues to hear the sounds of nature even in the city. The peace of Innisfree is able to transcend the urban environment because it resides in a completely natural one, that of the speaker himself.

Analysis:

“The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” a twelve-line poem divided into three quatrains, is a study in contrasts. The most obvious contrast is between two places: one rural (identified in the title and described throughout much of the poem), the other (alluded to only in the second-to-last line)—by implication—urban.

Innisfree is a small island at the eastern end of Lough Gill in County Sligo, Ireland. William Butler Yeats spent part of nearly every year in Sligo while growing up; he often walked out from Sligo town to Lough Gill. His father having read to him from Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), he daydreamed (as he says in *The Trembling of the Veil*, 1922, incorporated into his *Autobiography*, 1965) of living “a life of lonely austerity in imitation of Thoreau on Innisfree.” In 1890, while living in London, he was “walking through Fleet Street very homesick [when] I heard a little tinkle of water and saw a fountain in a shop-window and began to remember lake water. From the sudden remembrance came my poem *Innisfree*.”

Yeats imagines escaping from the city to the solitude and peace of a pastoral retreat, there to live a simple life, close to nature. The first stanza states his intention and provides a prospectus for the home he will make for himself, specifying the rustic construction for his cabin and exactly how many rows of beans he will plant. The second stanza, more fancifully imagining what living there

will be like, pauses over images that he associates with four different times of day: morning, midnight, noon, and evening. The third stanza reiterates his intention and for the first time suggests what motivates it: the (implied) urban setting and Yeats's nostalgia for Sligo.

The contrast between the matter-of-fact first and last stanzas and the fanciful middle stanza reinforces the contrast between the quotidian city, with its "grey" pavements, and the idealized country. The opening stanza employs no figurative language; the only figurative language in the closing stanza is the sound of waves "lapping" in "the deep heart's core." Otherwise, the language in these stanzas is straightforward and literal, emotionally neutral.

The second stanza, on the other hand, is brimming with metaphors and other figures: "peace comes dropping slow," as if it were dew; the morning wears "veils"; the cricket "sings"; the "evening [is] full of the linnet's wings." Language, imagination, and emotion all rise to a rapturous brief climax in this middle stanza before subsiding. The opening words of stanza 3, echoing the opening words of the poem, cue a return to the everyday world.

Themes:

□ Nature:

"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" expresses the idea that nature provides an inherently restorative place to which human beings can go to escape the chaos and corrupting influences of civilization. In his autobiography, Yeats writes that his poem was influenced by his reading of American writer Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), which describes Thoreau's experiment of living alone in a small hut in the woods on Walden Pond, outside Concord, Massachusetts. Thoreau lived in his one-room house from 1845–1847, gardening, writing, and studying natural history. Thoreau championed the solitary, self-sufficient life lived in harmony with nature, considering it more authentic than a life spent balancing ledgers or working for someone else. He disdained the ways working for a living and acquiring material goods can control one's life. Explaining his motivation for the experiment, Thoreau writes in *Walden*:

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so

dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary”.

Yeats also expresses this sentiment when he writes of building a small cabin “of clay and wattles” and living alone “in the bee-loud glade” of Innisfree. Yeats seems to refer to *Walden* when he writes of the “Nine bean-rows I will have there,” and he underscores the contrast between rural and urban lifestyle in the last lines, when he places himself “on the roadway, or on the pavements grey.” Both of these images symbolize the destructive, joy-deadening forces of modern life. Yeats emphasizes the authenticity of the desire to live close to nature, writing that he hears the call to go to Innisfree “in the heart’s deep core.”

□ **Imagination**

A primary feature of Romantic poetry is the idea of the imagination as a faculty that can generate alternate realities. The speaker of “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” exercises this faculty by daydreaming about life in the country. The entire poem describes a life that he “will” live, not one he is currently living. The detail of his fantasy suggests that the speaker has entertained this desire previously. Readers can clearly picture the haven the speaker imagines. He enumerates the bean-rows he will have, describes the building materials of his cabin, and lists particular creatures he will hear, i.e., bees, crickets, linnets.

Ever since William Wordsworth’s lyric poems about nature’s beauty and power helped define Romantic verse, poets have used their imaginations to conjure worlds in which they would be more content and where their “true” selves could find peace. But for Yeats, this imagined world remained a fantasy: unlike Thoreau, Yeats never lived the rural life. Rather, he was an urban man of letters, an Irish senator, and a Nobel laureate. Moreover, his later poems never exhibited the degree or kind of romanticism shown in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.”

□ **Nostalgia**

Less than a hundred years before Yeats penned “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” William Wordsworth wrote in a sonnet that “the world is too much with us,” meaning that the human mind and heart are too preoccupied by the material or worldly seductions of urban living. Yeats experienced the

urge to return to a simpler, more familiar life as a kind of homesickness which expressed itself as a desire to “return” to Innisfree, a small island at the eastern end of Lough Gill in County Sligo. The poet regularly visited Sligo while growing up, and the inspiration for the poem came when Yeats was living in London and walking Fleet Street, a busy commercial section of the city. The sound of a fountain’s water reminded him of the Sligo lake, and the poem was born. Two other early poems by

Yeats which deal with nostalgia and escape are “The Stolen Child” and “To an Isle in the Water.”

Literary Style

“The Lake Isle of Innisfree” is written with an *abab* rhyme scheme corresponding to each of the three quatrains in the poem, which are defined as a stanza composed of four lines which may or may not have a set line length. Also prevalent is the use of alliteration and assonance, both of which emphasize the musical tone and rhythm of the piece.

When a stanza in a poem has a pattern of rhymes it is called a “rhyme scheme.” “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” utilizes end rhyme in an *abab* rhyme scheme. This means that the end of the first line of a stanza rhymes with the end of the third line, and the end of the second line of a stanza rhymes with the end of the fourth line. All three of the quatrains in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” display an *abab* rhyme scheme.

“The Lake Isle of Innisfree” uses “alliteration” and “assonance” to emphasize the sound and mood of the poem. Alliteration is the repetition of certain consonants in a poem which are often used in order to stress a word or phrase. Notice the sound of the consonants ‘l’ and ‘s’ in the following line:

“I hear lake water lapping with the low sounds by the shore.” Read the line aloud and notice the emphasis on the words “lapping,” “low,” and “shore.” Assonance occurs when the vowel sounds attached to different consonants are repeated in a poem. Notice the sound of the vowels ‘i’ and ‘o’ in the following line:

“I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree.”

Assonance is less clear than either rhyme or alliteration, but its use is similar. It links important words or phrases in the poem together.

3. Robert Frost: Mending Wall

Frost penned “Mending Wall” in blank verse—unrhymed iambic pentameter—without stanza breaks. Frost favored this form, using it in other well-known lyrics such as “Birches” and “Out, Out—”. The form lends itself to a combination of narrative and meditation. “Mending Wall” describes the story of two landowners mending the wall that runs between their properties, but under the surface of the story, the speaker is busy investigating why the wall is broken and whether and why it ought to be mended.

Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall” is a meditation told from the perspective of a landowner who joins his neighbor in repairing the stone wall that divides their properties. As the speaker notes in the opening line, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” He notes the different forces at work against the wall, including the “frozen-ground-swell” that surges upward, scattering the stones from below, as well as hunters who strip away the stones to draw rabbits out of hiding.

As a result, every spring brings “mending-time,” and so the speaker calls on his neighbor and they meet to mend the wall. They walk along the wall, each man on his own side, fixing the broken spots as they go. They raise the fallen stones, some like bread loaves and others like spheres that wobble and threaten to fall.

The speaker then makes an observation: his neighbor’s lot contains only pine trees; his own, only apple orchards. The wall is thus unnecessary, for there are no animals to contain or keep out. When the speaker mentions this fact, his neighbor simply replies, ““Good fences make good neighbors.””

Filled with the mischief of springtime, the speaker persists. Noting again the wall’s uselessness, the speaker says, ““Before I built a wall I’d ask to know / What I was walling in or walling out.”” When the speaker repeats the dictum of the opening line, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,” it seems that the speaker himself is an agent of that “something.”

The neighbor raises a stone in both hands, “like an old stone-savage armed”; to the speaker’s eye, “he moves in darkness.” Finally, the neighbor responds to the speaker’s objections, deferring again to his beloved saying, passed down from his father: ““Good fences make good neighbors.””

Themes

“Mending Wall” is about two kinds of barriers—physical and emotional. More subtly, the poem explores an ironic underlying question: Is the speaker’s attitude toward those two kinds of walls any more enlightened than the neighbor’s?

Each character has a line summing up his philosophy about walls that is repeated in the poem. The speaker proclaims, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” He wants to believe that there is a “something,” a conscious force or entity in nature, that deliberately breaks down the stone wall on his property. He also wants to believe that a similar “something” exists in human nature, and he sees the spring season both as the source of the ground swells that unsettle the stone wall and as the justification for “the mischief in me” that he hopes will enable him to unsettle his neighbor’s stolid, stonelike personality. From the speaker’s perspective, however, when the neighbor shies away from discussing whether they need the wall, the speaker then sees him as a menacing “savage,” moving in moral “darkness,” who mindlessly repeats the cliché “Good fences make good neighbors.”

The speaker does not seem to realize that he is just as ominously territorial and walled in as his neighbor, if not more so. The speaker scorns the neighbor for repeating his maxim about “good fences” and for being unwilling to “go behind” and question it, yet the speaker also clings to a formulation that he repeats (“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall”) and seems unwilling to think clearly about his belief in it. For example, the speaker celebrates the way that spring ground swells topple sections of the stone wall. Why, then, does he resent the destruction that the hunters bring to it, and why does he bother to repair those man-made gaps? Similarly, if the speaker truly believes that there is no need for the wall, why is it he who contacts his neighbor and initiates the joint rebuilding effort each spring? Finally, if the speaker is sincerely committed to the “something” in human nature that “doesn’t love” emotional barriers (and that, by implication, does love human connectedness), why does he allow his imagination to intensify the menacing

otherness of his neighbor to the point of seeing him as “an old-stone savage armed” who “moves in darkness”? To consider these questions, the speaker would have to realize that there is something in him that does love walls, but the walls within him seem to block understanding of his own contradictory nature.

Frost ends the poem with the neighbor’s line, “Good fences make good neighbors,” perhaps because this cliché actually suggests a wiser perspective on the boundary wall than the speaker realizes. This stone “fence” seems “good” partly because it sets a clear boundary between two very different neighbors—one laconic and seemingly unsociable, the other excitable, fanciful, and selfcontradictory. On the other hand, this fence is also good in that it binds the two men together, providing them with at least one annual social event in which they can both participate with some comfort and amiability. To recall the two meanings of the title, the activity of mending the wall enables it to be a “mending wall” that keeps the relationship of these two neighbors stable and peaceful.

Forms and Devices

In his essay “Education by Poetry” (1931), Robert Frost offers a definition of poetry as “the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another.” “Mending Wall” is a vivid example of how Frost carries out this definition in two ways—one familiar, one more subtle. As is often the case in poetry, the speaker in “Mending Wall” uses metaphors and similes (tropes which say one thing in terms of another) to animate the perceptions and feelings that he wants to communicate to the reader.

A more subtle dimension of the poem is that Frost uses these tropes ironically, “saying one thing and meaning another” to reveal more about the speaker’s character than the speaker seems to understand about himself.

When the speaker uses metaphor in the first four sections of “Mending Wall,” he does it to convey excitement and humor—the sense of wonder, energy, and “mischief” that spring inspires in him. Through metaphor, he turns the natural process of the spring thaw into a mysterious “something” that is cognitive and active: “something that doesn’t love a wall,” that “sends” ground swells, that “spills” boulders, and that “makes gaps.” He playfully characterizes some of the boulders as

“loaves” and others as “balls,” and he facetiously tries to place the latter under a magical “spell” so that they will not roll off the wall. He also uses metaphor to joke with his neighbor, claiming that “My apple trees will never get across/ And eat the cones under his pines.”

In the last section of the poem, however, the speaker’s use of simile and metaphor turns more serious. When he is unable to draw his neighbor into a discussion, the speaker begins to see him as threatening and sinister—as carrying boulders by the top “like an old-stone savage armed,” as “mov[ing] in darkness” of ignorance and evil. Through this shift in the tone of the speaker’s tropes, Frost is ironically saying as much about the speaker as the speaker is saying about the neighbor. The eagerness of the speaker’s imagination, which before was vivacious and humorous, now seems defensive and distrustful. By the end of the poem, the speaker’s over-responsiveness to the activity of mending the wall seems ironically to have backfired. His imagination seems ultimately to contribute as much to the emotional barriers between the speaker and his neighbor as does the latter’s under-responsiveness.

There are multiple figures of speech (or literary/poetic devices) used in Robert Frost's poem "Mending Walls."

Alliteration- Alliteration is the repetition of a consonant sound within a line of poetry. For example, in the tongue-twister "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers," the repetitive sound of the "p" exemplifies alliteration. In the initial line of the poem, alliteration is found.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall.

In this line, the "t," or "th," sound in "there" and "that" is repeated.

Assonance- Assonance is the repetition of a vowel sound within a line of poetry. In the children's game "I Spy," the vowel sound "i" is repeated. Assonance can be found in the third line of the poem.

And spills the upper boulders in the sun.

In this line, the vowel sound "u" in "upper" and "sun" is repeated.

Metaphor- A metaphor is the comparison of two or more things which are typically different. An example of a metaphor is "My life is a roller coaster." Here, the speaker's life is compared to a roller coaster (meaning his or her life is full of ups and downs.) An example of a metaphor can be found in line twenty-four of the poem.

He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

Here, the speaker is comparing his or her neighbor to a pine tree and himself, or herself, to an apple orchard.

Personification- Personification is the giving of human characteristics or traits to non-human/nonliving things. For example, "the sun smiles" is an example of personification given the sun cannot smile, but humans can. Personification can be found in lines twenty-seven and forty-six.

"Good fences make good neighbors."

Here, fences are given the ability to be a good neighbor. Given that only humans can make good neighbors, this shows the personification of the fence.

4. Walt Whitman: O Captain! My Captain!

Whitman composed "O Captain! My Captain!" to commemorate Abraham Lincoln in the wake of his assassination in 1865, just five days after the end of the American Civil War. The three-stanza poem employs a layered conceit which represents Abraham Lincoln as the eponymous "Captain" of a ship returning to port. The ship represents the Union's cause, and its victory at sea is the Union's victory in the Civil War (1861–1865).

In the first stanza, the speaker, a sailor, salutes his captain. He reports that their voyage is successful and nearly complete and that "the prize we sought is won." As the ship approaches port, the speaker describes the bells tolling and the celebratory crowds gathering. But in a sudden shift, the speaker exclaims that his captain has fallen on the deck "cold and dead."

In the second stanza, the speaker implores his captain to “rise up” and see the crowd eagerly rejoicing in his victorious return. As the speaker tells his captain, “for you the flag is flung,” “for you the bugle trills,” and “for you the shores a-crowding.” Again, the tone shifts as the speaker acknowledges that his captain has “fallen cold and dead” but expresses hope that “it is some dream.”

In the third and final stanza, the speaker examines his deceased captain, whose “lips are pale and still” and who “has no pulse or will.” Though the voyage is complete and the ship safely harbored, the speaker is wracked with grief. He calls for the bells to be rung and for the crowds to exult, but he walks “with mournful tread[...] the deck my Captain lies, / Fallen cold and dead.” **Analysis**

In its tone, conceit, and structure, “O Captain! My Captain!” reflects the mixed mood of the Northern United States in the aftermath of the Civil War. On April 9, 1865, Robert E. Lee surrendered to

Ulysses S. Grant, an event considered the Confederacy’s most significant gesture of defeat. After four long years of fighting, the Union had finally prevailed. Just five days after the surrender, Abraham Lincoln was killed by John Wilkes Booth in the capital. Lincoln’s death cut through the Union’s post-victory elation like a cold draught of wind. In Whitman’s “O Captain! My Captain!”, his conceit, or extended metaphor, frames the state of the nation as a glorious maritime homecoming marred by the death of the ship’s captain. Whitman’s dramatic shifts from long, ecstatic lines to short, fraught ones captures these opposing emotions at the level of language.

The tone of the poem is that of triumph stained with grief. Whitman uses a variety of techniques to convey this dual tone. The repetition of words such as “O” and “heart!” creates an emphasis that can express either victory or grief. Phrase-level repetition expands this effect, as in the anaphora of “for you” in the second stanza, which rouses a spirit of praise. Whitman’s ample use of exclamation marks reaches towards both ends of the tonal spectrum, signaling both triumph (“O Captain! My Captain! rise up and hear the bells”) and loss (“Here captain! Dear father! / This arm beneath your head!”).

Whitman employs an unconventional verse form in “O Captain! My Captain!” Each of the three eight-line stanzas contains four long lines and four short lines. The long lines follow a slanting AABB rhyme scheme and consist of pentameter, hexameter, and, most commonly, heptameter. The short lines follow an ABAB scheme and consist of trimeter and tetrameter. There is a logic to the style, which Whitman shapes in service to the poem’s tone. The long, expansive lines describe the grand scenes of victorious return, whereas the short lines—with their quickened pace and heightened intensity—register the tragic death of the captain.

One of Whitman’s most notable choices in diction, or word choice, is “father,” a word he uses to describe Lincoln in the second and third stanzas. To refer to a American political leader as a figurative “father” is a convention that dates back to the “founding fathers” of the American Revolution. However, Whitman’s characterization of Lincoln as a father lends the poem an intensely personal dimension, adding weight to the speaker’s grief as he paces the deck “with mournful tread.” The loss of a father, figurative or not, is always closely felt. In the case of Lincoln’s death, the loss is doubly felt for a nation already ravaged and divided by civil war.

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT 2 - American Literature – SHS1302

1. Henry David Thoreau- *Solitude*

Early in the summer of 1845, Henry David Thoreau left his family home in the village of Concord, Massachusetts, to live for two years by himself in a rude house that he had constructed beside Walden Pond in a far corner of Concord Township. While there, he wrote in his journal about many of the things he did and thought. Thoreau was not the owner of the land on which he settled, but he had received the owner's permission to build his house and to live there. His objective was really to live simply and think and write; in addition, he proved to himself that the necessities of food, clothing, shelter, and fuel could be obtained rather simply for a man who desired only what he needed.

Walden is an account of the two years during which Henry David Thoreau built his own cabin, raised his own food, and lived a life of simplicity in the woods near Concord, Massachusetts. Thoreau's idea was that one's true self could be lost amid the distractions of ordinary life. His experiment consisted of stripping away those distractions, living deliberately instead of automatically, and following the inclinations that arose within him in the solitude, silence, and leisure of his simplified life. He retreated from nonessentials to explore what remained as the core of human identity, assuming that human identity is not based on one's profession or possessions or social connections. *Walden* is exemplary as a work of Transcendentalism is that the book makes the idealistic assumption that there is a true self to discover. Thoreau observed and appreciated nature keenly;

Walden details a naturalist's perceptions of the animals, plants, and seasons of the Concord woods. While at Walden Pond, summer and winter, Thoreau lived independent of time. He refused to acknowledge days of the week or month. When he wished to spend some time observing certain birds or animals, or even the progress of the weather, he felt free to do so. People often dropped in to visit with Thoreau, who frankly confessed that he did not consider people very important. In *Walden* he fails, in fact, to tell who his most frequent visitors were. He preferred only one visitor—a thinking one—at a time. Whenever he had more visitors than could be accommodated by his small house and its three chairs, he took them into his larger drawing room, the pine wood that surrounded his home. From what he wrote about his treatment of all but a very few of the people who came to visit him, it is very probable that he was an unfriendly kind of host, one who, if he

had nothing better to do, was willing to talk, but who usually had more to occupy him than simple conversation.

During the winter months, Thoreau continued to live comfortably at Walden Pond, though his activities changed. He spent more time at the pond itself, making a survey of its bottom, studying the ice conditions, and observing the animal life that centered on the pond, which had some open water throughout the year.

After two years of life at Walden, Thoreau left his house there. He felt no regret for having stayed, or for leaving; his attitude was that he had many lives to live and that he had finished with living at the pond. He had learned many lessons, had had time to think and study, and had proved what he had set out to prove twenty-six months before, that living can be extremely simple and yet highly fulfilling to the individual.

Thoreau is the book's narrator. An eccentric philosopher and lover of nature, Thoreau builds a cabin near Walden Pond, intending to live in solitude as an experiment in simplicity and spiritual exploration. "My greatest skill has been to want but little," Thoreau writes. He grows food, both for his own needs and to sell for the little money he requires. He reads and entertains occasional visitors. He spends many hours walking in the woods around his cabin, closely observing the landscape and animals. In this communion with nature, he also finds communion with the divine.

Thoreau is both irritable and humorous, often simultaneously, and he is a man of contradictions. He compares human beings to muskrats and vermin, and the only thing he likes less than people is people organized in the form of institutions. "Wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society," he complains. Yet he admits that he walks into the village often to hear news and gossip, and when deep winter keeps all visitors away, he conjures up memories and stories of past residents of the woods to keep him company.

At a Glance

Walden serves as a written account of the two years Henry David Thoreau lived alone in a cabin in Concord, Massachusetts. He built this cabin, grew vegetables, and had transcendental experiences.

He uses these to examine the fundamental elements of identity.

- Thoreau builds himself a small cabin on Walden Pond. He doesn't own the land, but has permission from the owner to live there. He builds the cabin for just \$28.
- To sustain himself, Thoreau grows and sells vegetables. His diet mainly consists of rye bread, salt pork, rice, and potatoes.
- In solitude, Thoreau is free to think about the nature of human consciousness. When he leaves Walden Pond, he's satisfied that he has proven human beings can live simply and without the trappings of the modern world.

Thoreau makes his case that the companionship of nature is more fulfilling than that of humans, and that he could not possibly be lonely in nature because he is a part of it. The plants and animals are his friends and, amid the peace of nature, God himself is the author's visitor:

"I have occasional visits . . . from an old settler and original proprietor, who is reported to have dug Walden Pond, and stoned it, and fringed it with pine woods; who tells me stories of old time and of new eternity; and between us we manage to pass a cheerful evening with social mirth and pleasant views of things"

For Thoreau, living outside of human community is the complement to living immersed in nature. One must withdraw from human company to truly experience oneness with nature and, therefore, with God. "I love to be alone," he declares. Thoreau makes his case that the companionship of nature is more fulfilling than that of humans, and that he could not possibly be lonely in nature because he is a part of it.

Thoreau sometimes had visitors at his cabin and sometimes walked into the village to hear news and observe people (much as he observed animals; in one passage he compares watching people in the village to watching muskrats in the woods). But, he writes, "I find it wholesome to be alone

the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating.” Human society moves too fast for Thoreau and centers around things that are of no interest to him: acquiring large homes and luxuries, giving fancy dinner parties, gossiping, and working long hours to pay for things. He sees most people as being spiritually asleep, and feels he has nothing in common with them.

In answer to those who asked if he was lonely, Thoreau writes that he had much company in his solitude. “Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me,” he assures readers. He even asserts that he was visited by God “in the long winter evenings” and by Mother Nature—“a ruddy and lustful old dame” who told him fables and invited him to walk in her garden.

Thoreau is a Transcendentalist and they believe that people and nature are both part of each other. They believe that being out in nature is good for your soul, basically. You need to not be materialistic. Thoreau talks about the idea that people do not own their possessions -- their possessions own them. He says that we spend all of our time trying to get more stuff instead of enjoying and living life.

Along with his spiritual, social, and artistic interests, Thoreau also carried a great passion for numbers: he goes into great detail about how much it cost to keep himself alive and healthy during his stay at Walden. Early critics tended to see this strain of “bookkeeping” as a weakness in his work.

As science in the twentieth century gradually caught up with Thoreau’s insight, *Walden*’s careful numerical accounting was revealed as the early roots of the science of ecology.

Thoreau’s exploration of his identity was founded on individualism rather than membership in any cultural group. In fact, for him, allegiance to any group was perilous, liable to distract or seduce one away from fidelity to one’s personal values and highest calling. For Thoreau, the conditions that favored human fulfillment were quiet concentration, simple labor, and a life attentive to the lessons of nature.

Themes

Since *Walden* is, on one hand, a sort of spiritual autobiography, Thoreau himself is its central character. The narrator of *Walden* resembles Thoreau in many ways, but is also a distinct narrative persona. The real Thoreau was a much pricklier personality than the sunny tone of the book indicates. Thoreau as narrator is an apologist for Transcendentalist beliefs and for the rights of eccentric personalities to live as they choose. But privately, as entries in his personal journal have indicated, Thoreau did not always feel that nature held the answer to most social and spiritual problems.

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited forms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. The Transcendentalists believed that the human mind had sources of knowledge—such as conscience or an inner light—that were independent of or transcended the senses. Emerson became the foremost thinker among those who endorsed such views, and helped found the Transcendentalist Club, a loose, informal group that often met at his house in Concord. Like other members of this club, Thoreau believed that humans were basically good, and that nature was benign and favored humankind. By keeping themselves pure, and through a close relationship with nature, people could perfect themselves and grow in the knowledge already granted them through the inner light. Thoreau set out to live according to this philosophy when he moved to Walden Pond.

In *Walden*, Thoreau's most attractive characteristics emerge when he shows his genuine love for the world around him, treating even the tiny fish in Walden Pond with affection. But his attitude toward humans is less tolerant and loving; he is least attractive when he preaches to the poor people he meets near Walden. His attitude toward the Irish workmen he meets is self-righteously condescending, and none of the other people mentioned in the book are given more than sketchy treatment. Even Emerson, who owned the land the cabin sat on and who occasionally visited Thoreau, is never mentioned by name. Thoreau is interested primarily in his own consciousness and its development while at Walden.

Thoreau considers life a great gift bestowed upon humans, and he is distressed that people do not make proper use of it. He cannot understand why people enslave themselves by devoting much of

their time to the attainment of material things when nature offers so much for nothing. Thoreau's reflections on the proper way of living constitute a major theme of the book. Thoreau believes that people should reap the benefits of nature by purifying themselves, forsaking false values, and seeking to become attuned to the spirit pervading the natural world and themselves.

Self-discovery is another theme in *Walden*. At the beginning of the section entitled "Higher Laws," Thoreau says that he has found in himself "an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both." Thoreau wants to develop spiritually, but at the same time he realizes that a degree of wildness is essential to human growth.

MARTIN LUTHER KING: *I HAVE A DREAM*

Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech on August 28, 1963, at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom at the Lincoln Memorial. The March on Washington was a monumental day in the civil rights movement and, at the time, was one of the largest peaceful protests in the world. The goals of the March were to create greater economic equality for people of color, especially black Americans, and to protect the right to vote. These topics—economic equality and voting rights protection—feature heavily in King's speech. At a broader level, his speech urges the protestors present to have hope for the future of the United States and to continue fighting for social justice.

Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous "I Have A Dream" speech on August 28, 1963. One of its most powerful lines reads, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

Martin Luther King delivered his most famous speech in 1963 during the March on Washington. King states that this occasion will be remembered as the "greatest demonstration for freedom" in America's history, a key moment in the Civil Rights movement.

Dr. King gave this speech to motivate his followers to continue to boycott, protest, and demonstrate until they were granted full equality and privileges due any citizen of the United States of America.

King begins by recalling the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. His choice of language here evokes Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, another key moment in American history. However, although it offered hope to many black Americans, there has been less progress than was hoped for because the black man in America is still not free. Instead, discrimination continues; black Americans live in comparative poverty despite the wealth of the nation as a whole and the after-effects of slavery are still felt.

He then evokes the signing of the Declaration of Independence, describing it as a "promissory note" whose promise has not been fulfilled for black men. Therefore, King says he is coming to Washington to chide the United States for "defaulting" on this promise in regard to black Americans who have not been granted life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The bank of justice, King says, surely still has money in it, and black Americans are owed.

King goes on to declare that now is the time to "make justice a reality" for all in the United States. He describes the situation as "urgent," stating that the growing discontent among black Americans will not just go away. Instead, in order to ensure "tranquility" in America, the black man must be granted his true rights as a citizen of this country. However, King is keen to stress that this revolt should not be violent. While the struggle must continue, his followers should not allow their protests to become physically violent. Instead, they must make clear to white Americans that the prosperity and freedom of both black and white are bound together. The struggle must continue until police brutality is no longer a concern for negroes, black people are no longer turned away from hotels, ghettos are a thing of the past, and voting rights are universal -- indeed, until justice is served.

King acknowledges that protesting in this way has been hard for many. Some of those present have been recently in prison, or have come many miles. But he promises that the struggle will be rewarded, and asks his listeners to return to their home states filled with a new hope. He then describes his famous "dream" of the country that will one day emerge.

King's dream is of a truly free and equal country in which blacks and whites will sit and eat together. It is of a world in which children will no longer be judged by their skin color, but by their character, and where black and white alike will join hands. He calls upon his listeners to have faith

that God will make this dream come to pass. King states that when freedom is allowed to "ring" from every part of the nation, eventually America will be what it should have always been and justice will have been achieved.

Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

"I Have a Dream" incorporates Aristotle's three essential rhetorical appeals: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. King's speech appeals to *logos*—the structure and precision of his argument—by effectively making the claim that black Americans are not free and that policy changes are needed to secure their rights. *Ethos*, or King's credibility as a speaker, is largely established by his long-term and consistent involvement in civil rights protests across the South.

However, it is the *pathos* of "I Have a Dream"—its emotional resonance with the audience—that gives the speech its lasting power. King achieves *pathos* through powerful metaphors and images, through allusions that convey a strong cultural resonance with his audience, and through the impassioned repetition of key phrases closely tied to his message. Because of King's masterful appeals to *pathos*, his speech resonated with his audience and continues to resonate with future generations.

Historical context

As King himself points out in the speech, the historical context of the various civil rights King advocates for goes back a hundred years.

The "I Have A Dream" speech was most famously given (it was a stump speech King gave in other locales) in August 1963 in the open mall area between the Capitol building and the Washington Monument during the March on Washington. On that day, it particularly galvanized the crowd.

The hundred years's context is Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 that freed the slaves in the rebel states. One of King's main points in the speech is that the black people might be freed, but they will have waited a century to gain their rights—and still lack them. He says they have been told to wait patiently for the right time, but he notes that that time never seems

to come. King says that now—right now—is the time for white people to make good on their promise to grant black citizens equal rights. The country is prospering, and black people have waited a long time for a place at the table. There is no reason to withhold equal rights any longer.

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FICTION

A FAREWELL TO ARMS

- Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway once referred to *A Farewell to Arms* as his version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Like Shakespeare's play, the novel is a tale of tragic romance between an American Lieutenant, Frederic Henry, and a British army nurse, Catherine Barkley, that unfolds along the Italian front during World War I. Although The Sun Also Rises is comprised of three "books" of unequal length, the division serves very little dramatic purpose. By contrast, Hemingway's second masterpiece is divided into five books that are analogous to the five acts of Shakespearean tragedy.

A Farewell to Arms is told in retrospect by its main male character, Second Lieutenant Frederic Henry, an American attached to an Italian ambulance unit stationed in the town of Gorizia near the battlefield with the Austrians. Frederic is a "normally" dissolute soldier; off duty, he drinks in the local taverns and frequents the town's brothels with his friend Lieutenant Rinaldi, a good-looking Italian surgeon, both of whom are chastised by a Catholic priest. When Henry returns to the front from one of these binges, he is told by Rinaldi that a unit of British nurses has been stationed at a field hospital nearby and that one of them, Catherine Barkley, has captured his fancy.

Rinaldi introduces Frederic to Catherine. She finds it odd that he is an American who is effectively in the Italian army. He learns that Catherine's fiancée has already been killed in the war. At this stage in their relationship, while he certainly finds Catherine to be attractive, Frederic is engaged in a casual romantic game: when he tries to kiss her for the first time and she slaps him, this is merely an expected countermove in his mind. Taking the wounded from the frontlines to the rear, Frederic sees Catherine on occasion. She gives him a St. Anthony's medal. Frederic is badly wounded in his legs during an Austrian artillery attack and sent to a field hospital where he is visited by Rinaldi and the Priest.

In Book Two, Frederic is transferred to a hospital in Milan where he is visited by Catherine, and she manages to have herself reassigned there to be by his side. Frederic is first told that he will

have to wait six months before an operation can be performed on his legs, but when he asks for a second opinion, he is immediately scheduled for surgery. In the wake of his brush with death, Frederic realizes that he is seriously in love with Catherine. During and after his operation, they spend nights together in the hospital and take romantic trips to the countryside during the day. As the summer turns to autumn, Frederic prepares to return to ambulance duty on the front. Before he goes, Catherine tells him that she is pregnant with their child. He proposes to marry her at once; she requests that they wait, but the bond between them is now secure.

Book Three begins back at the war front, where Frederic finds that the morale of the Italian troops has plummeted. The Germans have reinforced the Austrians, and the combined enemy has compelled the Italians to undertake the infamous retreat from Caporetto (an actual historical event). With three Italian assistants—Bonello, Aymo, and Piani—Frederic drives an ambulance filled with medical supplies for delivery to a medical post at Udine, but it is stuck on a road clogged with civilians and military columns. Two detached Italian sergeants join Frederic's makeshift unit and the American lieutenant decides that they will try to reach Udine by taking a series of back roads. When the ambulance becomes stuck in mud on this route, Frederic asks the sergeants to help dislodge the vehicle, but they refuse and try to run away. One of them escapes; Frederic shoots and wounds the other. The Italian medic Bonello then kills the would-be deserter with a bullet to the back of the head. As they approach Udine, Aymo is killed by a sniper bullet. Frederic and the two remaining medics then find that the Germans have blocked off one of the bridges across the Tagliamento River. They take cover in a barn, and Bonello announces that he will turn himself into the Germans as a prisoner of war.

Frederic and Piani now make their way to another crossing point further down the Tagliamento River. They see that the retreat column has degenerated into a frantic mob, with soldiers throwing their weapons away and officers ripping the insignia of the rank from their uniforms. They see that the military police have stationed themselves at the bridge to arrest and summarily execute deserters. Frederic is arrested by these carabinieri and they tie him to a tree. But he frees himself, dives into the river, and uses a log as a raft to make his way to the other shore. This "baptism" in the river is Frederic's "farewell to arms" ritual. After he hops a freight train, Frederic explicitly recognizes that while others may be moved to risk their lives for the sake of patriotic ideals, the

war “was not my show anymore.” His destination now is back to Milan, Catherine, and their unborn child.

Reaching Milan at the start of Book Four, Frederic learns that Catherine has been reassigned to a medical facility at Stresa. He borrows some civilian clothes from an American friend and takes a train to Stresa. He reunites with Catherine and they enjoy a respite from the turmoil by spending their nights at a hotel where Frederic plays billiards with the admirably wise Count Greffi. One night while a rainstorm rages outside, the hotel bartender warns Frederic that Italian authorities are about to arrest him as a deserter. The bartender offers to lend Frederic and Catherine a rowboat to make their way to safety in neutral Switzerland. They row all night, with Catherine taking a turn at the oars when Frederic’s hands become too sore. They reach the Swiss shore, but are immediately detained by the police. Frederic says that he and Catherine are just tourists. Once he produces passports and cash, the two are released.

In Book Five, Frederic and Catherine take up quarters at a small Alpine inn near Montreux. They spend idyllic days together talking about their future plans to live as a family once their child is born. Frederic again suggests that they marry immediately, but Catherine again wants to wait. Her hesitancy may have something to do with her concerns about having the baby; a local doctor says that because of her narrow hips, she may have problems giving birth.

As the time for the birth approaches, the lovers move to Lausanne, where they are closer to a fully equipped hospital. Catherine does suffer a very difficult labor. She is given an anaesthetic; but when the baby is delivered, it is still born. A nurse at the hospital orders the distraught Frederic to get something to eat. When he returns, Frederic is told that Catherine has suffered a severe hemorrhage. With Frederic by her side, Catherine says her final goodbye, slips into coma and dies. The story ends with a helpless Frederic walking toward a hotel in night rain and thinking that this is the awful price that he and Catherine had to pay for the “good nights” which they had shared.

Themes

a) The Grim Reality of War

As the title of the novel makes clear, *A Farewell to Arms* concerns itself primarily with war, namely the process by which Frederic Henry removes himself from it and leaves it behind. The few characters in the novel who actually support the effort—Ettore Moretti and Gino—come across as a dull braggart and a naïve youth, respectively. The majority of the characters remain ambivalent about the war, resentful of the terrible destruction it causes, doubtful of the glory it supposedly brings.

The novel offers masterful descriptions of the conflict's senseless brutality and violent chaos: the scene of the Italian army's retreat remains one of the most profound evocations of war in American literature. As the neat columns of men begin to crumble, so too do the soldiers' nerves, minds, and capacity for rational thought and moral judgment. Henry's shooting of the engineer for refusing to help free the car from the mud shocks the reader for two reasons: first, the violent outburst seems at odds with Henry's coolly detached character; second, the incident occurs in a setting that robs it of its moral import—the complicity of Henry's fellow soldiers legitimizes the killing. The murder of the engineer seems justifiable because it is an inevitable by-product of the spiraling violence and disorder of the war.

Nevertheless, the novel cannot be said to condemn the war; *A Farewell to Arms* is hardly the work of a pacifist. Instead, just as the innocent engineer's death is an inevitability of war, so is war the inevitable outcome of a cruel, senseless world. Hemingway suggests that war is nothing more than the dark, murderous extension of a world that refuses to acknowledge, protect, or preserve true love.

b) The Relationship Between Love and Pain

Against the backdrop of war, Hemingway offers a deep, mournful meditation on the nature of love. No sooner does Catherine announce to Henry that she is in mourning for her dead fiancé than she begins a game meant to seduce Henry. Her reasons for doing so are clear: she wants to distance herself from the pain of her loss. Likewise, Henry intends to get as far away from talk of the war

as possible. In each other, Henry and Catherine find temporary solace from the things that plague them.

The couple's feelings for each other quickly pass from an amusement that distracts them to the very fuel that sustains them. Henry's understanding of how meaningful his love for Catherine is outweighs any consideration for the emptiness of abstract ideals such as honor, enabling him to flee the war and seek her out. Reunited, they plan an idyllic life together that promises to act as a salve for the damage that the war has inflicted. Far away from the decimated Italian countryside, each intends to be the other's refuge. If they are to achieve physical, emotional, and psychological healing, they have found the perfect place in the safe remove of the Swiss mountains. The tragedy of the novel rests in the fact that their love, even when genuine, can never be more than temporary in this world.

MOBY DICK

- Herman Melville

Ishmael is a schoolmaster who often feels that he must leave his quiet existence and go to sea. Much of his life has been spent as a sailor, and his voyages are a means of ridding himself of the restlessness that frequently seizes him. One day, he decides that he will sign on a whaling ship, and packing his carpetbag, he leaves Manhattan and sets out, bound for Cape Horn and the Pacific.

On his arrival in New Bedford, Ishmael goes to the Spouter Inn near the waterfront to spend the night. There he finds he can have a bed only if he consents to share it with a harpooner. His strange bedfellow frightens him when he enters the room, for Ishmael is certain that he is a savage cannibal. After a few moments, however, it becomes evident that the native, whose name is Queequeg, is a friendly person, for he presents Ishmael with an embalmed head and offers to share his fortune of thirty dollars. The two men quickly become friends and decide to sign on the same ship.

Eventually they sign on the *Pequod*, a whaler out of Nantucket, Ishmael as a seaman, Queequeg as a harpooner. Although several people seem dubious about the success of a voyage on a vessel such as the *Pequod*, which is reported to be under a strange man, Captain Ahab, neither Ishmael nor Queequeg has any intention of giving up their plans. They are, however, curious to see Captain Ahab.

For several days after the vessel has sailed, there is no sign of the Captain, as he remains hidden in his cabin. The running of the ship is left to Starbuck and Stubb, two of the mates, and though Ishmael becomes friendly with them, he learns very little more about Ahab. One day, as the ship is sailing southward, the Captain strides out on deck. Ishmael is struck by his stern, relentless expression. In particular, he notices that the Captain has lost a leg and that instead of a wooden leg, he now wears one cut from the bone of the jaw of a whale. A livid white scar runs down one side of his face and is lost beneath his collar, so that it seems as though he were scarred from head to foot.

For several days, the ship continues south looking for whale schools. The sailors take turns on masthead watches to give the sign when a whale is sighted. Ahab appears on deck and summons all his men around him. He pulls out a one ounce gold piece, nails it to the mast, and declares that the first man to sight the great white whale, known to the sailors as Moby Dick, would get the gold.

Everyone expresses enthusiasm for the quest except Starbuck and Stubb, Starbuck especially deploring the madness with which Ahab has directed all his energies to this one end. He tells the Captain that he is like a man possessed, for the white whale is a menace to those who would attempt to kill him. Ahab lost his leg in his last encounter with Moby Dick; he might lose his life in the next meeting, but the Captain does not listen to the mate's warning. Liquor is brought out and, at the Captain's orders, the crew drinks to the destruction of Moby Dick.

Ahab, from what he knows of the last reported whereabouts of the whale, plots a course for the ship that will bring it into the area where Moby Dick is most likely to be. Near the Cape of Good Hope, the ship comes across a school of sperm whales, and the men busy themselves harpooning, stripping, melting, and storing as many as they are able to catch. When the ship encounters another whaling vessel at sea, Captain Ahab asks for news about the white whale. The captain of the ship warns him not to attempt to chase Moby Dick, but it is clear by now that nothing can deflect Ahab from the course he has chosen.

Another vessel stops them, and the captain of the ship boards the *Pequod* to buy some oil for his vessel. Captain Ahab again demands news of the whale, but the captain knows nothing of the monster. As the captain is returning to his ship, he and his men spot a school of six whales and start after them in their rowboats. While Starbuck and Stubb rally their men into the *Pequod's* boats, their rivals are already far ahead of them. The two mates, however, urge their crew until they outstrip their rivals in the race, and Queequeg harpoons the largest whale.

Killing the whale is only the beginning of a long and arduous job. After the carcass is dragged to the side of the boat and lashed to it by ropes, the men descend the side and slash off the blubber. Much of the body is usually demolished by sharks, who stream around, snapping at the flesh of the whale and at each other. The head of the whale is removed and suspended several feet in the

air, above the deck of the ship. After the blubber is cleaned, it is melted in tremendous try-pots and then stored in vats below deck.

The men are kept busy, but their excitement increases as their ship nears the Indian Ocean and the probable sporting grounds of the white whale. Before long, they cross the path of an English whaling vessel, and Captain Ahab again demands news of Moby Dick. In answer, the captain of the English ship holds out his arm, which from the elbow down consists of sperm whalebone. Ahab demands that his boat be lowered at once, and he quickly boards the deck of the other ship. The captain tells him of his encounter and warns Captain Ahab that it is foolhardy to try to pursue Moby Dick. When he tells Ahab where he had seen the white whale last, the captain of the *Pequod* waits for no civilities but returns to his own ship to order the course changed to carry him to Moby Dick's new feeding ground. Starbuck tries to reason with the mad Captain, to persuade him to give up this insane pursuit, but Ahab seizes a rifle and in his fury orders the mate out of his cabin.

Meanwhile, Queequeg has fallen ill with a fever. When it seemed almost certain he would die, he requests that the carpenter make him a coffin in the shape of a canoe, according to the custom of his tribe. The coffin is then placed in the cabin with the sick man, but as yet there is no real need for it. Queequeg recovers from his illness and rejoins his shipmates. He uses his coffin as a sea chest and carves many strange designs upon it.

The sailors had been puzzled by the appearance early in the voyage of the Parsee servant, Fedallah. His relationship to the Captain cannot be determined, but that he is highly regarded is evident. Fedallah prophesies that the Captain will die only after he has seen two strange hearses for carrying the dead upon the sea, one not constructed by mortal hands and the other made of wood grown in America. He also says that the Captain himself will have neither hearse nor coffin for his burial.

A terrible storm arises one night. Lightning strikes the masts so that all three flame against the blackness of the night, and the men are frightened by this omen. It seems to them that the hand of God is motioning them to turn from the course to which they had set themselves and return to their homes. Only Captain Ahab is undaunted by the sight. He plants himself at the foot of the mast and challenges the god of evil, which the fire symbolizes for him. He vows once again his determination to find and kill the white whale.

A few days later, a cry rings through the ship. Moby Dick has been spotted. The voice is that of Captain Ahab. None of the sailors, alert as they had been, had been able to sight the whale before their captain. Boats are lowered and the chase begins, with Captain Ahab's boat in the lead. As he is about to dash his harpoon into the side of the mountain of white, the whale suddenly turns on the boat, dives under it, and splits it into pieces. The men are thrown into the sea, and for some time the churning of the whale prevents rescue. At length, Ahab orders the rescuers to ride into the whale and frighten him away, so he and his men could be rescued. The rest of that day is spent chasing the whale, but to no avail.

The second day, the men start out again. They catch up with the whale and bury three harpoons into his white flanks, but he so turns and churns that the lines become twisted, and the boats are pulled every way, with no control over their direction. Two of them are splintered, and the men hauled out of the sea, but Ahab's boat has not as yet been touched. Suddenly, it is lifted from the water and thrown high into the air. The Captain and the men are quickly rescued, but Fedallah is nowhere to be found.

When the third day of the chase begins, Moby Dick seems tired, and the *Pequod's* boats soon overtake him. Bound to the whale's back by the coils of rope from the harpoon poles, they see the body of Fedallah. The first part of his prophecy had been fulfilled. Moby Dick, enraged by his pain, turns on the boats and splinters them. On the *Pequod*, Starbuck watches and turns the ship toward the whale in the hope of saving the Captain and some of the crew. The infuriated monster swims directly into the *Pequod*, shattering the ship's timbers. Ahab, seeing the ship founder, cries out that the *Pequod*—made of wood grown in America—is the second hearse of Fedallah's prophecy. The third prophecy, Ahab's death by hemp, is fulfilled when rope from Ahab's harpoon coils around his neck and snatches him from his boat. All except Ishmael perish. He is rescued by a passing ship after clinging for hours to Queequeg's canoe coffin, which had bobbed to the surface as the *Pequod* sank.

Themes

a) **Individual vs. Nature**

The voyage of the *Pequod* is no straightforward, commercially inspired whaling voyage. The reader knows this as soon as Ishmael registers as a member of the crew and receives, at secondhand, warnings of the captain's state of mind. Ahab, intent on seeking revenge on the whale who has maimed him, is presented as a daring and creative individual, pitted against the full forces of nature. In developing the theme of the individual (Ahab) versus Nature (symbolized by Moby-Dick),

Melville explores the attributes of natural forces. Are they ruled by chance, neutral occurrences that affect human characters arbitrarily? Or do they possess some form of elementary will that makes them capable of using whatever power is at their disposal?

b) **God and Religion**

The conflict between the individual and nature brings into play the theme of religion and God's role in the natural world. The critic Harold Bloom has named Ahab "one of the fictive founders of what should be called the American Religion," and although Melville wrote his novel while living in the civilized Berkshires, near the eastern U.S. seaboard, and set it on the open seas, the reader must not forget that America at that time had moved westward. To Ahab it does not matter if the white whale is "agent" or "principle." He will fight against fate, rather than resign himself to a divine providence. Father Mapple, who gives a sermon near the beginning of the novel, and, to a lesser extent, Starbuck both symbolize the conventional and contemporary religious attitudes of nineteenth-century

Protestantism. Ahab's defiance of these is neither romantic nor atheistic but founded on a tragic sense of heroic and unavoidable duty.

c) Good and Evil, Female and Masculine

Ahab picks his fight with evil on its own terms, striking back aggressively. The good things in the book—the loyalty of members of the crew, such as young Pip; Ahab’s domestic memories of his wife and child—remain peripheral and ineffective, a part of life that is never permitted to take center stage. Other dualities abound. The sky and air, home for the birds, is described as feminine, while the sea is masculine, a deep dungeon for murderous brutes. Also contrasted with the sea is the land, seen as green and mild, a tranquil haven. In Chapter 58 Melville writes: “As the appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, for thou canst never return!” Although Melville’s exact point of view is debatable, and the symbolism in the book is too rich to allow for neat comparisons, it can be said that qualities of goodness tend to be equated with the land, the feminine, and with mildness of temper. Viewing the *Pequod*’s voyage as a metaphor for life, the book seems to be saying that in following ambition or any far-off goal, an individual risks missing out on many of the good things in life, including home and domestic happiness.

The fact that there are no female participants in the novel has encouraged some critics to consider that this is a commentary on the masculine character—thrusting, combative, and vengeful. But it is because the other characters are all male, and they are not all like Ahab, that interpretations cannot be so straightforward. The very masculinity of Ahab is complicated somewhat by the possibility that he has been castrated, not by the initial encounter with the whale, but by the subsequent accidental piercing of his groin by his ivory leg. Critics as diverse as W. H. Auden and Camille Paglia have written about the sexual symbolism in the novel. It is a matter which invites debate, although any discussion on the subject needs to take into account that in the nineteenth century, it was an accepted convention to give certain characteristics a gender bias. Melville, like his contemporaries, was sophisticated enough to know that men and women could embrace a combination of traits deemed to be masculine and feminine.

d) Choices and Consequences

Ahab is both a hero and a villain. In making a choice and sticking by it, he can be seen as valiantly exercising free will. But the consequences of his decision transform him into a villain, responsible for the death of such innocents as Pip and good men like Starbuck. His monomania or obsession chains him to a fate worse than that which might have prevailed had he not so stubbornly pursued his goal. Contrasting readings of the novel are possible, and most turn upon the interpretation of the character of Ahab and the choices he makes—or, rather, towards the end of the book, the choices he refuses to make. “Not too late is it, even now,” Starbuck cries out to him on the third day of the climactic chase. The question is, in depicting a number of situations in which Ahab is given the possibility of drawing back, is Melville establishing a flaw in the individual character, or is he emphasizing the predestined and inescapable quality of the novel’s conclusion?

For much of the final encounter, the white whale behaves as any ordinary whale caught up in the chase, but in its last rush at the boat, “Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect....” These are exactly the qualities which Ahab himself has exhibited during the voyage. Ahab is finally seen as both defined and consumed by fate. When, at the end of the novel, Ishmael, the lone survivor, is finally picked up and rescued by the *Rachel*, we are reminded that he had become a member of the crew as the result of an act of free will rather than necessity, as a means of escaping thoughts of death.

e) Appearance and Reality

Underscoring all of these themes is an ongoing consideration of the meaning of appearances. A key chapter in this regard is “The Whiteness of the Whale,” a meditation in Ishmael’s voice on the masklike ambiguities which affect our interpretation of the visible world. There are ambiguities in the chapter itself, for in one of two footnotes Melville gives a firsthand account of his first sighting of an albatross. “Through its inexpressible, strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets which took hold of God.” Is the reader supposed to think this is Ishmael or Melville speaking? (Ambiguity becomes a major theme in Melville’s next novel, Pierre.) In this particular chapter, Ishmael meditates on the strange phenomenon of whiteness, which sometimes speaks of godly purity and at other times repels or terrorizes with its ghostly pallor. The meditation leaves color references

behind to become a general meditation on the nature of fear and the existence of unseen evil: “Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright.”

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SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT 4 -American Literature – SHS1302

DRAMA

ALL MY SONS

-Arthur Miller

Act One

The play opens on a Sunday morning in August and is set in the backyard of the Keller home, located on the outskirts of an unidentified American town, a couple of years after the end of World War II. Joe Keller, who has been reading classified ads in a newspaper, banters pleasantly with his neighbors, Dr. Jim Bayliss and Frank Lubey. He explains that the apple tree had split in half during the night.

It is a source of some concern, for the tree is a memorial for Joe's son, Larry, and its destruction might upset Joe's wife, Kate. Frank refers to it as Larry's tree and notes that August is Larry's birth month. He plans to cast Larry's horoscope, to see if the date on which he was reported missing in action was a favorable or unfavorable day for him.

The men ask after the Kellers' visitor, Ann, the daughter of Joe's former partner, Steve Deever, who once lived in the house now owned by the Baylisses. Sue, Jim's wife, arrives and sends Jim home to talk on the phone with a patient. She is followed by Frank's wife, Lydia, who reports a problem with a toaster.

Joe's son, Chris, comes from the house, and a neighborhood boy, Bert, darts into the yard. Joe amuses Bert in a role-playing game in which Bert is learning to be a police deputy under Joe's authority. He has shown Bert a gun, and they pretend that the basement of the house is actually a jail.

After the others leave, Joe and Chris talk about the tree and the fact that Kate was outside when it fell. She has never stopped hoping that Larry will return, still alive. Her failure to accept his death

is a major obstacle for Chris, who hopes to marry Ann. Kate can only think of Ann as Larry's girl, and she can not accept a marriage of Chris and Ann without first accepting her son's death. Chris's proposed solution, much to his father's chagrin, is to leave the Keller home and business unless his father helps him make Kate accept Larry's death.

Kate enters and muses over the significance of the fallen tree and Ann's arrival. She also speaks of a dream in which she saw Larry and expresses her belief that the memorial tree should never have been planted. Exasperated, Chris talks of trying to forget Larry. She sends him off to get an aspirin, then tries to wring from Joe an explanation for Ann's visit. She also discloses that if she were to lose faith in her belief that Larry was alive, she would kill herself.

Chris returns with Ann, and a tense confrontation almost immediately begins. Ann pointedly rejects Kate's hope that Larry is still alive. She also divulges that she is unwilling to forgive her father, now in jail, as Joe once was, convicted of providing the Army Air Force with 121 defective cracked cylinder heads. The parts were used in the engines of P-40 fighter planes, twenty-one of which crashed.

Joe, who was later exonerated, attempts to defend his former partner as a confused, somewhat inept "little man" caught in a situation that he did not fully fathom. Ann is unmoved and holds her father responsible for Larry's death. Yet Kate knows the truth: Joe ordered his partner to weld the cracked cylinder heads and hide the defect.

After Joe and Kate leave, Chris confesses his love to Ann, and she ardently confirms her own for him. She is mystified by his long delay in disclosing his feelings, and he explains that it took him a long time to shake free from a guilt he felt for his survival in the war. They are interrupted when Ann is told that her brother, George, is on the phone.

As she exits, Joe and Chris discuss the fact that George is in Columbus, visiting his father in jail. Ann is heard talking on the phone, trying to mollify her angry brother, while Joe speculates as to the possibility that George and Ann may be trying to open the criminal case again. Chris placates Joe, who shrugs off his concern and begins talking of Chris's future and telling him that he will

help Chris and Ann make Kate accept their marriage. Ann then comes out to tell them that George is coming to visit that same evening.

Act Two

It is late afternoon on the same day. Kate enters to find Chris sawing up the fallen apple tree. After telling Chris that Joe is sleeping, she asks Chris to tell Ann to go home with George. She is afraid that Steve Deever's hatred for Joe has infected his children, and she wants them both to leave.

When Ann appears, Kate returns to the house. Ann wants Chris to tell his mother about their marriage plans, and he promises to do so that evening. As he leaves, Sue enters, looking for her husband. She and Ann discuss Ann's marriage plans. Sue encourages her to move away after her marriage. She is bitter towards Chris, who, as Jim's friend, has tried to convince him to pursue work in medical research, a luxury that the Baylisses cannot afford.

When Ann defends Chris, Sue suggests that Chris is a phony, given the fact that Chris has greatly benefited from Joe's ruthless and unethical business practices. She also tells Ann that everyone knows that Joe was as guilty as Steve Deever and merely “pulled a fast one to get out of jail.”

When Chris returns, Sue goes in the house to see if she can calm Kate down. Ann tells Chris that Sue hates him, and that the people of the community believe that Joe should be in jail. Chris believes in his father's innocence and tells her that he can not put any stock in what the neighbors believe.

Joining them in the backyard, Joe tells the young lovers that he wants to find George a good local job, and then announces that he even wants to hire Steve Deever when he is released from prison. Chris is adamantly opposed, believing that Deever had wrongly implicated his father, and he does not want Joe to give him a job. Joe exits.

Having picked up George at the train station, Jim Bayliss enters quickly from the driveway. Jim warns Chris that George has “blood in his eye,” and that Chris should not let him come into the Keller yard. However, Chris welcomes George as a friend, but from George's surly behavior it is soon clear that he is angry.

As a result of visiting his father, he is convinced that Joe knew about the cracked cylinder heads but ordered Deever to ship them anyway, and he is now intent on stopping Ann from marrying Chris. He presents his father's account of the day the cracked cylinder heads were made, but Chris, believing in his father's innocence, tries to make him leave rather than confront Joe and upset his mother.

The tense situation is defused when Kate and Lydia enter the yard. After some amiable recollections are exchanged, Joe enters and asserts that Steve Deever only blames Joe because Steve, unable to face his faults, could never own up to his mistakes. George seems almost at ease, but when Kate makes a critical blunder, inadvertently disclosing that Joe had not been ill in fifteen years, George is once again upset. Joe's alibi was that he had been home with pneumonia when the defective parts were doctored up and shipped out by Deever; George realizes that Joe's alibi was a lie.

Frank Lubey enters with Larry Keller's horoscope, which speculates that Larry is still alive. Kate wants Ann to leave with George and has even packed her bag. Chris tries to make his mother see that Larry is dead, but Kate, knowing the truth about the defective parts, insists that he must be alive. Otherwise, she believes that Joe is responsible for his death.

Finally realizing the truth, Chris angrily confronts his father, who lamely tries to defend his actions as “business.” Chris, profoundly hurt and disillusioned, beats furiously on his father's shoulders.

Act Three

It is 2:00 AM of the following morning. Alone, Kate waits for Chris to return. Jim joins her and asks what has happened; he then reveals that he has known about her husband's guilt for some time. He contends that he hopes that Chris will go off to find himself before returning.

Jim exits just as Joe comes in. Kate tells him that Jim knows the truth. Meanwhile, he is concerned about Ann, who has stayed in her room since Chris left. He talks, too, of needing Chris's forgiveness and his intent to take his own life should he not get it.

Ann enters and hesitantly gives Kate a letter that she had received from Larry after Joe and her father were convicted. Chris returns and tells his father that he cannot forgive him. Ann takes the letter from Kate and gives it to Chris, who reads it aloud.

Composed just before Larry's death, it tells of his plan to take his own life in shame over what his father had done. It suddenly becomes clear to Joe that Larry believed that all the fighter pilots who perished in combat were Joe's sons. He then withdraws into the house, and Chris confirms his plan to turn Joe over to the authorities.

Suddenly, a shot is heard from the house. Chris enters the house, presumably to find his father's body. He returns to his mother's arms, dismayed and crying, and she tells him to forget what has happened and live his life.

Themes

American Dream

In a sense, *All My Sons* is a critical investigation of the quest to achieve material comfort and an improved social status through hard work and determination. In the Horatio Alger myth, even a disadvantaged, impoverished young man can attain wealth and prestige through personal fortitude, moral integrity, and untiring industry. Joe Keller is that sort of self-made man, one who made his way from blue-collar worker to factory owner. However, Joe sacrifices his integrity to materialism, and he makes a reprehensible decision that sends American pilots to their deaths, something he is finally forced to face.

Atonement and Forgiveness

Paradoxically, Joe Keller's suicide at the end of *All My Sons* is both an act of atonement and an escape from guilt. It stems from Joe's realization that there can be no real forgiveness for what he had done. The alternative is confession and imprisonment. Death offers Joe another alternative.

Forgiveness must come from Kate and Chris. The letter written by Larry reveals that he deliberately destroyed himself during the war, profoundly shamed by his father's brief imprisonment for fraud and profiteering. It is a devastating irony that Joe's initial attempt to do

right by his family—resulting in fraud and the deaths of twenty-one fighter pilots—leads to destruction of his world.

Choices and Consequences

All My Sons employs a pattern that is fundamental to most tragedies. Protagonists in tragedy must, in some degree, be held accountable for their actions. When faced with a moral dilemma, they often make a wrong choice. Joe, at a critical moment, elected to place his family's finances above the lives of courageous American soldiers.

The revelations that lead up to Joe's tragic recognition of guilt and his suicide, the final consequences of his choice, are essential to *All My Sons*. There is a sense of *anake*, or tragic necessity, that moves the work along towards its inevitable moment of truth and awful but final retribution.

Death

The key in the tragic arc of *All My Sons* is Kate Keller's refusal to accept the death of her son, Larry. Initially, prone to false hopes, it seems that she is in denial; finally, it is revealed that her need to believe that Larry is alive allows her to avoid the terrible consequences of her husband's deeds. She realizes that if Larry is dead, then Joe is responsible for his death—something Larry himself confirmed in his letter to Ann. All along, Kate knew her husband's guilt but desperately avoided it, knowing that it would destroy her family.

Duty and Responsibility

Joe Keller's sense of duty and responsibility is to the material comfort of his family and the success of his business. At a weak moment, under pressure, he puts these values ahead of what should clearly have been a higher duty, his obligation to human life. His fear of losing lucrative government contracts—essentially his greed—blinded him to the murder he was committing.

Ethics

Joe's decision to send defective parts is not merely a result of skewed values, it is a serious breach of ethics. Joe does not fully comprehend how serious a breach it is. To him, success is more

important than anything else, including human life and the good of his country. By setting up this ethical situation, Miller clearly questions the implications of a value system that puts material success above moral responsibilities to others.

Guilt and Innocence

In *All My Sons*, there are hints that Joe is troubled by his guilt—even before his eventual suicide. His suspicions of Ann and George Deever reveal his fears of being forced to face the truth. Even when he attempts to atone for his guilt by helping his former partner, Steve Deever as well as Deever's son, George, his offer seems rather lame given the enormity of his guilt. There is no way he can atone for the deaths of the American fighter pilots, however, something that he finally realizes.

Punishment

Joe's death at the end of *All My Sons* is paradoxically both punishment and escape. In one sense, Joe can do no less than pay for his crime with his life. It is not an empty gesture. It is made abundantly clear from the play's beginning that Joe is a man who is full of life and cherishes his roles as both husband and father.

When the truth comes out, Joe has to face not only a return to prison but also the alienation of his remaining son and the destruction his family. Death offers the only escape from that pain. It may also be seen as a sacrificial act, one which saves Joe's son, Chris, from further humiliation.

Revenge

Fueled by his anger over Joe's guilt, George Deever comes to the Keller's house seeking revenge and retribution. He is a major catalyst and intensifies the emotional tension of the play. For a moment, Kate's friendliness and warmth placate him. When, towards the end of the second act, Kate inadvertently confirms the probable truth of his father's accusations, George's anger returns. Joe is then forced to reveal his fraudulent and deceitful actions.

THE HAIRY APE

-Eugene O'Neill

Below decks on an ocean liner one hour out from its New York port, the firemen who power the ship by stoking coal drink, curse, and sing, creating a defiant uproar. The strongest and most respected of the group is Robert Smith, known as Yank, who takes pride in his strength and in the ability of the crew to power the engines. Yank's shipmate Paddy, a wizened old Irishman, yearns for the days of the graceful clipper ships that plowed the Atlantic silently, when men were in harmony with nature. A socialist agitator named Long curses the capitalist class that has forced the crew to slave for wages in the bowels of the ship. Rejecting these views, Yank sees himself as the mover of the world.

On the ship's promenade deck, rich young heiress Mildred Douglas and her overly rouged aunt recline in deck chairs. Mildred is the spoiled daughter of the steel-company president who chairs the liner's board of directors. She wants to visit the ship's stokehold to discover how the other half lives.

Mildred's aunt considers her interest in social service to be superficial and calls her a poseur. Mildred responds that she is sincere and wants to help those in need. Dressed in white, she insists that the ship's officers take her below. When they reveal to Mildred the stokers in all their brutality, she is repulsed and frightened. At the sight of Yank, who is caught unaware by her presence, she cries out and faints. Later, Paddy remarks to Yank that the young woman looked as though she had seen a hairy ape. His identity and sense of belonging shattered, Yank vows to get even.

When the ship returns to New York, Long attempts to channel Yank's hurt and fury against Mildred into rage against the ruling class. He shows Yank goods displayed in Fifth Avenue store windows, goods that will never be available to Yank, and he rails against the callous behavior of rich Sunday churchgoers. Unmoved at first, Yank becomes excited when he sees a coat made of monkey fur in a store window. It reminds him of Paddy's comment. He becomes further irritated when the men and women of Fifth Avenue ignore his hostile advances and seem not to see him.

Maddened by the crowd's delighted cries at the sight of the monkey-fur coat, he tries in vain to pull up a lamppost to use as a club. Not even punching a gentleman in the face brings him recognition: His arrest occurs only after the gentleman's accusation that Yank caused him to miss his bus.

Jailed for thirty days on Blackwell's Island, Yank at first thinks he might be caged at the zoo. His fellow inmates, learning of Yank's anger at Mildred, suggest that he can gain revenge by joining the Wobblies, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). According to newspaper stories, the IWW is a tough gang whose members dynamite buildings and seek to destroy American society. Yank realizes that Mildred's father, the president of the Steel Trust, made the steel of the ship where he thought he belonged, as well as the steel that imprisons him in jail.

Once he is freed from jail, Yank goes to the IWW office, believing that with his strength and purpose he will be useful to the group in its supposedly violent activities. After being welcomed by the IWW secretary, Yank assures the men that he is a regular guy and indicated that he is "wise" to them. The secretary tries to explain to him that the IWW's activities are legal and aboveboard. Yank continues, however, and when he boasts that he alone could blow up all the steel factories of the world, the union members decide he must be a spy from the Secret Service. They throw him out, and Yank discovers that he did not belong with them either.

The despondent Yank is unsure where to turn. The ship no longer represents home for him, society ignores him, and even the Wobblies have rejected him. He travels to the monkey house at the zoo to encounter his animal counterpart. At least the gorilla, he thinks, can dream of the past and of the jungle where it knows it belonged. Yank, by contrast, is homeless. Yank jimmies the lock and frees the gorilla. The two confront each other outside the cage. Yank offers a hand to his "brother," but instead of shaking it, the beast envelops him in its arms, crushing him in a murderous hug. Throwing the mortally injured man into the cage, the ape shuffles off. With a final, ironic effort to stand as a human being, Yank mockingly acknowledges the cage and dies.

Scene 1

The play opens in a ship's forecastle, the quarters for the crew located in the forward part of the boat. The firemen of the large ocean-going ship are all happily drinking, although there is discernible tension, indicating that the men are capable of violence at a moment's notice. One of the firemen, Yank, declares that beer is sissy and that he only drinks the "hard stuff." Paddy sings a song about whiskey. Yank yells at them, insisting that they are "dead." He says he wants quiet because he's trying to think. Someone sings a sentimental song about home, and Yank launches into a verbal attack of home, of emotional connections, and of women.

Long claims they are all really living in hell and blames their miserable conditions on the people in first-class, "the damned Capitalist class." Yank doesn't have the time or attention span for Long's talk of politics. He calls Long yellow and declares that all of the workers are better men than the people in first-class. "Dem boids don't amount to nothing." He gets the group riled up, drowning out Long's speech. Paddy reminisces about the old days, before boats had engines, when man and the sea and the ship became one. Yank says he's crazy, dead even. It takes a real man to work in hell, he claims. Yank sees his energy as what drives the ship. "I'm steel," he says, ridiculing the idea that they are slaves. He dismisses Paddy as an outcast, a leftover from a previous age.

Scene 2

On the promenade deck, young Mildred Douglas reclines in a deck chair with her aunt. They engage in small talk and little arguments. Her aunt chides Mildred about her forays into social service and attempts to help the poor. Mildred says she wants "to touch life somewhere," although she has enjoyed the benefits of the wealth produced by her family's steel business.

The aunt points out that Mildred is really quite artificial and that her efforts in helping the poor are actually thinly veiled attempts at some kind of social credibility. Mildred, however, is intent on visiting the stokehole of the ship, to mingle with the common workers and experience their lifestyle. She has received permission from the ship's captain by claiming she had a letter from her father, the chairman of the ship line, who requested that she inspect the vessel. The second engineer

escorting her to the stokehole questions her white dress, since she might rub up against dirt or oil; Mildred replies she will throw it out when she comes back up because she has plenty of dresses.

Scene 3

In the stokehole, the men are bare-chested, sweaty, and dirty as they shovel coal into the massive furnace that propels the ship's engines. The heat appears to be oppressive, close to unbearable. Paddy is exhausted. Yank ridicules him and brags about his own ability to face the furnace without tiring. He rallies the men as they put their energy into stoking the furnace.

"He ain't got no noive (nerve)," Yank says of Paddy, and the men respond to his encouragement as he calls on them to feed the baby (the furnace). At the height of their brute physical activity, Mildred enters in her lily-white dress. The whistle sounds, signaling the end of the work shift. The men notice Mildred and are shocked by her incongruous presence. Yank is oblivious to her and continues to work, shaking his shovel at the whistle.

Mildred observes Yank's animal-like force and is appalled by it. Suddenly Yank sees her, sending a venomous, hateful glare at her. She swoons with fear, nearly fainting into her escort's arms. She asks to be taken away, labeling Yank a filthy beast. He is enraged at the insult and throws his shovel at the door through which she has exited.

Scene 4

Yank, unlike the other fireman, has not washed himself after their shift. The men are off-duty and entertaining themselves, while Yank sits, his face covered in coal soot, trying to figure out the previous events in the furnace room. The other men tease him, suggesting he's fallen in love with the stokehole's strange visitor. No, he counters, the feeling he has for Mildred is hate.

Long complains that the engineers put them on exhibition, like they were monkeys. He mentions that Mildred is the daughter of a steel magnate. Paddy suggests her visit was like a visit to the zoo, where they were pointed out as baboons. Paddy says it was love at first sight when she saw Yank, like she had seen a great hairy ape escaped from the zoo. He makes fun of how Yank threw the shovel at her exit.

Yank seems to like the label "Harry Ape" and imagines that his encounter with Mildred resulted in violence to her. Long says he would have been punished for such an act, but Yank continues this fantasy, feeding his anger over the disparity in his and Mildred's social standing. As Yank shows signs of losing his temper and control, the others pile on him and hold him down. Paddy advises them to give Yank time to cool down before letting him up.

Scene 5

It is some time after the ship's return to port, and Yank and Long walk down Fifth Avenue in New York, talking. Long is once again offering his political rhetoric about the working class while Yank, oblivious to his companion's words, speaks of his growing obsession with teaching the upper class—specifically Mildred—a lesson about human worth. At the same time Yank complains that he doesn't fit in or belong anywhere. They see the jewelry and the furs in the windows of the store and are infuriated at the prices, which are far beyond the means of common men such as themselves. Yank sees a group of wealthy people coming out of a church where they have been making relatively insignificant contributions to the needy. Yank verbally attacks this group, saying they don't belong and bragging about his physical prowess, how people like him are the ones who make things work. He challenges them to a fight. Before he can commit any physical violence, however, Yank is restrained by police, who arrest him.

Scene 6

Yank is in jail, angry at being caged like an animal in the zoo. The other prisoners mock him. They ask him what crime he committed, suggesting a domestic argument. Yank explains the root of his anger—Mildred's visit to the stokehole—and his subsequent attack on the rich people. During his rant, he mentions Mildred's last name. The prisoners inform him that her father is president of the Steel Trust. One inmate suggests that Yank join a group of labor activists, the Wobblies, whose efforts are aimed at exacting revenge upon upper-class denizens such as Mildred and her father. The inmate gives Yank information about the union. Yank gets very excited that a tangible solution to his problems has presented itself. He talks about the steel bars that are restraining him, imagining

himself as a fire that will burn through them. His fervor becomes so intense that he bends the bars and has to be subdued by the guards.

Scene 7

Yank shows up at the Wobblies (the nickname for the International Workers of the World) local union office. He asks to join but has to stop and think when they ask him his real name. The union members are happy to find a fireman from the shipping line who is willing to join their cause. They express an interest in organizing the line's other workers. They want to know why Yank is joining. They ask whether he wants to change the inequality of the world with "legitimate direct action—or with dynamite." He responds that dynamite is the answer and indicates his desire to blow up the Douglas Steel Trust and its president. Quickly sensing that Yank is mentally unstable and dangerous, the union rejects his application. Out on the street, Yank becomes agitated, repeating his belief that there is no place where he truly belongs. A pair of policemen chastise him, believing him to be a drunk.

Scene 8

Yank visits the monkey house at the zoo. He talks to the animals about his experiences in the city. One gorilla responds by pounding on his chest, and Yank decides that they are members of the same club, the Hairy Apes. He wonders how the animals feel, having people look at them in a cage and make fun of them. Pondering the similarities in his and the animals' situations, Yank is so moved that he pries the cage door open. As the gorilla exits, Yank tries to exchange a secret handshake with his newfound friend. The gorilla grabs him in a crushing hug. Yank drops to the ground and, as he dies, realizes that he doesn't even belong with the hairy apes. The monkeys jump and chatter about the stage.

Themes

Class Conflict

Yank is the epitome of the lower class, the working poor. He has the brawn but not the brain. He and his peers put their shoulders to the wheel and make the great capitalist machine run; they provide the sweat and muscle that will push America to the forefront of the industrial age. The system exploits these efforts, reaping great profits for those who own the machines but offering little reward for those who operate them.

Although Yank initially envisions himself above the first-class passengers on the ship—reassuring himself with the knowledge that without people like him the ship would not run—he comes to realize that the rich are getting richer from his efforts while his own rewards remain paltry. It is Mildred's father who owns the steel works and the ship line. And it is people like Mildred who can afford the furs and diamonds on Fifth Avenue. They are living the good life by exploiting the workers.

It is this realization that he is only a cog in the machine and not the center of the industrial universe that plants the first seeds of Yank's disillusion. Before Mildred's appearance in the stokehole, Yank had not been directly exposed to the upper class. While his perception of himself was one of elevated status, he is confronted with the fact that the true mark of high status—money—is in the hands of others. His illusions of importance in question, Yank begins to ponder his exact place in society.

Meaning in Life

Although it is a pose at direct odds with his mental capacities, Yank is seen several times throughout the play in the pose of the "Thinker" (a famous sculpture by Auguste Rodin depicting a man in deep, contemplative thought). What provokes these ponderous episodes is his struggle to understand his role in life. It is a role that he thought he understood. He worked hard, providing the human energy that enabled the massive ship to run its engines. For these efforts he felt he should be viewed as a kind of superhuman, a creature upon whom the rest of society depended.

Yet when Mildred nearly faints at his brutish appearance, he is confronted with the possibility that others do not see him in this light.

While his initial reaction to being called an animal—a hairy ape—is one of pleasure, he comes to realize that the distinction is not a positive one. Far from being considered a superman, he is an outcast and an oddity. He is not like his fellow workers, and he is certainly not like the first-class passengers.

His first realization that he does not have the social standing he believed provokes growing selfreflection in Yank. Prior to Mildred's visit, he had a firm ideal of his place in society, the meaning of his life. Learning that others do not see him as he sees himself poses the question: where does he fit in? Lacking even the most basic social tools, Yank is an outcast even among the other firemen. Where he had previously seen this alienation as proof of his superiority, he now begins to question his place among humanity. At the start of the play, Yank is happy—or at least content—with his station in life. The knowledge that reality is far from his perception marks the start of his downfall, his search for a place to belong, and eventually his death.

Socialism and Society in the Industrial Age

While the FBI feared that *The Hairy Ape* would be used as a propaganda tool for those with socialist/ communist agendas, the play came to be known more for its study of human nature than for its politics. Socialism as voiced by the character of Long, argues that the only fair economic system is one that allows ownership by the workers and a more even distribution of wealth among all citizens. While *The Hairy Ape* makes some arguments in favor of better working conditions and an equitable share of profits (it is clear from the play that the firemen are not well compensated for toiling under extreme conditions), it does not aspire, like Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*, to present an overview of the injustices wrought on the working class.

What O'Neill sought to illustrate was how America's rapid evolution into an industrial nation created personality types that were suited for the necessary tasks. In a form of Darwinian adaptation, those with physical prowess became the workers while those with a sense for money and planning became the upper class. This evolution also created rigid ideals for each social class.

O'Neill's interest lay in the development of an extreme social persona such as Yank. Yank's strength and skill as a menial worker allowed him to develop and excel at one thing—stoking an engine furnace. Yet his advancement as a fireman came at a cost to his humanity. He has evolved to an ultra-refined state in which he is as much a machine as human. He can no longer interact with his peers. Beyond criticizing or embracing one system, the play condemns a society—socialist, capitalist, or other—that would allow such an extreme disassociation to take place in the name of progress.

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIT 5 - American Literature – SHS1302

SHORT STORY

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

- Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allen Poe's short story "*The Fall of the House of Usher*" was originally published in September of 1839. In the tale, the narrator visits a childhood friend who is sick and in need of company. The house is old and decrepit, and it seems to cause the madness of the last surviving Usher siblings, Roderick and Madeline. When Madeline succumbs to an illness, she is buried in a house vault, only to return after a premature burial. Madeline emerges from the vault the night of an intense storm and collapses on her brother in death. The narrator flees the house and looks back to see it sink into a swamp. Rather than convey a lesson, Poe's story explores gothic elements of the supernatural and evil to convey this tale of horror.

The story opens with the narrator riding alone on a cloudy autumn day to the House of Usher. He immediately feels depression and fear when he sees the mansion. He describes a childhood friendship with the owner, Roderick Usher. Roderick had requested the narrator's company during his convalescence from an illness. The narrator reflects on the once-great Usher family and that they have only one surviving direct line of descendants, comparing the beautiful but crumbling house to the family living inside.

After looking at the reflection of the mansion in the tarn, or small lake, in front of the estate, the narrator believes he sees a heavy mist and vapor rising from the trees and house. He then takes a closer look at the ancient mansion and sees a crack zigzagging from the roof to the foundation, where it disappears into the tarn's shore.

After entering the house, the valet shows him to a sitting room where Roderick lies on a sofa. The two sit together in silence, and the narrator cannot believe the man beside him is Roderick, because

his appearance has changed from that of a youthful boy to a gaunt, wispy-haired, and pale-skinned ghost of the man he once was.

When Roderick speaks, he states that his illness is hereditary and without cure, which causes him to have highly reactive senses. Roderick believes he will soon go insane from fear and die. He admits that he is superstitious about the house, and that its continual gloom has broken him down. Usher states that he and his sister, Madeline, are the last of the line of Usher, and that Madeline is sick with a disease the doctors cannot diagnose. Later that night, Roderick tells the narrator that she has died.

No one mentions Madeline, and Roderick spends his time painting, playing music, reading, and writing. He paints a dark underground tunnel with beams of strange light shining through. Usher writes songs on his guitar, and the narrator recounts one entitled “The Haunted Palace.” In the song a prosperous palace falls, and only dancing ghosts remain. Roderick admits he believes the Usher house is sentient and that a foul atmosphere grows from the grounds. He states that the house has moulded generations of the Usher family and has caused his current state. Roderick decides to keep his sister preserved in a house vault before moving her to the isolated family cemetery. He soon abandons his former hobbies, and the narrator observes that Roderick is beginning to lose his mind. While watching his friend’s condition deteriorate, the narrator feels himself slip into madness as well.

A week after Madeline’s death, the narrator lies awake with an unexplained feeling of fear. A storm rages outside, and despite efforts to reason with himself, he shakes with terror. He paces around the room, and Roderick enters in a state of restrained hysteria. The storm intensifies, and objects in the room glow with unnatural light from the mist that surrounds the mansion. Trying to calm Roderick, the narrator reads *The Mad Trist*. Usher moves his chair to face the door, murmuring under his breath while the narrator reads to him. The narrator comes to the scene in which the hero forces his way into the home of a hermit and finds a dragon that he eventually slays with a mace. At each critical moment in the story, the narrator hears noises coming from outside the room. Just as the hero kills the dragon, the sound of a shield falling—a sound which occurs in

the story—disturbs both the narrator and Roderick. Roderick begins quivering and ranting incoherently. Roderick’s following ravings reveal that he fears that he buried Madeline alive.

The door opens and Madeline stands with blood on her robes, trembling. She cries out and falls on her brother, and both die as she drags him to the floor with her. The narrator flees the house with the storm still raging around him. He looks back to see the crack in the house widen and the tarn swallow the House of Usher.

Themes

Fear, Imagination, and Madness

Fear is a pervasive theme throughout “The Fall of the House of Usher,” playing a prominent role in the lives of the characters. The story shows that fear and imagination feed off one another. The narrator is afraid of the old mansion, even though there is no specific threat. He recognizes that the individual aspects of the mansion are normal, but when put together, they convey an ominous presence. He is more terrified by the house’s reflection in the tarn, a distorted and ultimately imaginary image, than by the actual house.

The narrator sees Roderick losing his sanity and grip on reality, and while there is no obvious cause, the narrator admits he feels the same terror and madness setting on him. Roderick lives in a constant state of fear, which soon infects the narrator, making him superstitious as well. Roderick’s imagination makes him believe that the house is sentient, and this belief makes him fearful of his surroundings. Roderick states that he will eventually “abandon life and reason together,” and in doing so he will completely lose touch with reality and give in to his delusions.

The Moral-less Story

Many of Poe’s contemporaries were concerned with making moral and political statements through their writing. These writers believed that literature should be didactic, that it should teach a lesson. Poe preferred to write stories that focused on channeling singular emotions and effects rather than conveying a moral or a lesson. In “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Poe intentionally leaves his story without a lesson, showing that because people and nature are corrupted there is no

lesson to be learned. The story ends abruptly in death and destruction, with only the narrator left alive to recount it. The narrator does not attempt to make sense of the events; he only gives detailed descriptions.

Since there is no lesson attached, the story must be enjoyed for its own sake without a moral aim.

Gothic Style, Death, and the Supernatural

Poe uses the gothic-fiction device of dramatizing death, decay, and madness to show the corruption of nature and humanity. The descriptions in the story focus on the ominous and frightening. The house is decaying; its stones crumble, and a crack threatens the structural integrity of the mansion. Tattered and old furniture fills the interior of the house. While the windows are tall and high, only red light filters through and there are dark corners and shadowy places. There are many books and instruments, but they do not enliven the dreary house. The descriptions of the mansion and the grounds portray everything in a state of dilapidation, on the verge of collapse and death. The house acts as an example of how time erodes goodness and beauty.

The gothic element of madness appears most vividly in Roderick, but it also infects the narrator. Roderick wrestles with superstitions surrounding the house, and the narrator himself begins to feel an irrational terror creeping upon him. Roderick exhibits external signs of madness, while the narrator describes the experience of madness from an internal perspective.

The supernatural forces in the story are unilaterally destructive. In keeping with the gothic style, Poe depicts the supernatural as evil and relates it to insanity. Uncanny events—such as Madeline's reanimation—push Roderick and the narrator further into madness, forcing them to reconsider their sanity. In addition, the possible sentience of the house only drives its residents insane with fear, showing how the supernatural decays what it touches.

THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

- O. Henry

Della Young is a devoted young married woman. Christmas Eve finds her in possession of a meager one dollar and eighty-seven cents, the sum total of her savings, with which she wants to buy a gift for her husband, Jim. A recent cut in the family income, from an ample thirty dollars a week to a stingy twenty dollars a week, has turned Della's frugality into parsimony. Although she lives in an eight-dollar-a-week flat and her general surroundings, even by the greatest stretch of the imagination, do not meet the standards of genteel poverty, Della determines that she cannot live through Christmas without giving Jim a tangible reminder of the season.

Distraught, she clutches the one dollar and eighty-seven cents in her hand as she moves discontentedly about her tiny home. Suddenly, catching a glance of herself in the cheap pier glass mirror, a maneuver possible only for the slender and agile viewer, the perfect solution suggests itself. Whirling about with happiness, she lets down her long, beautiful hair. It is like brown sable and falls in caressing folds to below her knees. After a moment's self-admiration, and another half-moment's reservation, during which time a tear streaks down her face, she resolutely puts on her old hat and jacket and leaves the flat.

Della's quick steps take her to the shop of Madame Sofronie, an establishment that trades in hair goods of all kinds. Entering quickly, lest her nerve desert her, she offers to sell her hair. Madame Sofronie surveys the luxuriant tresses, unceremoniously slices them off, and hands Della twenty dollars. For the next two hours, Della feels herself in paradise, temporarily luxuriating in the knowledge that she can buy anything she wants. She decides on a watch fob for Jim's beautiful old watch. If there are two treasures in the world of which James and Della Dillingham Young are inordinately and justly proud, they are her hair (lately and gladly sacrificed) and Jim's revered gold watch, handed down to him by his grandfather.

She finally sees exactly what she wants, a platinum watch fob that costs twenty-one dollars. She excitedly anticipates Jim's reaction when he sees a proper chain for his watch. Until now, he has

been using an old leather strap, which, despite the watch's elegance, has forced him to look at the time surreptitiously.

Arriving back at the flat, breathless but triumphant, Della remembers her newly bobbed appearance. She reaches for the curling irons and soon a mass of close-cropped curls adorns her shorn head. She stares at herself anxiously in the mirror, hoping that her husband will still love her. As is her usual custom, she prepares dinner for the always punctual Jim and sits down to await his arrival. The precious gift is tightly clutched in her hand. She mutters an imprecation to God so that Jim will think she is still pretty.

At precisely seven o'clock, she hears Jim's familiar step on the stairs, his key in the door. He is a careworn young man, only twenty-two and already burdened with many responsibilities. He opens the door, sees Della, and an indiscernible look, neither sorrow nor surprise, overtakes him. His face can only be described as bearing a mask of melancholy disbelief. Even though Della rushes to assure him that her hair grows fast and that she will soon be back to normal, Jim cannot seem to be persuaded that her beautiful hair is really gone. Della implores him to understand that she simply could not have lived through Christmas without buying him a gift; she begs him, for her sake, as well as the season's, to be happy.

Jim, as if waking from a trance, embraces her and readily tells her that there is nothing a shampoo or haircut could do to Della that would alter his love for her. In the excitement he has forgotten to give her gift, and now he offers her a paper-wrapped package. Tearing at it eagerly, Della finds a set of combs, tortoise shell, bejewelled combs that she has so often admired in a shop on Broadway, combs whose color combines perfectly with her own vanished tresses. Her immense joy turns to tears but quickly returns when she remembers just how fast her hair grows.

Jim has not yet seen his beautiful present. She holds it out to him, and the precious metal catches all the nuances of light in the room. It is indeed a beautiful specimen of a watch chain, and Della insists on attaching it to Jim's watch. Jim looks at her with infinite love and patience and suggests that they both put away their presents—for a while. Jim has sold his watch in order to buy the combs for Della even as she has sold her hair to buy the watch chain for Jim.

Like the Magi, those wise men who invented the tradition of Christmas giving, both Della and Jim have unwisely sacrificed the greatest treasures of their house for each other. However, of all those who give gifts, these two are inevitably the wisest.

Themes

1. Love

Della Young and Jim Young's deep love for each other is the central theme of "The Gift of the Magi." It makes them willing to sacrifice their most prized possessions in order to buy a Christmas gift for the other person. Both show they value their relationship more than material things.

Della's love for Jim is evident in her willingness to live in a shabby apartment so Jim can pursue his career ambitions. He is making less money than in the past, but she does not blame him for their bleak financial circumstances. Instead she tries to stretch her budget by haggling with the grocer, vegetable man, and butcher in order to get the most for her money. She thinks very highly of Jim, wanting to buy him a gift that is "fine and rare and sterling," which is how she perceives him.

Jim similarly loves Della. He looks at her shorn head without anger or disapproval, affirming his love for her goes beyond her physical appearance. He tells her there isn't anything that could make him like her any less. He is calm and supportive rather than critical or demeaning, showing his love is based on mutual acceptance and endearment.

2. Self-Sacrifice

Jim and Della's selflessness is a major theme in the story. Both have given up much to live in New York. Jim has taken a job with a low salary. Della is forced to make ends meet by haggling with vendors. Both are wearing old clothes. They live in a barely furnished apartment. As a couple, they are willing to sacrifice a more comfortable life to allow Jim to pursue his ambition of working in New York.

At Christmastime, Jim and Della want to do something special for the other, however. Unable to squeeze enough money out of Jim's paycheck to buy a gift, they each sell their most prized possession. Their desire to make their partner happy is more important to them than any wish to please themselves. Considering neither of them owns much, this is indeed remarkable. Despite their dreary environment, lack of possessions, and financial straits, both put the interests of the other person above their own.

3. Material versus Spiritual

Della and Jim's spiritual or emotional connection is portrayed as more important to them than any material or physical possession. When they discover their actions have canceled out each other's gifts, they reveal what matters most to them. Rather than regretting what they have lost, they recognize they have something of far greater value—their love and concern for each other. Jim tells Della he will continue to like her no matter what she does to her hair. Della confirms her love for her husband is greater than the length of the hairs on her head.

The narrator emphasizes the theme of spiritual over material qualities through a biblical allusion that mentions the magi, wise men from the East who brought gifts to Christ when he was born and who "invented the art of giving Christmas presents." The narrator considers Della's and Jim's gifts to each other equal to or as wise as those given by the magi. This is a reference not to the combs and watch chain they gave each other, but to their giving of themselves.

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