



**SATHYABAMA**

INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)

Accredited "A" Grade by NAAC | 12B Status by UGC | Approved by AICTE

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SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

**SYLLABUS – AMERICAN LITERATURE– SHSA5102**

SHSA5102	AMERICAN LITERATURE	L	T	P	CREDIT
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**Course Objectives:**

- To demonstrate an awareness of the social, historical, literal elements in American Literature.
- To develop a broader knowledge on human ideas, beliefs and social values.
- To introduce major and minor authors, text & contexts and to realize the philosophical intellectuality
- To understand the American style of writing and ideologies like Transcendentalism, corruption etc

**UNIT I: Poetry**

**(9 Hrs)**

<b>Detail:</b>	1. Edgar Allan Poe	: <i>Raven</i>
	2. Emily Dickenson	: <i>Success is Counted Sweetest</i>
	3. Robert Frost	: <i>Birches</i>
<b>Non-detail:</b>	1. Sylvia Plath	: <i>Daddy</i>
	2. Robert Frost	: <i>Home Burial</i>
	3. Walt Whitman	: <i>Crossing Brooklyn Ferry</i>

**UNIT II: Prose**

**(9 Hrs)**

<b>Detail:</b>	1. Ralph Waldo Emerson	: <i>Self-Reliance</i>
<b>Non-detail:</b>	1. Martin Luther King	: <i>I have a dream</i>
	2. Edgar Allen Poe	: <i>The Philosophy of Composition</i>

**UNIT III: Drama**

**(9 Hrs)**

<b>Detail:</b>	1. Tennessee Williams	: <i>The Glass Menagerie</i>
<b>Non-detail:</b>	1. Edward Albee	: <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?</i>
	2. Arthur Miller	: <i>Death of a Salesman</i>

**UNIT IV: Fiction**

**(9 Hrs)**

1. Ernest Hemingway	: <i>The Old Man and the Sea</i>
2. Ralph Ellison	: <i>Invisible Man</i>
3. Saul Bellow	: <i>Seize the Day</i>

**UNIT V: Short Fiction:**

**(9 Hrs)**

1. Eudore Welty	: <i>Worn Path</i>
2. O. Henry	: 1. <i>One Dollar's Worth</i>
	: 2. <i>The Cop and the Anthem</i>

**Course Outcomes:**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand the historical and cultural environments of major American authors and their works
- Identify writing styles, themes, and importance of major works by American authors.
- Analyze and write about American literature and authors
- Demonstrate knowledge of the development of characteristic forms or styles of expression
- Articulate the aesthetic principles that guide the scope and variety of works in the arts and humanities.
- Prepare research-based critical papers using various critical approaches to literature.

**Prescribed Text:**

- Brehm, John. *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*. United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Foerster, Norman. Ed. *From Walt Whitman to the present*. United States, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947.

**References:**

1. Beach, Christopher. *The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
2. Fredman, Stephen, ed. *A Concise Companion to Twentieth-century American Poetry*. City: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
3. Gurudev, Sujata. *American Literature: Studies on Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishing, 2006.
4. Reames, Kelly Lynch. *Women and Race in Contemporary U.S Writing: From Faulkner to Morrison*. City: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.



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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**UNIT – I – AMERICAN LITERATURE– SHSA5102**

## AMERICAN LITERATURE – SHSA5102

### Course Materials

#### UNIT I – POETRY

<b>Detail:</b>	Edgar Allen Poe	– <i>Raven</i>
	Emily Dickenson	– <i>Success Is Counted Sweetest</i>
	Robert Frost	- <i>Birches</i>
<b>Non-Detail:</b>	Sylvia Plath	– <i>Daddy</i>
	Robert Frost	– <i>Home Burial</i>
	Walt Whitman	– <i>Crossing Brooklyn Ferry</i>

### THE RAVEN

- EDGAR ALLAN POE

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.  
“’Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—  
Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.  
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow  
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—  
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain  
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;  
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating  
“’Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—  
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—  
This it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,  
“Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;  
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,  
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,  
That I scarce was sure I heard you”—here I opened wide the door;—  
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,  
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;  
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,  
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, “Lenore?”  
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, “Lenore!”—  
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,  
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.  
“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice;  
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—  
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—  
’Tis the wind and nothing more!”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,  
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;  
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;  
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,  
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,  
“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,  
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—  
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!”  
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,  
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being  
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—  
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
With such name as “Nevermore.”

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only  
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.  
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—  
Till I scarcely more than muttered “Other friends have flown before—  
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my Hopes have flown before.”  
Then the bird said “Nevermore.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,  
“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store  
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster  
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—  
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore  
Of ‘Never—nevermore’.”

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,  
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;  
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking  
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—  
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore  
Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing  
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;  
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining  
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,  
But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,  
*She* shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer  
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.  
"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee  
Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;  
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"  
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—  
Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!"  
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."  
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!” I shrieked, upstarting—  
“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!  
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!  
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!  
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”  
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,  
And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

### **Analysis:**

The Raven tells a story of a grieving lover visited upon a midnight dreary by the ill omened raven, which the lover in his solitude labels —Prophet! . . . thing of evil! prophet still, if bird or devil! The emotional nature of the exchange between the raven and the melancholy speaker develops and changes in the course of the poem, as the speaker is, at first, seemingly amused by the raven’s precocity, then angered, and finally driven to despair. While the reader might be drawn by the seeming evil qualities of the bird and its remarkable propensity for appropriately responding —Nevermore! to the speaker’s queries, Poe’s description of the dramatic action of the poem, revealed in —THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION,<sup>11</sup> is simple: —A raven, having learned by rote the single word ‘Nevermore,’ and having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek admission at a window from which a light still gleams the chamber-window of a student, occupied half in poring over a volume, half in dreaming of a beloved mistress deceased. The narrator’s grief is in his sorrow for the lost Lenore as he glorifies her whom the angels name Lenore. As the torment of the speaker in the poem increases, he asks for respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore and asks to forget this lost Lenore. Her status as a sainted maiden<sup>12</sup> and a rare and radiant maiden<sup>13</sup> remains intact throughout the poem, and near the end of the poem the speaker states



twice that she is the maiden whom the angels name Lenore. Some critics have taken Lenore to represent the loss of the love of Poe's young life Sarah Elmira Royster to marriage, not death. Others have interpreted the name as a symbol of the creative impulse that is rare, precious, and too easily lost. The Raven is Poe's most famous poem. The poem made Poe a celebrity during his first nine months living in New York City. To take advantage of the poem's recognition and his own newfound fame, Poe also published *The RAVEN AND OTHER POEMS* in 1845. Poe enhanced his fame and aroused discussion of the poem by publishing *The PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION* in 1846, in which he purports to give an account of how he wrote the poem, from the selection of his theme to the choice of meter and refrain, thus giving further weight to those critics who have viewed Poe as a conscious rather than solely creative artist. He claimed to have pondered the poem for years and so was able to write the final draft late in 1844 in one sitting. In *The Philosophy of Composition*, Poe writes, I pretend to no originality in either the rhythm or metre of the Raven. ' . . . [T]he latter is octameter acatalectic alternating with heptameter catalectic and terminating with tetrameter catalectic. The Raven by Edgar Allan Poe is a narrative of a young man who is bereaved by the death of the woman he loved. He compulsorily constructs self-destructive meaning around a raven's repetition of the word 'Nevermore', until he finally despairs of being reunited with his beloved Lenore in another world. Just because of the nightmarish effect, the poem cannot be called an elegy. In fact, *The Raven* is a ballad of eighteen six line stanzas with decidedly emphatic meter and rhymes. Narrated from the first person point of view, the poem conveys, with dramatic immediacy, the speaker's shift from weary, sorrowful composure to a state of nervous collapse as he recounts his strange experience with the mysterious ebony bird. The first seven stanzas establish the setting and the narrator's melancholic, impressionable state of mind. Weak and worn out with grief, the speaker had sought distraction from his sorrow by reading curiously esoteric books. Awakened at midnight by a sound outside his chamber, he opens the door, expecting a visitor; he finds only darkness. Apprehensive, he whispers the name Lenore and closes the door. When the tapping persists, he opens a window, admitting a raven that perches upon a bust of Pallas (Athena). In stanza 8 to 11, the narrator, beguiled by the ludicrous image of the blackbird in his room, playfully asks the raven its name, as if to reassure himself that it portends nothing ominous. He is startled, however, to hear the raven respond, saying, Nevermore. Although the word apparently has little relevance to any discoverable meaning, the narrator is sobered by the bird's forlorn utterance. He assumes that the raven's owner, having suffered unendurable disasters, taught the bird to imitate human speech in order to utter the one word most expressive of the owner's sense of hopelessness. In stanza 12 and 13, the narrator settles himself on a

velvet cushion in front of the bird and whimsically ponders what the raven meant by repeating a word he inevitably associated with thoughts of the departed Lenore. At this point, the grieving lover, in anticipation of the raven's maddening repetition of Nevermore, begins masochistically to frame increasingly painful questions. Imagining a perfumed presence in the room, the narrator, in a state of growing agitation, asks the raven whether God had mercifully sent him to induce in the poet forgetfulness of lost Lenore; the inevitable response causes the narrator to plead with the raven now addressed as a prophet of evil sent by the Temptor - to tell him whether there is any healing in heaven for his grief. The raven's predictable answer provokes the grieving lover, now almost in a state of maddened frenzy, to ask bluntly whether his soul would ever be reunited with Lenore in heaven. Receiving the horrific Nevermore in reply to his ultimate question, the distraught narrator demands that the raven, whether actual bird or fiend, leave his chambers and quit torturing his heart; the raven's unendurable answer drives the bereaved love into a state of maddened despair. The raven becomes a permanent fixture in the room, a symbolic presence presiding over the narrator's self-inflicted mental and spiritual collapse. The physical setting of the poem reflects the inner personality or emotion of the central character. The poem begins at midnight in December... the last moment of a spend day in the final month of the year. Internally and externally, it is a time of death and decay. Even the dying fireplace embers reflect the melancholic atmosphere. The setting is contained and claustrophobic; the single room adds to this effect. The narrator himself mirrors the time and locale. Weak and weary, he seems trapped in his richly furnished prison. He hopes for the morning the return of light and life but tonight all he can do is brood on his dead beloved, the lost Lenore, and feel the solid horror of his current situation. The story that now unfolds is simple, tarrying and tragic. The Raven divides its characters and imagery into two conflicting worlds of light and darkness. The contrasting worlds of light and darkness grandly acquire additional symbolic resonances: they also represent life and death, the speaker's vain hope of an after-life with Lenore and the terrifying vision of eternal nothingness. The nightmarish effect of the poem is reinforced by the relentless trochaic rhythm and the arrangement of the ballad stanzas into five lines or octameter followed by a refrain in tetrameter. This combination, along with emphatic alliteration, allows for strong internal and end rhymes, resulting in a mesmerizing syncopation of redundancies as inescapable as the sonorous refrain. This incantatory repetition creates an aural quality that helps force collaboration between the poem and the reader, a maddening regularity aptly conveying the speaker's disintegrating reason, while contributing to the theatrical effect of the poem as histrionic performance.

## **SUCCESS IS COUNTED SWEETEST**

**- EMILY DICKINSON**

Success is counted sweetest  
By those who ne'er succeed.  
To comprehend a nectar  
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host  
Who took the Flag today  
Can tell the definition  
So clear of victory

As he defeated – dying –  
On whose forbidden ear  
The distant strains of triumph  
Burst agonized and clear!

Introduction: Emily Dickinson is one of the greatest poets of America. She led a life of seclusion, but intensity of her feelings urged her to express her feelings in a metrical composition. As a sensitive person, she was severely affected by the horrors of civil war which broke out in America in and the aftereffects which this war brought such as the tragedy of Lincoln assassination, and the process of Reconstruction. She lived a quite life in her father's house in Amherst Massachusetts where she was born and died (1830-1886). It is a popular myth that she led an isolated life but her poetry reveals that she was not forgetful of the world around her. She was deeply engrossed in the phenomenon of this world. During her life, no volume of her poetry was published. After her death, her sister discovered her diaries and published the content. Now she is considered one of the two finest poets of nineteenth century. Summary: The poem brings to us the pathetic condition of those soldiers who, in the hope of gaining success in the form of victory over their enemy, fought a battle but now are injured and about to die. At a short distance, there is a crowd of victorious soldiers, celebrating their victory but this crowd is not a company for them. Success has intoxicating effect on victorious ones. Trumpets are being played by their opponents

as a sign of their victory but for these soldiers, these trumpets are the symbol of their defeat and this is piercing the dying soldiers' hearts. The poem presents an enthusiastic and heroic atmosphere. The tone expresses a kind of enlightenment. **Themes:** The poem addresses the following major questions in the form of themes of the poem. Failure, a kind of success. The very first line of the poem is giving us the theme of the poem. The poetess describes a complicated phenomenon of human life that those who succeed in achieving something are not able to relish their success to full extent. The word success is important for those who never succeed. The description of need philosophy. Sores need is required to comprehend a need. We have regard for something or someone only when acute need is there. In fact water is sought by thirst so success is also taught by failure. The poet has used parallelism in this poem to bring about a heightened effect. On one side there are half-dead soldiers who are unable to bear the pain due to wounds they have received in war. On the other, there are the trumpets of victory which are adding to the misery of the dying half-conscious soldiers. Thus the callousness of human nature reveals itself in the behaviour of the victorious soldiers.

**Isolation** of man on this planet earth has been the theme of various poets. The loneliness of dying soldiers among so many opponents shows that a crowd is not company.

**Death** is a theme which occupies an important part in her poetry. Glaring example is —I could not stop for death and so many poems like this. The house where she lived was in the way which led to cemetery so death seems to be a part of her poetry.

**Stylistic analysis of the poem:** This is a short lyrical poem having twelve lines. The poetess is a highly gifted person. She has tried to explain a great phenomenon of world in few possible words. Indeed this poem is very close to our lives. The poem can be taken as a parable of human life. In this battle of human life, some of us remain successful in achieving success in terms of health, wealth, honour etc. Some of us are not successful in acquiring our desired goals. In the hope of achieving our goals, only death comes to our rescue. The charm of our unfulfilled desires continues to exist. This is a short lyrical poem having twelve lines. The poetess is highly gifted person. She has tried to describe a great phenomenon of life in few possible words. This poem is very close to life as every one of us has the same feelings at one or another stage of life.

**Phonological Level:** The poem has three stanzas, having four lines each. The quatrain has been used to express feelings and emotions on the part of the poetess. The rhyme scheme in first stanza is abcb and it is the same in third stanza. Second stanza does not follow this scheme. There are only two rhyming pairs in the poem such as Succeed, need Ear, clear.

**Alliteration:** Use of alliteration 's' is clear in the first line of the poem. Success is counted sweetest Alliteration of 'd' is visible in the 9th line. As he defeated dying.

**Symbolism:** The poetess has cleverly used symbolism in the poem which adds to it a specific charm and delight. Nectar is the symbol of triumph and victory. In her day wars were common so they found their expression in this poem. Word purple stands for the blood stains and Host for king who wins the victory in the battlefield. It seems that the king is habitual of fighting wars with his enemies and during this process the uniform, he is wearing, has received so many stains which have become purple with the passage of time. Success is now a facile victory for him. Trumpets are symbol of victory are for the successful soldiers but a symbol of defeat for the unsuccessful dying soldiers. Flag is another symbol of victory used in this poem.

**Paradox:** We find a paradox, a kind of homily which appears quite simple but very complex in nature when it is closely examined i.e. Success is counted sweetest By those who ne'er succeed. Skilful use of paradox reminds the readers of Donne's style of poetry where two heterogeneous ideas are successfully combined.

**Phrase:** A beautiful, marvellous and uncommon phrase has been used which gives a touch of richness to the poem e.g. —on whose distant ear.

**Tone :** A kind of serenity, untold calmness is there in the poem. The tone of the poetess is suggestive of her sensitivities. Her tone seems to be sympathetic. The unfulfilled desire of success has been glorified. She has given us a new mirror to look at things and phenomena around us. With the help of mere words, the poetess has given us the photographic representation of a battlefield.

**Conclusion:** Success is counted sweetest is a poem which describes that success is sweet but the desire of success is more charming. Words have been carefully used to give the readers the picture of a battlefield where on one side there are the victorious ones whose victory will lose its charm after some time. On the other hand, there are the losers, the dying soldiers who will be able to taste the fruit of success as this particular word has still a charm for them. They will continue to love it forever. This poem reminds us of Keats Ode On Grecian Urn where Heard melodies are sweet Those unheard are sweeter.

## **BIRCHES**

- **ROBERT FROST**

When I see birches bend to left and right  
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay  
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—  
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.  
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,  
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed  
So low for long, they never right themselves:  
You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.  
But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm  
I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—  
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
Whose only play was what he found himself,  
Summer or winter, and could play alone.  
One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again  
Until he took the stiffness out of them,  
And not one but hung limp, not one was left

For him to conquer. He learned all there was  
To learn about not launching out too soon  
And so not carrying the tree away  
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise  
To the top branches, climbing carefully  
With the same pains you use to fill a cup  
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.  
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,  
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.  
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.  
And so I dream of going back to be.  
It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.  
I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over.  
May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk  
*Toward* heaven, till the tree could bear no more,  
But dipped its top and set me down again.  
That would be good both going and coming back.  
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

**Analysis:**

Birches is one of Frost's most frequently anthologized poems, in large measure because it rewards multiple readings and leaves considerable room for interpretation. In order to begin the work of understanding and writing about —Birches, it is important to note that nothing

explicitly happens as the poem unfolds. A poem like *Out, Out ‘ ‘* tells a story, as does a poem like *—Home Burial* or *—The Death of the Hired Man*. With *—Birches*, the significance emerges from unpacking the images and feelings the poem evokes as you read it. Critic Judith Oster has asked, *—How, in Birches,‘* do we divide the experience of the poem from the meaning of the poem? The answer is that we do not. The meaning of the poem is the experience of the poem, so as you are confronting the poem, it is important to remember that you are not reading for plot but rather scanning Frost’s lines for ideas. The central image of the poem is that of a boy —swinging birches, and the rest of the poem builds around that image. You may want to begin by concentrating on that image and working to understand its significance to the speaker. When does he think of a boy swinging birches? What comfort does that image offer him? He notes that he once was a swinger of birches; what is he nostalgic or wistful for? He wants to be a swinger of birches again why? Note that the speaker’s desire to swing birches is not a yearning to return to childhood or to permanently escape adulthood and its cares. Specifically, he says at the end of the poem that he wants to climb a birch as high as he can before it bends under his weight and puts him back on the ground. Is there more to this activity than recreation or diversion? He describes climbing the tree as moving —Toward heaven, suggesting the point of the activity is the climbing, not the arrival. If he does not want to get to heaven, but just to move in that direction before coming back to earth, what does he hope to gain? Is the climb a metaphor for a spiritual quest? If the speaker values the movement toward heaven but wants to return to earth, what has he gained from his upward journey that helps him back on earth? Part of the appeal of *Birches* comes from the number of ideas it invites us to think about, all the while carefully avoiding telling us exactly what to think or what Frost wants us precisely to conclude about them. In addition to spirituality, the poem comments on the burdens and rewards of earthly living, which is both a pathless wood and the right place for love. The speaker mentions love only once in the poem, but it is the only specific reason he gives for wanting to stay on earth. The speaker seeks movement toward heaven but also distrusts fate; apparently his spiritual viewpoint values an idea of heaven but distrusts what he might find once he gets there. He even looks at the piles of ice that fall from birches and imagines that the inner dome of heaven had fallen. Why heaven? Why does he not describe it simply as the sky? What does it tell us about the speaker that he seems, perhaps unconsciously, to want the barrier between earth and heaven to shatter? Many critics detect in the poem a commentary on factual thinking and imaginative thinking. Notice that the speaker acknowledges the truth about the birches: They are bent by the weight of ice during repeated storms, not by the weight of a boy who has been playing in them. Still, that Truth distracts him



from what he really wants to think about. Imagining a boy swinging on the trees enables the speaker to consider weightier, more abstract concerns; where the factual truth offers a closed and final explanation, the imagined truth is open-ended and far reaching. What does the poem ultimately suggest about the value of facts compared to the value of imagination? Is the poem somehow about poetry and poetical thinking? Is the poem arguing for the benefits of poetry?

**Themes:** *Birches* invites us to consider a variety of themes, from the relatively simple to the extraordinarily complex. On one level, the poem offers a reverie, a respite from work as the speaker remembers when he was a boy playing in birch trees. The image he conjures of a boy taking a break from his chores to play is wistful and longing since the boy is able to step away from responsibility so easily without abandoning it altogether, while the speaker, as an adult, seems less able to disengage. Whatever disengagement he seeks would only be temporary, however, since earth is the right place for love. The speaker mentions love just this once, but in doing so he identifies love as the key reason for living. The ambiguity of the reference leaves the idea of love open for us to interpret as neighborly love, familial love, that of husband and wife, even erotic love (partially suggested by the sensual image of girls drying their hair in the sun); perhaps the speaker is referring to one of these forms of love; perhaps he is referring to them all. In any or all of its forms, love seems for the speaker to be of central importance. At the same time, he balances the companionship of love with healthy isolation. He makes a point of telling us that the boy he imagines is alone too far from town to learn baseball tending to his chores but also amusing himself without apparently feeling alone. While the speaker believes we need love, he suggests we also need to be able to be alone, either for self-contentment's sake or because the only way we can tend to spiritual matters is when we are isolated, without distractions. Spiritual matters seem centrally important to the poem, for the entire image of climbing the tree to get above the dense thicket below, to gain perspective and simply to take a break, is presented with such spiritually themed language (fate, heaven) that we must consider the act to be more than simply climbing a tree. The poem suggests that we benefit from moving continuously between the poles of heaven and earth, that we gain something at one side of the spectrum that makes it possible for us to better appreciate the other end.

## DADDY

- SYLVIA PLATH

You do not do, you do not do  
Any more, black shoe  
In which I have lived like a foot  
For thirty years, poor and white,  
Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.

Daddy, I have had to kill you.  
You died before I had time——  
Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,  
Ghastly statue with one gray toe  
Big as a Frisco seal

And a head in the freakish Atlantic  
Where it pours bean green over blue  
In the waters off beautiful Nauset.  
I used to pray to recover you.  
Ach, du.

In the German tongue, in the Polish town  
Scraped flat by the roller  
Of wars, wars, wars.  
But the name of the town is common.  
My Polack friend

Says there are a dozen or two.  
So I never could tell where you  
Put your foot, your root,  
I never could talk to you.  
The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare.  
Ich, ich, ich, ich,  
I could hardly speak.  
I thought every German was you.  
And the language obscene

An engine, an engine  
Chuffing me off like a Jew.  
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.  
I began to talk like a Jew.  
I think I may well be a Jew.

The snows of the Tyrol, the clear beer of Vienna  
Are not very pure or true.  
With my gipsy ancestress and my weird luck  
And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack  
I may be a bit of a Jew.

I have always been scared of *you*,  
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.  
And your neat mustache  
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.  
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You——

Not God but a swastika  
So black no sky could squeak through.  
Every woman adores a Fascist,  
The boot in the face, the brute  
Brute heart of a brute like you.

You stand at the blackboard, daddy,  
In the picture I have of you,  
A cleft in your chin instead of your foot  
But no less a devil for that, no not  
Any less the black man who

Bit my pretty red heart in two.  
I was ten when they buried you.  
At twenty I tried to die  
And get back, back, back to you.  
I thought even the bones would do.

But they pulled me out of the sack,  
And they stuck me together with glue.  
And then I knew what to do.  
I made a model of you,  
A man in black with a Meinkampf look

And a love of the rack and the screw.  
And I said I do, I do.  
So daddy, I'm finally through.  
The black telephone's off at the root,  
The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two——  
The vampire who said he was you  
And drank my blood for a year,  
Seven years, if you want to know.  
Daddy, you can lie back now.

There's a stake in your fat black heart  
And the villagers never liked you.  
They are dancing and stamping on you.  
They always *knew* it was you.  
Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

### **Analysis:**

This incredibly powerful, angry poem speaks of the poet's feelings towards her father. Plath's father died when she was only a child and her troubled relationship with him was not allowed any resolution. Instead, it builds up into an obsessive love and anger towards her father that constrains her entire life. He is always there, an ominous ghost dominating her, subsuming her personality. She even attempts suicide at the age of twenty to attempt to reach him and only when she is a woman of thirty can she really begin to exorcise his ghost. While she declares the conflict over —Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through— it is difficult to believe that the conflict can fully have been resolved. So much anger and hurt do not easily go away. The father in the poem, just like Plath's father, died when the protagonist was just a child, a young girl. Like many young girls, she saw her father as a larger than life figure, a —bag full of God—. He was a strong figure, and to the young girl he must have seemed omnipotent. Thus he became not only her father but an image of Daddy, an amalgam of memory and ideal. As such he is untouchable, —marble heavy—, a —ghastly statue— that is too implacable, too distant to reach. Marble is associated with luxury (and thus power) but also it is cold and hard, suggesting a cold, unreachable father. As a child, she was unable to communicate with him as she recalls with the words —I could never talk to you. The tongue stuck in my jaw. It stuck in a barbed wire snare.— For a child who would become a poet, this inability must have been torture. Perhaps had he lived, she would have been able to find a voice to speak to him, to communicate, but with his death, she could not. It could be that Plath's own anger was accentuated by the knowledge that the death of her father, Otto, was completely preventable. He refused to deal with a sore on his toe until it became septic and he required hospitalization. By then it was too late. Such a futile, stupid death could only make his daughter's frustration worse. Plath's anger would not have been so strong however had her love not been so deep. —Every woman adores a Fascist— speaks of another aspect of Plath's attitude to her father. She has retained a child's devotion to her father, and in his absence that love has not diminished

but grown into a love bordering on obsession. She wanted her father back —I used to pray to recover you|| and her whole life has been an attempt to fulfil that love. Like Electra, her entire life is subsumed in her devotion to Daddy. Love and hate, resistance and submission, have dogged Plath through her life because of it. In a way, her life stopped when her father died. Through the poem, the use of childish language such as —Achoo||, —gobbledygoo|| and indeed, the reference to —Daddy||, suggests a woman frozen in time: no grown woman calls her father —daddy||. As a child-adult still, she is still submissive to him, suggested by the —black shoe|| metaphor. She is constrained, a pale white foot within his black, tight shoe, unable to express herself fully in his presence or with the memory of him alive around her. —Every woman adores a Fascist|| also suggests that Plath has lost herself in her father's domination, her personality subsumed to him. She no longer can speak for herself, but rather speaks for the whole of womankind, trying to find communion in a perception of shared pain. Exhibiting a masochistic side she suggests is symptomatic of womankind, she both loves and hates the control he has over her and would seem to suggest that other women would, do, feel the same. Plath uses multiple metaphors for her father. The first and most powerful is the comparison between her father and a Nazi. At the time the poem was written, the shadow of Nazism was still clear in many minds and the imagery provides an immediate visual picture to the reader. Here is an authoritarian figure, a dangerous, evil, black monster, utterly towering over the young girl. Plath's father, Otto, was of German descent and to the poet's ears even his language was —obscene||. Plath counterpoints this by comparing herself to a Jew: impotent in the face of her father's control, being driven by her father's hateful language — —chuffing me off like a Jew|| — to the concentration camps of the psyche, wherein lies only pain and hardship. This Nazi imagery recurs throughout the poem. Her father is described as —panzer-man|| with the —Aryan eye, bright blue.|| The second description of Plath's father is as a devil with —A cleft in your chin instead of your foot|| who —Bit my pretty red heart in two||. Her recurrent use of the word —black||, fits with both this image and the others the poet uses. Nazis were often pictured dressed in black, as is the archetypal vampire. Her father is not merely a shoe, but a black shoe; he is described as a —black man|| with a —black heart||. Black here is a potent symbol of evil, of the darkness in her father and the effect he has had upon her. The final comparison is that of the vampire. The vampire is a mythological creature that, although dead, lives an unlife by sucking the life blood from its victims. Plath is still her father's victim, just as she was the Jew to her father's Nazi. For years, he has been dead yet still alive, sucking at her life blood, draining her of vitae. The vampire archetype is also often itself a metaphor for sexuality and might further suggest the existence of the Electra complex in the young woman. Plath tries different methods of coping with the death of his father and his control of him. Her first action is to attempt suicide by

an overdose. She does not do this for herself, but rather she does it for him, for her father. She cannot reach him in life, and needing to connect with him, she sees no alternative but connecting with him in death, as she writes: —At twenty I tried to die And get back, back, back to you. However, her attempt is foiled and —And they stuck me together with glue. But she cannot really be whole again. A broken vase that is shattered can be glued together but it will never be as strong, never perfect again. After the suicide attempt, the poet writes that —I made a model of you as she attempts to recreate her father in another man, her husband. She looked for a man as strong as her father, a —man in black with a Meinkampf look who recollects her father's nazi image and with —[his] love of the rack and the screw her father's ability to torture her. She believes that, having the husband- father to interact with, she will be able to put an end to her father's influence upon her life. She will be able to refuse to listen to her father's voice coming through the aether —The black telephone's off at the root. The voices just can't worm through. It is debatable with how much success she manages this. Plath's real marriage to the poet Ted Hughes was unhappy, and while they had children, they had separated by the time this poem was written. Finally, however, Plath begins to fight back against her father's malign influence. Leaving her husband, she has, in her mind, also left her father —I've killed one man, I've killed two. Recognizing the way that her father husband has sucked at her life force, she strikes a blow against it —There's a stake in your fat, black heart. She cannot do this alone, as she is still too weak against his force, but with the —villagers she can manage it. The villagers are the other women, the other people, oppressed and fearful, who can finally rise up and destroy their oppressors. With their strength she can begin to purge his influence from her battered psyche. She can declare, although not altogether convincingly, that —Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through. Plath's poem is an angry attempt to purge her father's influence from her life. Losing him at an early age she has never been able to reconcile herself to his loss or to the presence of his ghost in her life. Despite him being compared to a nazi, a devil, a vampire, she still loves him and cannot easily deny his memory. Even as the poem ends with her declaring herself through, the reader knows she is not. She still thinks of him as —daddy and we know that within months of the poem's creation, she will have joined her daddy as a second suicide attempt succeeds. From his futile death to her tragic death, the cycle is completed.

**IMAGERY IN THE POEM DADDY** When Sylvia Plath's father, Otto Plath, passed away in 1940, she was deeply traumatized. Plath was only eight years old when her father died, and she was left with a large emotional void. It was then that she began writing poetry as an outlet for her emotions. Many of Plath's poems have been influenced by experiences from her own life; "Daddy" is no exception. Throughout Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy", she uses powerful images to confess her attitudes toward her late father and also toward her husband. Plath

uses various images to describe how she viewed her father. The images she uses change throughout the poem, causing the attitudes she communicates about her father to be inconsistent. In the second stanza, Plath depicts her father as being "a bag full of God." Here Plath makes it seem that her father is Godlike, and she looks to him as a role model. Later on in the poem, Plath uses several Nazi-related images to describe her father. She even goes so far as to draw physical parallels between her father and Hitler. These images include "your neat mustache / And your Aryan eye, bright blue. / Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You " in the ninth stanza and "Every woman adores a Fascist" in the tenth stanza. These images cause a dramatic shift in tone from earlier in the poem. These Nazi images show how Plath resented the death of her father and saw him as a horrible person for leaving her. Since Plath grew up during WWII, she used descriptions of the most atrocious people she could find, which were Nazis, to convey this. Plath also portrays her father as a devil, for the same reasons she uses the Nazi images, when she says "A cleft in your chin instead of your foot / But no less a devil for that. " in the eleventh and twelfth stanzas. Plath uses equally strong images to convey the oppression and hatred she felt from being controlled by the memories of her father, as well as her husband, Ted Hughes. In the first stanza, she writes "black shoe / In which I have lived like a foot / For thirty years." Plath is comparing her life to a foot trapped inside a shoe - herself being the imprisoned foot and her father and husband being the shoe. The color black is a Imagery in Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" Essay 2 symbol of death, and thus it could be said that the shoe is killing her. Images conveying the disgust Plath felt can also be found in the twelfth and thirteenth stanzas, when she says "And then I knew what to do. / I made a model of you. / ...And I said I do, I do." and in the fifteenth stanza, when she says "The vampire who said he was you / And drank my blood for a year, / Seven years if you want to know." These are in reference to her husband, Ted Hughes. In stanzas twelve and thirteen, Plath is referring to when she married Ted Hughes, a man who reminded her of her father, after trying to commit suicide. Although Plath married Hughes in an attempt to overcome the void left by her father, she was only hurt again. Hughes caused Plath to feel victimized and subordinate. Plath uses images of Jewish people to further show how she often felt dominated by men. In stanza seven, she writes "Chuffing me off like a Jew. / A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen. / I began to talk like a Jew. / I think I may well be a Jew." Stanza eight also says "With my gypsy ancestress and my weird luck / And my Taroc pack and my Taroc pack / I might be a bit of a Jew." By relating her life to that of a Jewish person and her father to a Nazi, Plath portrays what her life was like growing up without her father and with a horrid husband. Plath compares herself to a Jew, because she feels victimized, trapped, and confined. Much like Hitler and the Jews, Plath's father and dominating husband caused her to live a life full of fear. "Daddy" is a poem that is filled



with strong, vivid imagery. These images are used to communicate to the reader Plath's feelings about her life dominated by men. Imagery is also used to illustrate Plath's attitudes about the death of her father. Plath struggled all her life to overcome the emotional void that was left when she lost her father, and a repressive husband only augmented her difficulties. After using poetry as a means to attempt to defeat the troubles of her life, Plath seems to have done just that. The concluding stanza of "Daddy" shows that she has accomplished what she has been attempting for so long; "They are dancing and stamping on you. / ...Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

## HOME BURIAL

- ROBERT FROST

He saw her from the bottom of the stairs  
Before she saw him. She was starting down,  
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.  
She took a doubtful step and then undid it  
To raise herself and look again. He spoke  
Advancing toward her: 'What is it you see  
From up there always—for I want to know.'  
She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,  
And her face changed from terrified to dull.  
He said to gain time: 'What is it you see,'  
Mounting until she cowered under him.  
'I will find out now—you must tell me, dear.'  
She, in her place, refused him any help  
With the least stiffening of her neck and silence.  
She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,  
Blind creature; and awhile he didn't see.  
But at last he murmured, 'Oh,' and again, 'Oh.'

'What is it—what?' she said.

'Just that I see.'

'You don't,' she challenged. 'Tell me what it is.'

'The wonder is I didn't see at once.  
I never noticed it from here before.  
I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.  
The little graveyard where my people are!  
So small the window frames the whole of it.'

Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?  
There are three stones of slate and one of marble,  
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight  
On the sidehill. We haven't to mind *those*.  
But I understand: it is not the stones,  
But the child's mound—'

'Don't, don't, don't, don't,' she cried.

She withdrew shrinking from beneath his arm  
That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;  
And turned on him with such a daunting look,  
He said twice over before he knew himself:  
'Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?'

'Not you! Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!  
I must get out of here. I must get air.  
I don't know rightly whether any man can.'

'Amy! Don't go to someone else this time.  
Listen to me. I won't come down the stairs.'  
He sat and fixed his chin between his fists.  
'There's something I should like to ask you, dear.'

'You don't know how to ask it.'

'Help me, then.'

Her fingers moved the latch for all reply.

'My words are nearly always an offense.  
I don't know how to speak of anything  
So as to please you. But I might be taught  
I should suppose. I can't say I see how.'

A man must partly give up being a man  
With women-folk. We could have some arrangement  
By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off  
Anything special you're a-mind to name.  
Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.  
Two that don't love can't live together without them.  
But two that do can't live together with them.'  
She moved the latch a little. 'Don't—don't go.  
Don't carry it to someone else this time.  
Tell me about it if it's something human.  
Let me into your grief. I'm not so much  
Unlike other folks as your standing there  
Apart would make me out. Give me my chance.  
I do think, though, you overdo it a little.  
What was it brought you up to think it the thing  
To take your mother-loss of a first child  
So inconsolably—in the face of love.  
You'd think his memory might be satisfied—'

'There you go sneering now!'

'I'm not, I'm not!

You make me angry. I'll come down to you.  
God, what a woman! And it's come to this,  
A man can't speak of his own child that's dead.'

'You can't because you don't know how to speak.  
If you had any feelings, you that dug  
With your own hand—how could you?—his little grave;  
I saw you from that very window there,  
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,  
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly  
And roll back down the mound beside the hole.  
I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you.

And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs  
To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.  
Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice  
Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,  
But I went near to see with my own eyes.  
You could sit there with the stains on your shoes  
Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave  
And talk about your everyday concerns.  
You had stood the spade up against the wall  
Outside there in the entry, for I saw it.'

'I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed.  
I'm cursed. God, if I don't believe I'm cursed.'

'I can repeat the very words you were saying:  
"Three foggy mornings and one rainy day  
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build."  
Think of it, talk like that at such a time!  
What had how long it takes a birch to rot  
To do with what was in the darkened parlor?  
You *couldn't* care! The nearest friends can go  
With anyone to death, comes so far short  
They might as well not try to go at all.  
No, from the time when one is sick to death,  
One is alone, and he dies more alone.  
Friends make pretense of following to the grave,  
But before one is in it, their minds are turned  
And making the best of their way back to life  
And living people, and things they understand.  
But the world's evil. I won't have grief so  
If I can change it. Oh, I won't, I won't!'

'There, you have said it all and you feel better.  
You won't go now. You're crying. Close the door.

The heart's gone out of it: why keep it up.

Amy! There's someone coming down the road!

'*You*—oh, you think the talk is all. I must go—

Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you—'

'If—you—do!' She was opening the door wider.

'Where do you mean to go? First tell me that.

I'll follow and bring you back by force. I *will!*—'

### **Summary:**

The poem presents a few moments of charged dialogue in a strained relationship between a rural husband and wife who have lost a child. The woman is distraught after catching sight of the child's grave through the window—and more so when her husband doesn't immediately recognize the cause of her distress. She tries to leave the house; he importunes her to stay, for once, and share her grief with him—to give him a chance. He doesn't understand what it is he does that offends her or why she should grieve outwardly so long. She resents him deeply for his composure, what she sees as his hard-heartedness. She vents some of her anger and frustration, and he receives it, but the distance between them remains. She opens the door to leave, as he calls after her.

### **Form:**

This is a dramatic lyric—"dramatic" in that, like traditional drama, it presents a continuous scene and employs primarily dialogue rather than narrative or description. It is dramatic, too, in its subject matter—"dramatic" in the sense of "emotional" or "tense." Form fits content well in this poem: One can easily imagine two actors onstage portraying this brief, charged scene. Rhythmically, Frost approaches pure speech—and some lines, taken out of context, sound as prosaic as anything. For example, line 62: "I do think, though, you overdo it a little." Generally, there are five stressed syllables per line, although (as in line 62), they are not always easy to scan with certainty. Stanza breaks occur where quoted speech ends or begins.

### **Commentary**

Pay special attention to the tone, vocabulary, and phrasing of the dialogue. At the time of "Home Burial" 's publication, it represented a truly new poetic genre: an extended dramatic exercise in

the natural speech rhythms of a region's people, from the mouths of common, yet vivid, characters.

"Home Burial" is one of Frost's most overtly sad poems. There are at least two tragedies here: the death of a child, which antecedes the poem, and the collapse of a marriage, which the poem foreshadows. "Home Burial" is about grief and grieving, but most of all it seems to be about the breakdown and limits of communication.

The husband and the wife represent two very different ways of grieving. The wife's grief infuses every part of her and does not wane with time. She has been compared to a female character in Frost's *A Masque of Mercy*, of whom another character says, "She's had some loss she can't accept from God." The wife remarks that most people make only pretense of following a loved one to the grave, when in truth their minds are "making the best of their way back to life / And living people, and things they understand." She, however, will not accept this kind of grief, will not turn from the grave back to the world of living, for to do so is to accept the death. Instead she declares that "the world's evil."

The husband, on the other hand, has accepted the death. Time has passed, and he might be more likely now to say, "That's the way of the world," than, "The world's evil." He did grieve, but the outward indications of his grief were quite different from those of his wife. He threw himself into the horrible task of digging his child's grave—into physical work. This action further associates the father with a "way-of-the-world" mentality, with the cycles that make up the farmer's life, and with an organic view of life and death. The father did not leave the task of burial to someone else, instead, he physically dug into the earth and planted his child's body in the soil.

One might say that any form of grief in which the bereaved stubbornly finds the world "evil" is not a very healthy one. One could also claim that the bereaved who never talks through his grief—who never speaks of it—is doing himself and others injury. But, again, the purpose of the poem isn't really to determine the right way to grieve. Rather, it intends to portray a failure of empathy and communication. Each person fails to appreciate the other's grieving process—fails to credit it, allow it, and have patience with it. And each fails to alter even slightly his or her own form of grief in order to accommodate the other.

Note how utterly the woman misunderstands the man's actions. To her, the act of burying the child was one of supreme indifference, while to him it must have been one of supreme suffering—

an attempt to convince himself, through physical labor, that this is the natural order of things; or an act of self-punishment, a penance befitting the horror of the loss; or simply a way of steeping himself in his grief, of forcing it into the muscles of his arms and back, of feeling it in the dirt on his clothes. Note, too, how the wife completely fails to grasp the meaning of her husband's words: "Three foggy mornings and one rainy day / Will rot the best birch fence a man can build." Indisposed to see her husband's form of grieving as acceptable, she takes his words as literal, inappropriate comments on fence building. Yet they have everything to do with the little body in the darkened parlor. He is talking about death, about the futility of human effort, about fortune and misfortune, about the unfairness of fate and nature.

And yet, the man is also partially to blame. If he had any understanding of how to communicate to her, he would not leave everything unspoken. He would make some concession to her needs and articulate a brief defense. "You misunderstand," he might say. "When I said that, it was because that was the only way I could say anything at all about our loss." Instead, he lets her accusations float in the air, as if they were just hysteria and nonsense and not worth challenging. This displays a lack of empathy and a failure of communication as fatal as hers. When she describes his heartless act of grave digging, he says only, "I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed. / I'm cursed. God, if I don't believe I'm cursed." This leaves her free to believe that he accepts her accusation, that the curse refers to his hard-heartedness and not the terrible irony of her misinterpretation. He uses irony where she requires clarity. She needs him to admit to agony, and he can grant her no more than veiled references to a substratum of unspoken grief. And in the face of her griefs obvious persistence, he makes a callous—or, at very least, extremely counterproductive—remark: "I do think, though, you overdo it a little."

How important a role does gender play in this tragedy? Certainly it has some relevance. There are the husband's futile, abortive physical threats, as if he could physically coerce her into sharing her grief—but these are impulses of desperation. And both husband and wife acknowledge that there are separate spheres of being and understanding. "Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?" asks the husband. "I don't know rightly whether any man can," she replies. A little later he laments, "A man must partly give up being a man / With womenfolk." He sees his taciturnity and his inability to say the appropriate thing as a masculine trait, and she seems to agree. (Yet she sees his quiet grave digging as nearly inhuman.) Additionally, it is fairly standard to assume that more outward emotion is permitted of women than of men—the tragedy of this poem might then be seen as an exacerbation of a pervasive inequality. Yet one enduring stereotype of gender



distinctions is the man's inability to read between the lines, his failure to apprehend the emotions underlying the literal meaning of the woman's words. In this poem, husband and wife fail equally in this manner. A woman, perhaps, might be less likely to dig a grave to vent her grief, but she is just as likely to react to death by withdrawal or by immersion in quotidian tasks. The reader witnesses the breakdown of a marriage (the burial of a home, expressed in the title's double entendre), but more basically, this is a breakdown of human communication.

Partly, that breakdown is due to the inescapable limits of any communication. Much of the literature of the twentieth century stems from an acknowledgement of these limits, from attempts to grapple with them and, paradoxically, express them. A great deal of Frost's poetry deals with an essential loneliness, which is linked to the limits of empathy and the sense that some things are simply inexpressible. What can one really say about the loss of one's child? Can one adequately convey one's grief on such an occasion? Is empathy—always a challenge—doomed to fail under such particular strain?

We should note in passing—though it is not of merely passing importance—that Frost knew firsthand the experience of losing children. His firstborn son, Elliott, died of cholera at the age of three. Later, his infant daughter died. Two more of his children died fairly young, one by suicide.

## **CROSSING BROOKLYN FERRY**

- **WALT WHITMAN**

### **1**

Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!

Clouds of the west—sun there half an hour high—I see you also face to face.

Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!

On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose,

And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose.

### **2**

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,

The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme,

The similitudes of the past and those of the future,

The glories strung like beads on my smallest sights and hearings, on the walk in the street and the passage over the river,

The current rushing so swiftly and swimming with me far away,

The others that are to follow me, the ties between me and them,

The certainty of others, the life, love, sight, hearing of others.

Others will enter the gates of the ferry and cross from shore to shore,

Others will watch the run of the flood-tide,

Others will see the shipping of Manhattan north and west, and the heights of Brooklyn to the south and east,

Others will see the islands large and small;  
Fifty years hence, others will see them as they cross, the sun half an hour high,  
A hundred years hence, or ever so many hundred years hence, others will see them,  
Will enjoy the sunset, the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide.

### 3

It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not,  
I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence,  
Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,  
Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,  
Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I was refresh'd,  
Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I stood yet was hurried,  
Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the thick-stemm'd pipes of steamboats, I  
look'd.

I too many and many a time cross'd the river of old,  
Watched the Twelfth-month sea-gulls, saw them high in the air floating with motionless wings,  
oscillating their bodies,  
Saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their bodies and left the rest in strong shadow,  
Saw the slow-wheeling circles and the gradual edging toward the south,  
Saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,  
Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,  
Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in the sunlit water,  
Look'd on the haze on the hills southward and south-westward,  
Look'd on the vapor as it flew in fleeces tinged with violet,

Look'd toward the lower bay to notice the vessels arriving,  
Saw their approach, saw aboard those that were near me,  
Saw the white sails of schooners and sloops, saw the ships at anchor,  
The sailors at work in the rigging or out astride the spars,  
The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the slender serpentine pennants,  
The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in their pilot-houses,  
The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl of the wheels,  
The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sunset,  
The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled cups, the frolicsome crests and glistening,  
The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the gray walls of the granite storehouses by the  
docks,  
On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely flank'd on each side by the barges,  
the hay-boat, the belated lighter,  
On the neighboring shore the fires from the foundry chimneys burning high and glaringly into  
the night,  
Casting their flicker of black contrasted with wild red and yellow light over the tops of houses,  
and down into the clefts of streets.

#### 4

These and all else were to me the same as they are to you,  
I loved well those cities, loved well the stately and rapid river,  
The men and women I saw were all near to me,  
Others the same—others who look back on me because I look'd forward to them,  
(The time will come, though I stop here to-day and to-night.)

5

What is it then between us?

What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?

Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not,

I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine,

I too walk'd the streets of Manhattan island, and bathed in the waters around it,

I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,

In the day among crowds of people sometimes they came upon me,

In my walks home late at night or as I lay in my bed they came upon me,

I too had been struck from the float forever held in solution,

I too had receiv'd identity by my body,

That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I knew I should be of my body.

6

It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall,

The dark threw its patches down upon me also,

The best I had done seem'd to me blank and suspicious,

My great thoughts as I supposed them, were they not in reality meagre?

Nor is it you alone who know what it is to be evil,

I am he who knew what it was to be evil,

I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,

Blabb'd, blush'd, resented, lied, stole, grudg'd,

Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,

Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly, malignant,  
The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me,  
The cheating look, the frivolous word, the adulterous wish, not wanting,  
Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness, none of these wanting,  
Was one with the rest, the days and haps of the rest,  
Was call'd by my nighest name by clear loud voices of young men as they saw me approaching  
or passing,  
Felt their arms on my neck as I stood, or the negligent leaning of their flesh against me as I sat,  
Saw many I loved in the street or ferry-boat or public assembly, yet never told them a word,  
Lived the same life with the rest, the same old laughing, gnawing, sleeping,  
  
Play'd the part that still looks back on the actor or actress,  
The same old role, the role that is what we make it, as great as we like,  
Or as small as we like, or both great and small.

## 7

Closer yet I approach you,  
What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you—I laid in my stores in advance,  
I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.  
  
Who was to know what should come home to me?  
Who knows but I am enjoying this?  
Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot see  
me?

8

Ah, what can ever be more stately and admirable to me than mast-hemm'd Manhattan?

River and sunset and scallop-edg'd waves of flood-tide?

The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the belated lighter?

What gods can exceed these that clasp me by the hand, and with voices I love call me promptly  
and loudly by my highest name as I approach?

What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face?

Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?

We understand then do we not?

What I promis'd without mentioning it, have you not accepted?

What the study could not teach—what the preaching could not accomplish is accomplish'd, is it  
not?

9

Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!

Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!

Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your splendor me, or the men and women  
generations after me!

Cross from shore to shore, countless crowds of passengers!

Stand up, tall masts of Mannahatta! stand up, beautiful hills of Brooklyn!

Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers!

Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solution!

Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house or street or public assembly!

Sound out, voices of young men! loudly and musically call me by my highest name!

Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the actor or actress!

Play the old role, the role that is great or small according as one makes it!

Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be looking upon you;

Be firm, rail over the river, to support those who lean idly, yet haste with the hasting current;

Fly on, sea-birds! fly sideways, or wheel in large circles high in the air;

Receive the summer sky, you water, and faithfully hold it till all downcast eyes have time to  
take it from you!

Diverge, fine spokes of light, from the shape of my head, or any one's head, in the sunlit water!

Come on, ships from the lower bay! pass up or down, white-sail'd schooners, sloops, lighters!

Flaunt away, flags of all nations! be duly lower'd at sunset!

Burn high your fires, foundry chimneys! cast black shadows at nightfall! cast red and yellow  
light over the tops of the houses!

Appearances, now or henceforth, indicate what you are,

You necessary film, continue to envelop the soul,

About my body for me, and your body for you, be hung out divinest aromas,

Thrive, cities—bring your freight, bring your shows, ample and sufficient rivers,

Expand, being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual,

Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting.

You have waited, you always wait, you dumb, beautiful ministers,

We receive you with free sense at last, and are insatiate henceforward,

Not you any more shall be able to foil us, or withhold yourselves from us,



We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you permanently within us,  
We fathom you not—we love you—there is perfection in you also,  
You furnish your parts toward eternity,  
Great or small, you furnish your parts toward the soul.

### **Analysis:**

I am with you, you men and women of a generation hence, or ever so many generations hence“ (Whitman 1856: 212). There is force in this annunciation. Whitman makes himself present to us, through the setting he depicts, through his meditations“ on it, and through the voice that speaks to us in Crossing Brooklyn Ferry.“ Titled Sun-Down Poem,“ it first appeared in the second (1856) edition of Leaves of Grass. Thoreau told a friend that it and Song of Myself“ were Whitman’s two best poems. Indeed Crossing Brooklyn Ferry“ has come to figure almost as prominently as Song of Myself“ in discussions of Whitman’s work. They complement each other, the latter being the more radically innovative, the former seeming more conventional but equally complex in its demands upon the reader’s imagination. Some early drafts of the poem survive in Whitman’s manuscripts. After its first publication, he revised it in subsequent editions, retitling it, removing a few lines and passages, altering punctuation and capitalization, dividing it into sections and, over the years, altering those divisions. The poem assumed its standard form in the 1881 edition of Leaves of Grass. Crossing Brooklyn Ferry“ can be read as a poem in the Romantic tradition, a meditation on a landscape culminating in a deeper insight into the poet and his circumstances. It should also be taken as a reflection on urban life in America in the mid-nineteenth century. Again, because the poem meditates on how personal experience is conserved and communicated, it is a poem about poetry itself. And in recent years, the complex relationship between I“ and You“ has invited readers to reflect on how the poet uses language in his struggle to ensure that he is indeed with us, the men and women of another generation. These several accounts of Crossing Brooklyn Ferry“ complement one other, each furthering our understanding of the poem. A Romantic Poem: Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!“ . The invocation recalls. A good point of entry into Crossing Brooklyn Ferry“ is to read it as a latter-day Romantic landscape poem, the kind that Meyer Abrams characterized as the Greater Romantic Lyric (Abrams 1965). Like the prototypical Tintern Abbey,“ Whitman’s poem begins by situating a speaker in a moment of powerful response to a landscape, describing that landscape in some detail,

and searching for the ground of his response. The search deepens into meditation, arrives at an insight, and returns to the original setting, with which it has never completely lost touch. Typically poems in this genre acknowledge not only a spiritual something“ deeply interfused into the landscape but also another human presence, so that the poet’s voice is not altogether soliloquy, the overheard“ speech postulated by John Stuart Mill (1981: 348), but dialogic, personal address. However much Whitman may be associated with the open road,“ in its themes and form *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*“ is circular and repetitive, a ferry-like shuttling between alternatives. (Fulton Ferry was a double-ended craft plying a tidal waterway.) As the poem begins Whitman is struck with an overwhelming sense of presence, a face to face“ encounter, not only with the anonymous people around him on the ferry from Manhattan to Brooklyn but also with the harborscape, most especially the shipping, the moving waters and the waning sunlight. It is an encounter akin to what Sigmund Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, termed an oceanic moment.“ That surge of at-one-ness immediately yields to a pang of loss, for the moment and the setting alike are in transition, moving not only through the water but also through time. To read the poem within its Romantic context is to follow a meditative process leading Whitman to recognize a spiritual presence pervading the landscape and incorporating the speaker-poet and his fellows into a common universal being. And it is to both the setting and the future passengers that he speaks. As the ecstatic unity of the first few lines wanes, the poet thinks regretfully of the disintegrated“ solitude of each person’s existence, and the brevity of those moments of glory“ – even if they may come again not only for him but also for the others and for others that are to follow“ (Whitman 1856: 212). What sustains one’s sense of I“ through time, not just from visionary moment to quotidian interval, but from year to year, generation to generation? What makes the poet’s experience, on this ferry at this sundown, similar enough to the experience of those around him, and those who will follow him, that they can share his experience, and he theirs? He divines a \_\_simple, compact, well-join’d scheme“ (p. 211) in which he and his fellow passengers are united, and they with others across time. Returning to the scene (section 3), and reaffirming his bond with future men and women (section 4) the poet declares that all share in a float forever held in solution“ (p. 216), a chemical metaphor for a universal substance, out of which individual souls are precipitated for a sojourn in time, and to which they return at death. Though this float“ has been identified with the Emersonian Oversoul (e.g., Miller 1992: 70–2), it is not Transcendental but Immanentist, that is, spiritual and material interfused. (In the Preface to the 1855 edition Whitman had mentioned a sense of the oneness of nature“ that is called up of the float of the brain of the world“ (Whitman 1996: 20). Theories of recurrence were widely diffused in Whitman’s culture, from the literary fascination with Wordsworth’s *Immortality Ode*, to the Egyptology

movement (NUPM, 1: 198), to the universal magnetic fluid“ of the mesmerists (Reynolds 1995: 261). In the course of his meditation Whitman also explores other, less speculative, bases of unity that transcend time. In section 6 he acknowledges that he too [knew] what it was to be evil,“ cataloguing the dark patches“ of self-doubt and personal sin. It is on this passage that biographical and psychological readings of the poem have concentrated.) He likens human life to a play, in which the roles are forever fixed though the changing players may make more or less of their parts. And, early, middle, and late in the poem, he returns to New York’s nexus of cities and waters, a being than which none else is perhaps more spiritual“ (p. 221). The poem’s late movement, section 9, returns to the scene detailed in section 3 – but with an important syntactical change. In 3 its features were explicitly or implicitly the objects of I saw,“ phenomena of consciousness. Now they are subjects, not objects: the seabirds fly, the light diverges, the cities thrive. The poet speaks no longer as a sustaining center of consciousness, but as one affirming what each thing characteristically does: his imperatives do not compel the river to flow or the masts to stand up, but rather recognize and applaud their autonomous being and doing. In a brief, muted coda, however, Whitman reaffirms the idealist side of his visionary city, in a catalogue-becomelitary invoking its features as dumb [i.e., silent] beautiful ministers.“ Part of what things are and do is spiritual, serving as a ground of meditation, furnish[ing] [their] parts toward eternity“ (Whitman 1856: 222). The splendid physical scene from which the poem began is reaffirmed in its every detail as the soul.“ Whitman may be thinking of a divine, universal soul, of which all individuals are temporary if god-like incarnations. But it is also characteristic of the Romantic mode, particularly as articulated by Emerson, to identify this soul“ with poetic consciousness, so that ship and factory, gulls and passengers, alike are absorbed into the poet’s god-like vision. Crossing Brooklyn Ferry“ toys with the solipsism against which Emerson had struggled in *Nature* and in *Experience*.“ Quentin Anderson reads the poem as a contest between Whitman’s confidence in his omnivorous poetic powers and fear of imprisonment within his own sensorium: instead of falling back on the utter solipsism of complete delusion, he faced about and carried his cosmic inward spectacle to the print-shop“ (Anderson 1971: 136). However, Anderson also points out that no Whitman poem is more successful in offering us an apprehended world“ (Anderson 1971: 121). Romanticist readings of *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*“ frequently emphasize the mimetic power of Whitman’s lengthy and reiterated description of the ferry passage. Like Coleridge in his *Dejection Ode*, Whitman takes pains to recreate the atmospherics of his passage, especially the senses of light and motion. He observes the spokes of light that surround his reflected image in the water; he sees the play of yellow and shadow on the bodies of the gulls; he detects the violet hue of the steam vapor: appropriately these effects have been termed *Luminist* (Thomas 1987) or

impressionist (St Armand 1979), or linked with Ruskin's attention to the illusionist use of color in Modern Painters. The harborscape is presented not objectively, but rather as it would be seen from a consciousness within it – Whitman's, the future travelers', the readers'. This element of subjectivity supports Whitman's claim to be with us, by reversing it: we are there with him, at the ferry's rail. Atmospheric detail likewise supports our sense that the ferry is moving through time and space. He prolongs the 10- minute journey, so that before it ends the sun is no longer half an hour high, "but has set, leaving the shores illuminated by the glare of foundry chimneys. Details of the harborscape are catalogued not at random but as they would successively pass before a person crossing from Manhattan to Brooklyn. And the scene itself is in flux, with a tide roiling the East River, harbor traffic coming and going from the sea and the Hudson, and sailors and passengers moving about the vessels. Detail and motion draw us into the scene, as they did in the nineteenth-century panorama. Further, the Heraclitean setting fits with the poem's meditation on permanence and impermanence, multiplicity and unity. But unlike landscape poems in which the present flows into the irrecoverable past, here the motion is cyclic, the poet's thoughts shuttling between a future that becomes the present that becomes the past as he imagines his relationship with those who will someday ride the ferry either in fact or by the proxy of his poem. This reciprocal motion renders change illusory, time timeless: it avails not." The way forward, T. S. Eliot would later write, is the way back.

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**SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**UNIT – II– AMERICAN LITERATURE– SHSA5102**

## AMERICAN LITERATURE – SHSA5102

### Course Materials

#### UNIT II – PROSE

**Detail:** Ralph Waldo Emerson – *Self-Reliance*

**Non-Detail:** Martin Luther King – *I have a Dream*

Edgar Allen Poe – *The Philosophy of Composition*

#### RALPH WALDO EMERSON- ‘SELF-RELIANCE’

Emerson opens the essay “Self-Reliance” with an anecdote, recalling, “i read the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional.” This originality is, to him, the true “value” of an idea, “let the subject be what it may.” This reflection in the opening lines supports the full force of his main argument for the essay: “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius.” He presents the Transcendentalist idea that every truth originates in and radiates outward from the human mind, so that “the inmost in due time becomes the outmost.” We should look within and appreciate our own thought, rather than look to the thoughts of others: “a man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages. yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his.” education is not about “envy” or “imitation” but rather about self-discovery and selfacceptance. Knowledge is to be cultivated within ourselves, not derived from others. “Trust thyself.” Trust the “transcendent destiny” of your own life. Self-trust requires we return to the openness of childhood. Emerson watches the “oracles nature yields” in babies and children and wonders how and why we lose this “unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unaffrighted innocence” we once held. Society requires conformity and thus requires we silence our authentic selves: “These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world.” The self-reliant person “must be a nonconformist” and must accept that “nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.” We must not accept others’ definitions but determine the truth for ourselves: “He . . . must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness . . . the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it.” We cannot derive goodness or morality from “large societies and dead institutions.” We must follow only what comes from within: “What i must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think.” Conformity and adherence to a “dead church” or to political parties are “screens” that hide “the

impression of your character.” it is not necessary to make such outward connections in an effort to prove your character; rather, simply, “do your work, and i shall know you.” Religion is defined by conformity and unoriginality, the opposites of self-reliance: “if i know your sect, i anticipate your argument.” The minister, in particular, is bound by sect, by “communities of opinion,” and is not an independent man. It is not just society that poses a risk to the self but limitations we impose upon ourselves. We are afraid of “self-trust” and adhere to our own “consistency” in the comfort of “our past act or word.” We criticize change and contradiction, but “a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen, philosophers, and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do.” it is better to speak different thoughts each day than to be consistent out of fear: “To be great is to be misunderstood.” We can only act in accordance with our nature and our false actions to please society to not reveal our true character: “your conformity explains nothing.” instead, we are explained by a variety of seemingly unrelated “zigzag” actions throughout our lives: “The force of character is cumulative.” if someone or something reminds you of someone else, it is not true or genuine, for “character” is unique and individual, and “reminds you of nothing else.” Men of character are at “the centre of things” and “all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout & earnest persons.” Self-reliance means confidence in ourselves: “let a man then know his worth.” nothing is beneath you. Do not look at “a palace, a statue, or a costly book” and think it is greater than or “forbidding” to you; it is you, waiting for you to “take possession” and make your own “verdict” on it. Emerson believes that there is no difference in the lives of “great” men and “ordinary” men; whether “kingdom and lordship” or regular people doing a “common day”’s work . . . the things of life are the same to both.” your “private act to-day” is as important as their “renowned” acts of the past. The rights and honor due to kings and others is “the right of every man.” Self-trust is the source “of genius, of virtue, and of life.” Emerson explains how self-trust relates to the idea of God, namely, that if there is a God, he would “communicate, not one thing, but all things.” Truth and “divine spirit” are directly revealed, with no need for a mediator: “if, therefore, a man claims to know and speak of God, and carries you backward to the phraseology of some old mouldered nation in another country, in another world, believe him not.” Why privilege the god of books rather than the god of direct experience? Why look to the past for something greater than yourself? “is the acorn better than the oak?” He answers his own question by declaring that humans are “timid and apologetic.” We would quote someone else before trusting our own instincts and experiences. He uses the analogy of nature, which always trusts itself, making no reference to the past. The “full-blown flower” is the same essence as the “leafless root.” nature lives in the

present and is “resolution of all into the . . . One”—“the ultimate fact.” The power of nature derives from self-reliance, self-sufficiency—that which is not self-sufficient in nature will not survive. Emerson then moves to a discussion of the relationship of the self to society. “We must go alone,” being responsible only for ourselves. We need not adopt “the faults” or “folly” of our friends and family but must see that the world is “in conspiracy” against us with “trifles” and worries. We must have integrity enough to resist: “no man can come near me but through my act.” We must obey only “the eternal law,” not customs. This is not selfish, it is truth to self—“cannot sell my liberty and my power” to save feelings and friendships. Emerson urges to be “godlike” and be your own “doctrine, society, law.” Society makes us “afraid” and “timorous,” and the result is that most people “cannot satisfy their own wants.” everything we have in our lives—homes, relations, religion—“we have not chosen, but society has chosen for us.” We wait for chance when instead we need “self-trust” and “new powers shall appear.” In the next section Emerson looks at four different aspects of social life and determines that “a greater self-reliance must work a revolution” in each of these areas. The first of these is religion, and the first problem with religion is the idea of prayer. Prayer is the opposite of self-reliance, for it “looks abroad” for guidance through “endless mazes of natural and supernatural.” Prayer is, in fact, selfishness, and “as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft.” Prayer assumes separation from God “and not unity in nature and consciousness.” if we were truly “one with God,” there would be no need to “beg.” Prayer comes from “discontent” and “regrets,” which are the opposite of self-reliance: “as men’s prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect.” Religious beliefs originate in “some powerful mind,” but when spread among “unbalanced minds,” the idea becomes “idolized.” The faithful soon look to “their master” to explain everything to them, blinded by this one idea to the true “million-orbed, million-colored” “immortal light” of the universe. The second area Emerson addresses is American culture. “it is for want of self culture” that “educated Americans” have such a “fascination” with Europe and spend much time traveling abroad. Emerson challenges instead to see that “the soul is no traveler; the wise man stays at home.” it is fine to travel and learn about the world, to spread “benevolence,” but the individual must not expect to find something “greater than he knows.” He will not “get somewhat which he does not carry” within himself and can never travel “away from” himself. It is easy to believe that happiness lies elsewhere, to believe that “at Rome, i can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness.” But this is a problem within, and this person will find, no matter where he or she travels, “the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that i fled from.” The third area into which Emerson applies the question of self-culture is art. Travel and imitation of foreign culture are



signs of “a deeper unsoundness.” The American “intellect is vagabond” and imitation (in art, architecture, or furnishings) is “travelling of the mind.” Americans should not focus on “the Past and the Distant” but realize that “beauty, convenience, grandeur of thought . . . [are] near to us.” We need an American artist and mindset to appreciate America. The American artist must “never imitate,” for no “master” can teach us about ourselves, which we will then have only “half possession” of. He notes that Shakespeare had no master. Lastly, Emerson looks to the “spirit of society” itself and its relation to self-reliance. He concludes that “society never advances . . . for everything that is given, something is taken.” for example, the cost of “civilization” is loss of “aboriginal strength,” technology replaces “skill,” and religion replaces virtue. We only progress when we believe that “no greater men are now than ever were.” Our science and art as it exists now would not be any greater education for great men centuries before: “Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not.” The main problem with society, Emerson warns, is “reliance on Property, including the reliance on governments which protect it,”—this reliance on property is “the want of self-reliance.” We value and protect things and “institutions” and affiliations rather than who we are. We wait for “good days” to come from “fortune” or “Chance,” when, in fact, “nothing can bring you peace but yourself.

## MARTIN LUTHER KING- 'I HAVE A DREAM'

On August 28, 1963, King gives his speech for freedom. He begins his speech with the emancipation of the slaves, issued by Abraham Lincoln, and later mentions that after being freed from slavery, blacks are still not free. King claims all men were issued a check and a promise of freedom, yet for black men and women that check has come back with "insufficient funds." The members of the civil rights union issue a check to America, they return America's unkept promise with one they are sure to keep: the continued pursuit of justice. King, along with his many supporters, demand their freedom now, they demand things to change with a sense of urgency and without procrastination from the oppressor. They do not want to see slow change over time; they would rather see significant change immediately. King roars, "now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children." However, King hopes to obtain equality through non-violent movement. He tells fellow black people to not have hatred or bitterness in their heart or turn to guns and fists. He knows that violence to obtain peace only leads to an endless cycle of fighting, unnecessary death, and cruelty. Also King believes blacks must not let this one incident lead them to hate all people of different races and nationalities. He knows that only leads to the same kind of discrimination he is fighting against with his "I have a dream" speech. Black people are not fighting for their own satisfactions, to fight until they feel content with what they have accomplished. Black people are fighting for continuous freedom and equality, not just to be stopped with King's 1963 speech. Rhetorical Analysis of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream": The "I Have a Dream" speech has a very simple context. The author of the "I Have A Dream" speech is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King is known for his work in Civil Rights during the 1960s. The purpose of this speech is to inspire change in both white and black citizens of the United States during the Civil Rights era. Moreover, the premise of the speech is that both sides of the discussion must accept change in a non-violent yet effective way. Finally, the audience of the speech is very general; however, one should note that since the speech is given in Washington, it is possible that the speech attempts to engage law makers and policy makers who work and live within the nation's capital. The genre of this work is somewhat narrative and argumentative. The speech conveys many personal thoughts and experiences of the author; however, there is a strong position taken against the crimes of "white" citizens and the nation as a whole. While there is no explicit claim present, there are the foundation points which make the argumentative position of the author very clear and visible. The style of the speech is very formal with some hints of informality. The diction or word choice is comparable to other political speeches such as John F. Kennedy's

“Inaugural Address.” Yet, throughout the “I Have a Dream” speech, one may find a bit of black gospel within it. The images and the ornaments are heavily religious, reminiscent of a Sunday church sermon. The tone is both informative and argumentative. Moreover, it is descriptive. The imagery is very dark, and the ideas are very sincere. The claim, as I mentioned, is not very explicit. However, the points of support are clear: 1) American has defaulted on its promises. 2) The black people of the U.S. are still not free. 3) Now is the time to make changes. 4) As, King suggests, “Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred” (p.343). 5) People should move forward to spread the message that freedom is a part of every U.S. citizen’s life, even blacks. In terms of natural support, throughout the speech, King uses biblical codes. In addition, King is very overt in using his own testimony of what is happening in the United States. In terms of artificial support, King uses many different kinds of pathos. Beginning with a long allegory about Negro freedom and banking, King uses the imagery of being behind a great leader, Abraham Lincoln. One could make a case that such imagery is also linked to ethos, since Lincoln was the father of the Emancipation Proclamation. Towards the end of the speech, there is a surge of pathos, as King discusses the brutality that the negro has experienced and the basic mobility of the negro who is unable to find jobs, stay in hotels, etc. Towards the absolute close of the speech, King launches into a long discussion of a possible and decent future, using images of children playing together. In these passages, King uses biblical images: “That one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low... the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (p.344). While the introduction of the speech evokes Lincoln, the conclusion uses lyrics from the song “America” (p.344). Additionally, he gives a sort of “shout out” to the people of the United States, saying: “Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York... Pennsylvania... Colorado... California” (p.345). In the end, King closes with words from an old Negro spiritual: “Freed at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last” (p.345). King’s style is unique but very easy to discuss. King’s use of ornamentation/embellishment is made possible through heavy uses of the anaphora (a scheme which allows for repetition in the beginning of successive lines). An example of this includes his long series of “I have a dream...” statements, where he states: “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed... 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” (p.344). Further, King makes heavy use of listing. In one passage, he states: “Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina...” (p.343), which he mixes with a sort of anaphora. Of note, King uses a large allegory

in the beginning of the speech, again comparing banking to the rights of black U.S. citizens. Overall, the speech is very much loaded with rhetorical techniques. King as an accomplished civil rights leader is a very accomplished writer. His words are very hopeful and deliberate. He is very conscious of his audience, and he is very commanding of his wording to avoid hurting his credibility with this audience. However, King takes the right kinds of chances rhetorically. I believe that this speech is one of the better written works that I have had the chance to read.

## **EDGAR ALLEN POE- 'THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION'**

Essay by Poe published in the April 1846 issue of GRAHAM'S MAGAZINE. Poe purports to demonstrate how he wrote "The RAVEN" and how it should be read, as well. He claimed that many people would stop him and ask, "„Why, Mr. Poe, how did you write „The Raven“?" This was his answer. Whatever its reason for creation, the essay is a vital text in understanding Poe criticism. It contains a thorough analysis of his creative process, which has led to significant debate regarding the accuracy of Poe's description of his compositional process. Poe suggests that the essay will reveal the method that any author might follow in producing successful literature, beginning with "the consideration of an effect . . . after looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect." The author writes that he has often thought "how interesting a magazine article might be written by any author who would—that is to say who could— detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion." Poe suggests that "authorial vanity" may be the reason that writers have omitted such analysis, because "most writers—poets in especial— prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition." The opposite is actually true, notes Poe, and most writers "would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes . . . at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable—at the cautious selections and rejections— at the painful erasures and interpolations." After pointing out that most authors are "in no condition to retrace the steps by which his conclusions have been attained," Poe proposes to analyze for readers the composition process that he followed in writing "The Raven." He identifies issues that determine the success or failure of a poem, with emphasis upon length, the effect to be conveyed, and the province, beauty in this case. Poe asserts, "there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art—the limit of one sitting." Although he allows that a novel may require more time, the limit should never be exceeded in a poem. The choice of effect is a second consideration, and Poe argues that the poet should determine in advance the effect that he wishes to create. For Poe, the province of the poem should be Beauty, "because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes." He then applies his observations to "The Raven" to provide examples of his theory. It is this very detailed and carefully delineated discussion that created debate as to how honest Poe was in assessing his writing of "The Raven." Critics who doubted the premise expressed doubt that the creative process could be so straightforward and logical.

**CRITICAL RESPONSE:** In his introduction to "The Raven," Mabbott says quite simply that

"The Philosophy of Composition" "includes a partly fictional account of the planning of 'The Raven'" (Poe, "The Raven," p. 353) and reminds readers that Poe "admitted freely that his 'Philosophy of Composition' . . . was not expected to be taken as literal truth" (p. 359). Some critics have suggested that Poe's essay is a purposeful hoax while others make a less strident assessment, as G. R. Thompson does when he characterizes the essay as "possibly half tongue-in-cheek" (p. xl). Daniel Hoffman argues that in "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe reveals "the method of his art [that] enables the madness of his matter to be spoken" (p. 92). Hoffman also points out that Poe must have taken pleasure in having George Graham publish his essay after rejecting "The Raven" years earlier. As Hoffman succinctly puts it, Poe made Graham "eat raven" (p. 80). Dennis Pahl argues that "The Philosophy of Composition" not only "ends up reproducing many of the poem's features becoming as it were seduced by the very rhetoric it is supposed to analyze" (p. 10) but also ultimately "engages in violating boundaries, in questioning assertions of mastery, in what might be called in other words, 'writing in the feminine'" (p. 20). No one has suggested that the essay is simply a recipe for good writing, yet many have excerpted particular ideas as nodal points of Poe's literary sensibility, especially the following: the death of a beautiful woman as "the most poetical topic in the world," the need for an "under-current" of meaning in all artworks, and the importance of "unity of effect."

INTERPRETATION: Clues to whether or not Poe actually revealed his writing method in "The Philosophy of Composition" can be found in the essay itself. Poe often advises the writer to do what is ordinarily done; for example, when he explains how he chose the refrain as the pivot of "The Raven," he says he chose it above all other devices because "no one had been so universally applied as that of the refrain" (p. 199). He further advises a writer to rely on themes that are "universally appreciable" and tones that allow for "universal understanding" (p. 201) if universality is most important, as if it is best to please the mob. Yet, considering that "The Raven" accomplished its goal of pleasing both "the popular and the critical taste," it is no wonder that Poe chose this poem as the concrete example for explicating his "modus operandi" (p. 195). But anyone who knows Poe's work knows a concern for universality would not be utmost in his mind at all times. Granted, he did wish his poetry and fiction to be read and, more importantly, to sell, but his aesthetic principles went far beyond a mere desire to please the populace and earn a living. Poe wanted to be remembered as a poet even though most of his career was spent as a critic and magazine writer. In 1848, a year before his death, Poe dedicated his prose poem Eureka, the work he considered the culmination of his writing career, "to those who feel rather than to those who think the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities" (Poe, Eureka, p. 5). In Eureka, Poe defines intuition as "the conviction arising

from those inductions or deductions of which the processes are so shadowy as to escape our consciousness, elude our reason, or defy our capacity of expression" (p. 22). This assertion counters his claim in "The Philosophy of Composition" that writers who claim "ecstatic intuition" as the means of production are deluding themselves and others (p. 194). Yet Poe valued most an "under-current" of meaning in a poem or narrative, and Poe's pupil can nowhere find the rule for creating this "suggestiveness" in Poe's "Philosophy." Such "suggestiveness" more often than not is created by a process akin to the definition of intuition found in Eureka. Those who follow the steps outlined in "The Philosophy of Composition" would be remiss were they to think that that would be all they need to do to create an "art product." Poems or narratives produced in this way, Poe claims, would "repel the artistical eye" because they lack "adaptation" and "suggestiveness," the two aspects of writing that cannot be taught (p. 207). Careful readers of Poe's essay would be confounded by what they find in the penultimate paragraph. Here Poe states, "Holding these opinions, I added the two concluding stanzas of the poem their suggestiveness being thus made to pervade all the narrative which has preceded them" (p. 208). Should not those two last stanzas have been conceived first, according to what Poe says in his introduction? How could he "add" these two stanzas to make the rest resonate with "suggestiveness," when Poe ostensibly holds to the rule of having "the end always in view"? Like the Prefect in Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter," do readers overlook what is "in plain view"? Do they overlook evidence "by dint of [its] being excessively obvious"? This glaring but subtle contradiction makes the reader question Poe's "sincerity" and purpose in writing "The Philosophy of Composition." Other hints throughout are not quite so obvious but persistent nonetheless. For example, Poe's insistence on "universality" as a primary consideration for many compositional decisions is suspect. Finally, his direct statement that "from out my heart" is "the first metaphorical expression in the poem" is outright dissembling (p. 208). Poe's essay holds the clues to its project: to purport to reveal all the "modus operandi" while withholding the essential components that transform technical prowess into art. Nonetheless, Poe's "Philosophy of Composition" illuminates many of the principles that make Poe's writing so engaging: unity of effect, adaptation of complexity, suggestiveness, careful attention to form as a reflection of content, and a fascination with death and perversity.

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**SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**UNIT – III– AMERICAN LITERATURE– SHSA5102**



**AMERICAN LITERATURE – SHSA5102**  
**Course Materials**

**UNIT III – DRAMA**

**Detail:** Tennessee Williams – *The Glass Menagerie*

**Non-Detail:** Edward Albee – *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Arthur Miller – *Death of a Salesman*

**TENNESSEE WILLIAMS – 'GLASS MENAGERIE'**

The plot is slight stuff, as Williams himself knew. (Scanlan, 99) Equipped with the knowledge of the outstanding success of *The Glass Menagerie*, it might be shocking to encounter a scholar's reference to the meagerness of the plot. More shocking is the assertion that Tennessee Williams was fully aware of this lack of dramatic action in *The Glass Menagerie*. Scholar Tom Scanlan is brave enough to make this statement, and while it seems that this is a critical remark about a flaw in Williams's work, the opposite is in fact true. After all, Tennessee Williams repeatedly made references to the —plastic element of the play. In fact, Scanlan backs his claim by including one of Williams's own comments from his Production Williams states, —A freeand imaginative use of light can be of enormous value in giving a mobile plastic quality to plays of a more or less static nature. Furthermore, Williams actually emphasized this static quality, speaking in favor of a new —sculptural drama or —plastic theatre to replace the dramatic realism that was dominant at the time. It was Williams's belief that realism was no longer adequate to convey the complexities of modern existence. The totality of experience could be better represented through symbolic implications, psychological action, and a lack of other distractions. An abundant plot is therefore superfluous, and so, Williams adopts a more minimal approach. This pareddown concept flows throughout the play. *The Glass Menagerie* consists of only four characters: Tom Wingfield, Laura Wingfield, Amanda Wingfield, and Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller. The set consists of a living room, dining room, and an exterior portion of the Wingfields' apartment building; the props are almost non-existent (characters who are eating have no actual food or silverware); and the timeline accounts for a very brief period of time. Even the actions of the characters are minimal. Amanda, Tom, and Laura are seen performing basic, domestic tasks such as washing the dishes, clearing the table, or reading the newspaper. As Tom Scanlan has already pointed out, the overall dramatic action is equally sparse. There are only two basic lines of thought touched on in *The Glass Menagerie*: Tom's desire to escape and Amanda's obsession with finding a husband for her daughter, Laura.

(Scanlan, 99) Accordingly, the —major<sup>l</sup> dramatic actions of each character can be summarized as follows: Amanda and Tom clash; Laura plays with her collection of glass animals and winds the Victrola; Jim, the gentleman caller, comes to visit. In fact, the gentleman caller's visit is the only true dramatic action; the overall structure of the play is defined by this event. Williams divides the play into two parts: —Part I Preparation for the Gentleman Caller<sup>l</sup> and —Part II The Gentleman Calls. Tom's departure, which is perhaps the most drastic act of the play, is revealed passively in a monologue, rather than actively in a more traditional dramatic format. Appearing as Narrator, Tom says matter-of-factly, —I left St. Louis. I descended the steps of this fire escape for the last time.... The general themes of *The Glass Menagerie* are no more original and dynamic than the actions in the play. The subjects that the play approaches have appeared again and again in international theatre and the greater body of literature as well. Given these facts, what can account for *The Glass Menagerie*'s ultimate and lasting success? Tennessee Williams's deceptively simple play is able to address the whole of the human experience by symbolically broaching opposing concepts such as self and other, the internal or interior and external or exterior, duty and freedom, domestic experience, and religious experience. This is accomplished through the interplay of several unique strategies, some of which are discussed in Tennessee Williams's Production Notes, which precede the text of the play in the reading version of *The Glass Menagerie*. Tennessee Williams's deceptively simple play is able to address the whole of the human experience by symbolically broaching opposing concepts such as self and other, the internal or interior and external or exterior, duty and freedom, domestic experience, and religious experience. This is accomplished through the interplay of several unique strategies, some of which are discussed in Tennessee Williams's Production Notes, which precede the text of the play in the reading version of *The Glass Menagerie*. One of the most critical devices is the use of memory in *The Glass Menagerie*. *The Glass Menagerie* is described as a —memory play. The scenes that we witness are memories belonging to Tom Wingfield; he is therefore, given the unique job of serving as both narrator and character in the play. This format has distinct benefits for the audience. 4 Rather than serve as voyeurs, watching an act as it happens (as an audience would have done at a realistic play of the time), Williams's audience is given direct access to Tom's most private, psychological place—his memory. Not only is the audience subject to this internal realm, but they are also able to witness the original actions as if they had been there with Tom. And so, the memory becomes theirs as well. Tom Scanlan describes the dynamic balance of these forms, noting —even while we move into the bizarre or exaggerated situation emblematic of the gauzy mind of the protagonist, we are constantly aware that it approximates a realistic situation. (Scanlan,

97) As was noted earlier, in addition to his original use of memory, Williams had called for another necessary new form in drama—the —sculptural drama or —plastic theatre. Williams tells us that this new form uses expressionistic tools, not in an attempt to avoid reality, but rather, to approach experience more closely. He says, —When a play employs unconventional techniques, it is not, or certainly shouldn't be, trying to escape its responsibility of dealing with reality, or interpreting experience, but is actually or should be attempting to find a closer approach, a more penetrating and vivid expression of things as they are.¶ In the production notes, Williams refers to three of the main expressionistic tools used in *The Glass Menagerie*—the screen device, music, and lighting. Williams's screen device is simply the projection of words or images onto a screen onstage. In *The Glass Menagerie*, projections appear on a part of the wall between two rooms that compose the interior portion of the set. For instance, when we learn that Jim was a —high school hero, an image of him holding a trophy appears onscreen. Williams explains that these devices are meant to highlight the —values of scenes that are structurally important to the play. It was also<sup>5</sup> Williams's intention that the devices remove some of the emphasis from traditional dialogue and action. The atmosphere in the play is moderated through the manipulation of music and lighting. Rather than play the music of the time, a single piece of music is predominantly heard throughout *The Glass Menagerie*. Williams describes it as being —like circus music¶ heard from a distance. It functions as an auditory symbol of the emotional states of the characters, evoking a feeling of sadness. Its repetitive tune and consistent presence throughout the play helps to accent the feeling of stasis. Other background music does occasionally manifest itself, changing with the events on stage. For instance, Jim and Laura hear a romantic piece of music like a waltz; when Amanda and Tom argue, the background music is heavy and ominous. The lighting works in tandem with the music, mimicking the actions and emotions of the play. The overall lighting of the play is dim, another reminder that the play is about memory. Williams is able to use light to symbolize a character's critical traits. For example, he directs that the light on Laura be distinct from the light shone on the other characters. Hers should be reminiscent of the light of a church or the light one would associate with a saint. Felicia Hardison Lóndre generously states that the symbolism embodied in these techniques makes it nearly impossible to convey a sense of the play through mere description or summary. —So tightly written are the scenes in *The Glass Menagerie*, so full of musicality and suggestive power are the lines of dialogue, so integral are the effects of sound and lighting—that a summation of<sup>6</sup> what is said and done on stage cannot nearly convey a sense of the play.¶ (Lóndre, 47) It is also worth mentioning that these three devices are not the only symbolic tools employed throughout the play. Williams also uses time

and color as symbolic devices. For instance, transitional scenes such as Scenes Five and Six take place at dusk, a transitional time of day. In these scenes we shift from Part I of the play (preparation for the gentleman caller's visit) to Part II (the actual visit). When Williams wants to express that his characters feel hopeful, he might have Tom tell us that it is spring, a season of rebirth and growth. As Williams uses spring to convey optimism and hope, he uses color accordingly, dressing Amanda and Laura in light-colored dresses in these scenes. When he wants a more ambiguous feeling, he dresses his characters all in white. Even the lighting takes on varied tones: ebony darkness in Scene Four, pale white moonlight in Scene Five, lemony-yellow light in Scene Six, artificially warm and rosy lamplight in Scene Seven. The color blue is introduced in Scene Two in the projection of blue roses onscreen. When associated with roses, the color is an oddity. It is also the color traditionally equated with sadness and with the Virgin Mary and is therefore, an appropriate color to correspond with Laura. The structure of *The Glass Menagerie* might also be considered an expressionistic device. Lóndre suggests that the splitting of the play into multiple scenes is a reflection of the nature of memory. —This fragmented quality is justified by the selectivity of memory, she says (Lóndre, 47). Williams corroborates this in a statement that Lóndre has not failed to miss; in his Production Notes he says, —In an episodic play, such as this, the basic structure or narrative line may be obscured from the audience; the effect may seem fragmentary rather than architectural. This structure also brings to mind not only the fragmented nature of memory, but more literally, the image of shattered or fragmented glass—the central symbol of the play, and certainly an appropriate symbol for the shattered Wingfield family. Furthermore, the play is broken down into seven scenes. The number is suggestive of an ordinary sense of time (seven days in a week), but this number has religious implications as well. There are seven sacraments, as there are seven deadly sins. This merging of the secular and the nonsecular is carried throughout the play. Williams employs typical cultural symbols as well as religious iconography and allusive language to demonstrate the whole of the human situation, or as Judith J. Thompson puts it, —two types of symbols, concrete and transcendent are used by Williams to evoke this communal response. (Thompson, 681) As the final seventh scene approaches, one might feel that the number seven is an indicator of luck; at the conclusion of this scene, we learn that it might rather have been a sarcastic or ironic nod to such an idea. But even before the first scene begins, before the music is played and the lights are dimmed, there exists no trace of the play for the audience other than a small combination of words on the playbill—the title. Like the dynamic new tools of sculptural drama that Tennessee Williams exalts in his production notes, the title is used for support, primarily, and emphasis, finally. It might allude to a key aspect of

a climatic scene, or it might play a cruel trick as an ironic disguise. The title is a provocateur, a conjurer of images that precedes the language and action of<sup>8</sup> the play. Because it is the first trace of the work that one encounters, it is the source of the ignition of internal experience for a theatergoer. Seated in Chicago's Civic Theatre on the night of December 26, 1944, what might a theatergoer be thinking while examining the words —glass menagerie<sup>1</sup> on the playbill? The image of glass provides us with a nearly inexhaustible stream of associations. Glass is associated with fragility, an ability to break. In light of its susceptibility to external forces which might cause it to shatter, it has the potential to become fragmented. If one sought a psychological equivalent, we might think of emotional fragility, desperation, or confusion. In a different context, glass is also multifaceted and complex in a beautiful and positive way when illuminated by light, perhaps the symbolic equivalent of joy, spiritual ecstasy, or purity. Glass is reflective, and in this way, can be indicative of self-exploration, or, taken further, narcissism. It might be used as a barrier—or it might simply be admired for its decorative properties (something Amanda Wingfield would be prone to doing). When it is placed between two sites, as a window might be, one might either assume the role of voyeur, observing an interior site as an outsider; or one might be on the inside, looking out to the world beyond as a dreamer or philosopher might (as many of Williams's 'poet' characters, such as Tom Wingfield, do). It functions as the link and the boundary between the internal and external. In the symbolic context of the play, it could be said that it provides voyeuristic access to internal experience beyond the self, simultaneously exposing the grander experience, drawing us outside of ourselves and into the realm of<sup>9</sup> empathetic experience. The revelation of empathetic experience is perhaps the primary success of Williams's work. For, while realistic drama can succeed in attaining a sympathetic response from its audience, Williams goes a step further, creating for his audience an umbilical link between the realms of self and other. As it turns out then, the title may be the most critical and forthright of the expressionistic devices used by Williams in *The Glass Menagerie*. The word 'menagerie', thought to be derived from the Middle French word —ménage,<sup>1</sup> translates to —management of a household or farm.<sup>1</sup> More commonly, it is associated with a collection of animals. One might consider a zoo, a place where animals are trapped, or at least confined, and in many ways, exposed. It is a place where primal nature is made public. As Scene One begins, Williams uses this analogy to set the stage. The play begins with a shot of the dark wall of the Wingfields' apartment building in St. Louis, Missouri. The external wall is transparent, encouraging the association of the characters to animals on display. The building is described as a —hivelike conglomeration,<sup>1</sup> providing us with the image of drones, a comment on the dire economic situation of the people who live

there. The building area is dark, dirty, and surrounded by alleys, a sinister dead-end frequently employed in Hollywood movies to indicate danger. Williams puts particular emphasis on the presence of the fire escape, a part of the building ironically attached. When in the role of narrator, Tom frequently appears here. The fire escape doesn't primarily or ultimately symbolize freedom or escape, but rather the opposite. Like the alleys, it indicates the potential for catastrophe. The living room, because of the disparity of the Wingfields' economic status, is also Laura's bedroom; it is placed in closest proximity to the audience. The walls are decorated sparsely with a large photograph of Tom and Laura's absentee father, Mr. Wingfield, and with charts for typing and shorthand. An old-fashioned curio houses Laura's collection of glass animals. The physical environment has been revealed, and it is at this time that we are introduced to Tom, the narrator, who will also take a place as a character in the play. As noted previously, Tom frequently appears outside of the building as narrator, temporarily separating himself from the internal dynamics of the action on stage. Dressed as a sailor, he begins by setting up the social background of the play. The exterior wall is lifted away and not seen again until the end of the play; the play is now concerned with the interior or internal—the realm of memory, pain, and emotion. Music is heard for the first time, as any reference to the external falls away. Tom (on cue) reminds us that the play is about memory. He introduces himself as narrator and as a character in the re-enactments of his own memory, which will provide —truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.¶ He also introduces his mother, Amanda; his sister, Laura; Jim, the gentleman caller; and his father, who only appears in the form of the large photograph in the living room. Tom generously refers to his father, who has abandoned his family, as a telephone man —who fell in love with long distances.¶ As if inextricably linked in Tom's memory, at the mention of Mr. Wingfield, we hear Amanda calling for Tom in the distance. The first instance of the screen device occurs when we meet Amanda. The words —ou sont les neiges appear on screen. They translate to —where are the snows?¶, words from a fifteenth-century French poem in praise of beautiful women. The text is puzzling, fragmented, and appropriately, it is foreign—projected in French rather than English. As our understanding of Amanda is only partial, so is our comprehension of this phrase. In the first scene we are immediately faced with two of the main dynamics of the play: the tension between Tom and his mother, and Amanda's obsessive desire for Laura to have a gentleman caller. The essential actions of the characters are to be repeated throughout the play in a kind of gestural merry-go-round. Stripped of any real variation, their recurrence in the next five scenes creates tension and encourages the audience in their hope that things might turn out differently in the final scenes. There is no time to adjust or settle into the dialogue, as the primary moments of the

play yield the first glimpses of a domestic battle. Amanda begins nagging Tom about the way he is eating. Tom makes his way to the door, as if to escape, indicating that this is not the first instance of his mother frustrating him in this way. Amanda calls for Tom to return, and when he informs her that, rather than leaving, he was going to get a cigarette, she replies with another criticism: —You smoke too much.¶ Laura, who is also in the dining room, seems unaffected—or perhaps, resigned. She offers to get something from the kitchenette but Amanda instructs her that she needs to stay seated so she will be —fresh and pretty—for gentleman callers.¶ Laura states plainly that she is not expecting any callers. Amanda begins to reminisce about her own experiences with gentleman callers and again there are indications that this is not the first instance of their mother behaving this way. —I know what’s coming!¶ and —She loves to tell it!¶ are Tom and Laura’s reactions. While it initially seems quite normal for a woman of Amanda’s age to recount stories of better times which begin —When I was your age...,¶ there seems to be something amiss when she recalls having seventeen gentleman callers in one afternoon. Despite Tom’s sarcastic goading, Amanda continues on as if in another world. At this time, the second screen device appears. It is the image of Amanda as a young woman with her gentleman callers. The image draws further attention to the absurdity of Amanda’s exaggerated tales and supports the audience’s developing suspicions. Amanda harkens back to another time, a better time when she was in the South at Blue Mountain. It is a time when men were gentleman and women knew how to make pleasant and clever conversation. To clear up any remaining doubts about the truth of Amanda’s stories, Tom steps in as Narrator and directs that music be played and a spotlight shone on Amanda. Amanda continues and ceases only when the recollection of her absent husband surfaces. Alice Griffin suggests that this retreat—from the harsh reality of the Depression to the illusion of herself in the legendary South of elegant beaux and belles makes the present somehow more bearable for Amanda.¶ (Griffin, 62) The full phrase —Ou sont les neiges d’antan?¶ now appears onscreen, translating to —Where are the snows of yesteryear?¶ For the second time, Laura responds as if she is unaffected, asking to clear the table. Amanda reminds Laura again that she needs to stay so she will be —fresh and pretty¶ for any callers. The glass menagerie music can be heard in the background as Laura reminds her mother that there will likely be no callers. Scene Two opens with an image of blue roses projected on the screen. Laura is seen cleaning her collection of glass animals, but when she hears her mother coming, she goes and sits at the typewriter. Amanda has discovered that Laura hasn’t been going to business school classes as she thought. Her first word of the scene is —deception¶ and the scene will close with the same. Laura had gotten sick the first week and hadn’t returned. Instead, Laura confesses, she has been going to the museum to view the

religious paintings, to the zoo, and to a glass greenhouse where tropical flowers are raised. The sites reinforce the portrayal of Laura as a fragile, unearthly flower. Amanda is sure that Laura's only hope of a future is in finding a good husband. When asked if she has ever liked a boy, Laura confesses that there was a boy named Jim that she liked in high school. An image of Jim, holding a large trophy, appears on the screen. Laura points out that Jim was supposedly engaged, and must be married by now. It is later revealed that Jim had nicknamed Laura —blue roses‖ in high school. She had been ill with pleurosis, and when Jim questioned her about her absence, he had misheard her. This moment of social contact was clearly an important and treasured one for Laura. For the moment, the image of blue roses remains a curious one. It parallels the other references to flowers; these flowers, however, are different and point to Laura's difference. She is forced to wear a leg brace. Aware of her handicap, Laura is accepting of her current situation, which clearly doesn't allow for a boyfriend like Jim, but her mother is clearly unable to accept this. She refuses to allow Laura to use the word —crippled‖ and defines Laura's handicap as —a small defect‖ that can be hidden by charm. It is not the last time that Amanda makes such a claim — that charm, a variety of acceptable deceit, can hide that which one does not want to be revealed to others. The scene ends as Amanda recalls that charm was something Mr. Wingfield had plenty of, pointing out Amanda's own ability to be deceived. Tom reappears as narrator outside of the apartment on the fire escape at the start of Scene Three. He notes that finding a gentleman caller for Laura has gotten to be an obsession for his mother. He tells us that in order to make more money so that their home will look nice when callers do arrive, Amanda sells subscriptions to *The Homemakers Companion* magazine. As soon as Tom's monologue as narrator is finished and he reclaims his role as character, he and Amanda begin to quarrel. Tom, an aspiring poet, has left some of his books out. Amanda, disapproving of the subject matter written about by authors such as D.H. Lawrence, returns the book to the library. For Tom, this is clearly an indication that his mother doesn't understand him. More than a small act of motherly disapproval, it is for Tom an indication of his lack of freedom. Tom and Amanda's tension reaches an apex when Amanda accuses Tom of —saying he is going to the movies when he is elsewhere.‖ Tom explodes at Amanda, throwing his overcoat, which hits the curio cabinet that houses Laura's glass menagerie. There is the sound of breaking glass. Laura, like an animal, cries out —as if wounded.‖ The inside of the apartment is dark and a church bell can be heard in the distance as Scene Four begins. It is five o'clock a.m. and Tom is stumbling home. —A shower of movie ticket stubs‖ and a bottle fall from his pockets as proof of where he has been. (Scholars suggest that this is an autobiographical nod to Williams himself, who also frequently escaped to the movies.) Laura is inside when he



arrives. She is concerned and gently disapproving, pointing out that their mother might wake up. Tom replies, describing a stage show that he claims to have seen, —It doesn't take much intelligence to get yourself into a nailed up coffin, Laura. But who in hell ever got himself out of one without removing one nail? His thoughts, even after having been gone all night, are still on the pain of entrapment and the hope of escape. On cue, the photograph of Mr. Wingfield, the true escape artist, is illuminated. The church bell rings again and Amanda is heard calling Laura; she wants her daughter to go get groceries. It is made clear enough that Amanda always asks for credit, or rather it is Laura who is always sent for the groceries. With the brace on her leg, there is no doubt that Laura's —small defect will ensure that they all remain satisfactorily fed. When Laura departs, one hears —Ave Maria in the background. After a long, awkward silence, Tom apologizes to Amanda. She begins to cry, claiming that it is her —devotion that makes her children hate her. She confesses that she worries about her children and implores Tom never to be a drunkard. As if incapable of resisting, she begins to nag Tom again, this time for eating too fast and drinking black coffee. Amanda, who is accomplished at using her daughter for the sake of deceiving others, tells Tom that she believes Laura is concerned about him. After all, this might instill some guilt in him and he might possibly stop going out. She admits that, contrary to what Tom believes, she understands that he doesn't enjoy working at the warehouse. The Christian symbols (—Ave Maria, the mother's tears, her choice of the word —devotion) reinforce the notion of Amanda as martyr (an image that is referred to throughout the play), but it also sets the stage for a critical moment in the play— Amanda's confession. She says to Tom, —There's so many things in my heart that I cannot describe to you! It appears that Amanda is not purposefully cruel or antagonistic after all and her character becomes deeper after this admission. In a moment of foreshadowing, Amanda says that she sees Tom taking after his father. Tom tries to explain his restlessness to his mother. —Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse, he says. Thomas Allen Greenfield notes that —Williams presents us with an irresolvable conflict between meaningless rationalized modern work and the passion and romance that are for Williams the life's blood of men who are intellectually and spiritually alive. (Greenfield, 74) Surely, Tom embodies this conflict. As it turns out, Amanda has seen Tom's letter from the Merchant Marine. She understands his desire to escape as his father did, but she asks him not to go until Laura is taken care of, imploring Tom to bring home a gentleman caller for Laura. Tom reluctantly agrees. Perpetuating the Christian motif, the projection of the word —Annunciation is the first image of Scene Five. It is the foretelling of a hopeful event and the calling of someone to a higher purpose. Williams indicates that the sun is just about to set on a

Spring day. The opening is therefore optimistic and a tense audience might have their first chance to relax. Amanda and Laura are performing the ordinary task of cleaning the table, but Williams refers to it as being like —a dance or ritual.¶ They wear light-colored dresses and Tom wears a white shirt and pants. The atmosphere is lighter, almost ethereal, corresponding to the message on the screen. This is disrupted when Williams compares the characters to moths, colorless and silent. Tom is separate from the women and remains by the exterior portion of the set. We hear Amanda, and this time she is nagging Tom about combing his hair and again about smoking. Tom, who had been reading a newspaper with international news, grows frustrated and steps outside to smoke. The door slams behind him and Amanda looks over to the photograph of her husband, perhaps considering the inevitable. Across the alley, music is coming from a dance hall. Now that Tom is outdoors he resumes his position as Narrator and describes the source of the music. Clearly, he has been inside before. He describes —a large glass sphere that hung from the ceiling.¶ He says, —It would turn slowly about and filter the dusk with delicate rainbows.¶ The young men and women come outside on nice nights to kiss in the moonlight. For Tom, this image is interpreted as a repeated momentary deception, paralleling many other details of the play. In the next part of Scene Five, Amanda and Tom come together. In a moment symbolic of Amanda's attempt to reach out to her son, she steps outside to an area that clearly has belonged to Tom up until this point. They both make wishes on the moon. Tom reveals that he has found a gentleman caller for Laura . Williams refers to this revelation as —the annunciation,¶ and an ordinary event such as having a visitor is elevated to a level of spiritual significance. Like the Christian annunciation, this event is a reason for hope. With Mr. Wingfield absent and Tom's departure imminent, —it remains therefore for Jim to come as the Savior to the Friday night supper.¶ (Stein, 115) The two return inside and Amanda begins making preparations for the visit. Since the caller will be arriving on a Friday, Amanda decides they will dine on fish (another religious symbol, reminiscent not only of Jesus Christ himself, but also of his miracle of providing the desperate fisherman with plenty). Jim's coming is infused with the hope of providing a miraculous transformation for the Wingfield family. Amanda questions Tom to see if Jim drinks. After all, she doesn't want Laura to be in the same situation she currently finds herself in. She can't help referring back to her time at Blue Mountain and her own —tragic mistake¶ which interrupted those happier times. Tom confesses that he didn't tell Jim about Laura, but Amanda is sure that when Jim encounters Laura he will be taken with her unique beauty. Tom is more realistic, pointing out that, while Laura's positive points are evident to them, someone else might notice her handicap first. But with every word that Tom uses to describe the way someone might see Laura (crippled,

peculiar), Amanda counters it with her denial. The music coming from the dance hall now —has a minor and ominous tone.¶ Frustrated, Tom announces that he is leaving to go to the movies. Unable to let him go, and perhaps anticipating his final departure, Amanda yells after him —I don't believe you always go to the movies!¶ With Tom gone, Amanda calls Laura outside to wish on the moon. Scene Five is the first scene that finds all three characters on the exterior portion of the set and there is an indication that, perhaps, the characters are being drawn outside of their selves, but Laura, who is out of her element, isn't sure what to wish for. As Stephanie B. Hammer says, —Everyone else in Williams's drama has a clear wish to escape, to get somewhere, to have something. But Laura's desire is something and somewhere else.¶ (Hammer, 43) Amanda, filled with new hope, enthusiastically instructs her to wish for —Happiness!¶ and —Good fortune!¶ Scene Six begins with our narrator, Tom, in his usual place on the fire escape. Onscreen is an image of Jim, the gentleman caller, as a —high school hero.¶ As it turns out, Jim has gone to high school with Tom and Laura; he is, of course, the same Jim that Laura once had a crush on. He was popular in school and successful at everything including sports, drama, and politics. Despite all of this, Jim now works at the warehouse with Tom, who he calls —Shakespeare.¶ The lighting in the apartment is described as a —lemony light.¶ Again, it is nearly dusk, implying that a transition is about to take place. Amanda has transformed their home, hiding any flaws that might reveal their true situation to Jim, and Laura and Amanda are seen together again, performing another domestic task. This time, Amanda is fixing Laura's dress. Williams describes it as —devout and ritualistic,¶ with Laura standing with her arms outstretched as her mother kneels in front of her. Judith Thompson notes that —Williams' plays do not simply recall the old mythic images and religious rituals; they transform them in their reenactment.¶ (Thompson, 684) Laura —is like a piece of translucent glass, touched by light.¶ She is so nervous that she is visibly shaking. Her mother, who wants her daughter to wear —gay deceivers,¶ instructs her that —all pretty women are a trap,¶ perpetuating the notion that charm should be used to deceive. Perhaps on her own advice, Amanda leaves to dress herself and when she returns, she is holding jonquils and wearing one of her old dresses—a vision of her youth. Getting away with herself, she describes a day when she received so many jonquils from her callers that there weren't any more vases to hold them. As always, she promptly concludes this line of thought with a remembrance of Mr. Wingfield. In another moment of foreshadowing, Amanda notes that it is about to rain. When Amanda says that she gave Tom money —so he and Mr. O'Connor could take the service car home,¶ Laura realizes that her caller is the same Jim O'Connor that she went to school with, the same Jim that used to call her —Blue Roses.¶ Laura says that she will be unable to come to the table

knowing that it is him. She is left alone to panic as Amanda goes to check on dinner. By this time, Tom and Jim have arrived and are standing on the fire escape. —A low drum sounds.‖ Amanda calls to Laura to open the door, but she is frozen with fear and stares at the door without moving. Her instinct in this moment is to run to the Victrola and begin winding it. As if this act has given her strength, she finally goes to the door and lets the boys in. Tom introduces Laura to Jim and it is clear that Jim doesn't immediately remember her. Jim shakes her hand, boldly (or some might say rudely) noting that her hand is cold. Laura instinctively heads back towards the Victrola and then disappears from the room. When Tom explains that Laura is very shy; Jim replies that he doesn't meet girls like this very often. He also notes that Tom never mentioned that he had a sister. While they wait for dinner, Tom offers Jim the newspaper and Jim, the All-American boy, requests the sports page. Tom is clearly disinterested in the news that Jim shares from the page, and as if provoked by Tom's mood, Jim begins to try to sell Tom on the benefits of public speaking. Jim notes that the primary difference between him and Tom is their —social poise.‖ He tells Tom that their boss had been speaking about him in a less than positive manner. He warns Tom that he could lose his job if he doesn't —wake up.‖ Tom responds, —I am waking up.‖ He is clearly not referring to his job, but to a more personal matter. An image of a ship with the Jolly Roger appears onscreen. Tom leans over the rail of the fire escape as if he is on the ship. He confesses to Jim that he is tired of the movies because movies simply portray people having adventure and Tom is interested in the real thing. He shows Jim his membership card for the Merchant Marines and confesses that he has paid his dues rather than his family's electric bill. When Jim asks what his mother will do, Tom responds, —I'm like my father,‖ as if he has already resigned himself to the idea. His fate, he believes, depends on his ability to avoid the realm of empathy, simply disregarding his mother's feelings. As if on cue, Amanda approaches. She is wearing one of her old ball gowns and, since charm is the best form of magic, she exaggerates her Southern manners for Jim's benefit. An image of a young Amanda appears onscreen. Amanda begins to talk about the weather and uses it as an opportunity to draw attention to her dress. Perhaps afraid that his mother will launch into one of her tales of the past, Tom interrupts, asking about dinner. In an effort to impress Jim, she claims that Laura is in charge of supper and begins to glorify Laura. As Tom anticipates, she can't help entering herself into the conversation, mentioning her gentleman callers and her subsequent marriage to the absent Mr. Wingfield. It is critical to note that Amanda's tales of the past always end with the thought of her husband. She is not sincerely stuck in the past; rather, the charm of her memories is sufficient to temporarily—and only temporarily—deceive her. Scholar Benjamin Nelson points out that

while Amanda does cling to the past, —she clings just as desperately to the present. She is attempting to hold two worlds together and realizes that both are crumbling beneath her fingers.¶ (Nelson, 89) Catching herself, she apologizes and uses this as an opportunity to ask if Jim has any —tribulations¶ of his own. Before he can answer, Tom returns with the news that Laura is sick and cannot come to the table. Amanda demands that she come to the table and a faint Laura obediently appears, only to stumble to the table in near collapse. With the elements of nature mimicking the elements of the play, we hear the sound of thunder. Tom helps Laura back to the living room while Amanda suggests to Jim that her daughter is only sick from being in front of a hot stove for too long on a warm night. As if the façade can no longer be kept up, it begins to rain. Amanda, perhaps facing the reality of the situation, looks nervously at Jim. She insists that Tom say grace, and as he does, we see Laura lying on the sofa, holding back a —shuddering sob.¶ As noted previously, Scene Seven is the climax and the finale scene of the play. Accordingly, all hope rests in the actions of this scene. Williams punctuates this feeling with small details: the light is a warm rose color, the rain ceases, and the moon, the holder of the Wingfields' wishes, comes out from behind the clouds. The light, however, is artificial; coming from a new shade that Amanda has put on one of the lamps to hide its shabbiness and, as in Scene Five, this atmosphere quickly disintegrates. Since Tom didn't pay the electric bill, the lights have gone out. This draws attention to the disparity of the Wingfields' situation, but it also gives cause for a lighting change. Candles, typically associated with religious or romantic encounters, are lit. Amanda sends Tom off to do the dishes and asks Jim to check on Laura in the meantime. Elevating this act to ritual status, she gives him a candelabrum —that used to be on the altar at the Church of Heavenly Rest,¶ which burned down after being struck by lightning. The implications are not positive. She also gives him some wine to offer her. The action that follows is described as —the climax of her secret life.¶ Jim invites Laura to sit on the floor with him. He offers her wine and later, a piece of gum, which makes him think aloud about the success of the Wrigley Company. Jim can't contain his optimism, telling Laura that —the future will be in America, even more wonderful than the present time is.¶ Laura doesn't reply. After a kind smile from Jim, she regains herself, taking a stick of gum and starting a conversation. She asks if Jim has continued singing. Jim finally realizes that he has met Laura previously in high school; they shared a class together, to which Laura always arrived late. Not trying to hide or downplay her handicap, she confesses that it was because of her leg brace. While in Laura's mind the brace attracted attention with its loud clanking, Jim says that he hardly noticed and begins coaching her on how to gain self-confidence. He relates that all people have their own disappointments, even himself, who hoped he —would be further along¶

than he is. After some discussion about high school, Laura gathers the courage to ask about Emily Meisenbach, Jim's high school sweetheart and presumed fiancée. Jim calls her a —krauthead‖ saying that the announcement of their engagement was —propaganda.‖ Presumably unattached, Jim smiles at Laura and asks what she has been doing since high school. Williams says that this smile —lights her inwardly with altar candles.‖ The question, however, has made her nervous and she picks up a piece from her glass collection while considering how to answer. After further prodding from Jim, Laura confesses that she did take a business course but dropped out because of her nervous stomach. Now, she says, she spends her time taking care of her glass collection. She —turns away again, acutely shy.‖ Jim begins another speech about self-confidence, claiming that he was once lacking it too; as he said to Tom, he gained his confidence from public speaking. There is an implication that self-display in public can lead to confidence and a stronger sense of self, and the audience might consider it possible for the Wingfields to benefit accordingly from their own public display, Jim does not consider that the public can also be a venue for humiliation. In a pathetically humorous moment, Jim gloats, —Now I've never made a regular study of it, but I have a friend who says I can analyze people better than doctors that make a profession of it. I don't claim that to be necessarily true, but I can sure guess a person's psychology.‖ Making new symbolic use of glass, Jim glances —unconsciously‖ (and narcissistically) in the mirror. Jim continues on—he is studying radio engineering because of his faith in the future of television. He believes that he is getting in —on the ground floor.‖ —That's the cycle democracy is built on!‖ he says. The situation in America doesn't seem to have affected him the way it obviously affects the other characters, and Jim is able to retain his patriotic and optimistic opinion of America. He turns the conversation back to Laura, asking again about her interests. Laura explains that she keeps a glass collection— —tiny animals made out of glass.‖ Frank Durham explains that their significance lies in their symbolism. —Laura's glass animals, especially the unicorn, which is broken, symbolize the tenuousness of her hold on reality, the ease with which her illusion may be shattered. (Durham, 123) As the glass menagerie music resumes, Laura hands Jim a small glass unicorn. As if referring to herself, creating a link between herself and this creature, she says —Oh, be careful—if you breathe, it breaks! In the line of conversation that follows, the unicorn continues to stand in symbolically for Laura. Jim, responding appropriately, says he'd better not touch it then because he is clumsy. Laura, however, has already given him her trust and places it in his hand. She confesses that the unicorn is her favorite piece. Like Laura, the unicorn is not like other animals of the —modern world. Both are almost like others with the exception of a —small defect that keeps them apart. Jim says that the unicorn —must feel sort

of lonesome. Laura doesn't deny that this position as an outsider isn't lonely; rather, she says that—he doesn't complain about it. The unicorn stays on the shelf with creatures without this defect and as Laura says, —They seem to get along nicely together. Laura has also been able to get along satisfactorily among others. Jim places the unicorn on a nearby table. Noticing that it isn't raining anymore, he opens the fire-escape door. A waltz can be heard coming from the dance hall and Jim invites Laura to dance. Laura is so caught off-guard by the invitation that she can barely breathe. —I'm not made of glass, Jim assures her. In a romantic moment, Jim teaches Laura to dance, but as the two move around the room they seem out of synch. Williams describes their dance as a —clumsy waltz. Jim suddenly bumps into the table and the glass unicorn crashes to the floor. Having finally experienced a romantic encounter like other girls her age, Laura says —Now it is just like all the other horses. In her most bold act yet, Laura gives Jim a nickname, saying, —It's no tragedy, Freckles. The horn has been broken off and the removal of this defect makes Laura and the unicorn —feel less— freakish. As if charmed by the transformation in Laura, Jim tells Laura that she is beautiful. While the tone is still romantic, something seems amiss when Jim says, —I wish you were my sister. I'd teach you to have some confidence in yourself. Jim notes that —blue roses is an appropriate nickname for Laura since she is not like everyone else, but Laura recognizes that blue is not the correct color for a rose. The most climatic scene of the play ensues. —Somebody needs to build your confidence up and make you proud instead of shy and turning away and—blushing, he says. —Somebody ought to kiss you, Laura! He turns and kisses her. Jim immediately apologizes to a dazed Laura. Despite his previous pronouncement of his ability to determine a person's psychological situation, Jim has no idea what he has done. Jim tells Laura that Tom may have made a mistake in bringing him here to call on Laura. He continues, —I can't take down your number and say I'll phone. I can't call up next week and ask for a date. I thought I had better explain the situation in case you— misunderstood it and—I hurt your feelings... Laura begins to comprehend what has happened. Jim confesses that he is engaged to another girl. Since the elements of nature have aptly paralleled the states of the characters throughout, this element is now made internal, metaphorically—Laura is experiencing an —emotional storm. In an attempt to complete the triangle of the private, natural, and spiritual experience, thereby presenting its indivisibility, Williams says, —The holy candles on the altar of Laura's face have been snuffed out. As she opens her hand, we see that she is still holding the broken glass unicorn. With her innocence and her faith shattered, she no longer has need for the childish glass animal. She gives it to Jim as a —souvenir and returns to the Victrola. Amanda enters the room with juice and a plate of macaroons. She notices the expression on Laura's face but

doesn't comprehend what has happened. She says that she wants Jim to come over all of the time, but Jim says that he has to be going. Amanda assumes that he has to leave because of work, but Jim confesses that he is meeting Betty, the girl he goes steady with. —The Sky Falls appears on the screen. Amanda notes that Tom never said anything about his engagement and Jim explains that —the cat's not out of the bag at the warehouse In a final gesture representative of his inability to see beyond himself, he stops at the mirror on his way out. When Amanda turns from the door, Laura is at the Victrola again. It seems that things are left as they were and the visit hasn't brought about the happy transformation that Amanda had hoped for. Amanda is unable to believe that her son didn't know anything about the engagement; after all, Jim is supposed to be his best friend at the warehouse. Ironically, she accuses Tom of living in a dream and manufacturing illusions. This accusation is particularly interesting as it draws attention to the universal escapism that all of the Wingfields practice. The actions that ensue are unfortunately reminiscent of those of the first five scenes. Amanda and Tom argue and finally, Tom announces that he is leaving to go to the movies. In a final symbolic gesture, he —smashes his glass to the floor. While Jim has caused irreparable damage, it is implied that Tom is truly responsible for the shattered family's fate. He runs to the fire escape, again gripping the rail as if on a ship, a gestural indication of what is to come. Gilbert Debusscher suggests that —the short scene in which Tom leans on the railway may be a dramatic reconstruction of the last minute of the poet's life before he escaped, as Tom is planning to do, from a world that had become too oppressive to bear (Debusscher, 35), but we cannot be certain because this line of action comes to a halt here. Tom resumes his position as narrator and as he delivers his final monologue, the action is turned back over to Laura and Amanda who are inside together. Amanda is now said to exude —dignity and to possess a —tragic beauty. Their movements are again slow and —dancelike as Amanda comforts her daughter. She stops to look one more time at the picture of Mr. Wingfield. The audience is afforded with the unique opportunity of witnessing all three characters at once, one last time. —By typical use of his dramatic talents, Lester Beaurline says, —Williams makes the audience conscious of several characters' feelings at the same time, like a juggler keeping four balls in the air. (Beaurline, 50) Despite Williams's use of this technique, many critics have pointed out that the scenes with Laura and Amanda may be overemphasized. Benjamin Nelson says, —The story of Laura and Jim is simple and poignant, but it is neither the sole nor the central conflict in the play. Laura's personal dilemma is part of a greater dilemma: the destruction— slow and remorseless—of a family. Part of the trouble is that Tom's departure is revealed in a monologue rather than action on the set, since the departure of Tom has more to do with an emotional or existential journey



than a physical one. We do not actually see Tom leave, but indeed, he leaves and never returns. —I didn't go to the moon, he says. —I went much farther—for time is the longest distance between two places. Not long after that I was fired for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe-box. I left Saint Louis. I descended the steps of this fire escape for a last time. Benjamin Nelson notes that—in part, the play is his attempt to overcome his fears, but we are left with no assurance at the conclusion that he has succeeded. (Nelson, 91) Tom's decision to leave has made him like his father, and there are additional consequences. He is unable to forget about his family, specifically, about his sister, Laura. —Oh, Laura, Laura, he cries, —I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger—anything that can blow your candles out! Tom painfully recognizes that his sister is out of place in the world, —For nowadays the world is lit by lighting— tragedy, desperation, and war. The last image we see is Laura extinguishing the candles with her breath and finally, darkness. Tom's disregard for the empathetic experience, the most human of experiences, has left him fragmented and his family shattered. He has not, after all this, been made whole by his new freedom, but by the offering up of private experience, what Tom has lost, the audience has gained.

## **EDWARD ALBEE - WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?**

### **The Plot:**

Late one Saturday night, a husband and wife return to their home in a New England college town. George, is an associate professor of history; Martha, 52, is the daughter of the college president. They have been drinking heavily at a faculty party given by Martha's father, and as the two stumble around the living room and bicker, they seem like many other such couples after a long and alcoholic party. But this is a night in which tensions within their marriage will erupt and the patterns of their lives may be altered forever. To George's surprise, Martha announces that she has invited another couple to join them for a drink at 2 A.M.! Naturally combative, George and Martha use the invitation as another excuse to battle. The guests arrive. Nick, a new faculty member in the biology department, and his wife, Honey. He's good-looking and athletic; she's a sweet and seemingly superficial person. They quickly find themselves to be the audience for George and Martha's scalding war of words. As the evening progresses and the liquor flows, tensions that have been partially hidden emerge in the form of psychological games. Martha is disgusted with George's lack of ambition and failure to advance in the history department, particularly with his advantages as the son-in-law of the university president. She treats George with open contempt, and George tries to strike back by using his superior verbal skills. He has taken an immediate dislike to Nick, not only because Martha is obviously physically attracted to the younger man, but also because Nick is a biologist. As a historian, George sees biology as a science determined to eliminate man's individuality. Nick tries to stay detached from the turmoil between his hosts, but he soon gets caught up in it and reveals himself as ambitious and shallow. Honey seems too drunk and too mindless to comprehend much of what is going on. A turning point occurs when George discovers that Martha has mentioned a forbidden topic to Honey while the two women were out of the room. The taboo topic: George and Martha's son. The bitterness between the couple accelerates, and they persist in their battle of verbal abuse. As Act I ends, Martha has figuratively twisted a knife in George's back by harping on his supposed failure as a man and as a teacher. The fight dissolves into a shouting match and Honey is made physically ill by a combination of the quarreling and too much alcohol. As Act II of the play opens, George and Nick talk alone. George tells the story of a young boy who killed his mother and caused his father to die, a story that may or may not be autobiographical. Nick reveals that he married Honey when she thought she was pregnant, but that the pregnancy turned out to be a false alarm. George's attempts to warn Nick about being —dragged down by the quicksand of the

college fall on deaf ears. Nick has his eye set on the top, and one of his techniques for advancement will be to sleep with a few important faculty wives. Martha and Honey return, and the sexual attraction between Martha and Nick increases. They dance erotically with each other as Martha goads her husband by telling their guests of George's attempts to write a novel, whose plot concerns a boy responsible for his parents' deaths. Infuriated, George physically attacks Martha, stopping only when Nick intervenes. George seeks his revenge, not on Martha, but on the guests. He tells a —fable that mirrors Nick and Honey's early lives and her hysterical pregnancy. Humiliated, Honey flees the room. Enraged and out for blood, George and Martha declare —total war on each other. The first victory is Martha's, as she openly makes sexual advances to Nick but fails to make George lose his temper. Yet after she has led the younger man to the kitchen, where George can hear the sounds of their carousing, George makes a decision that will be his final act of revenge, one that will change his and Martha's lives forever: he decides to tell her that their son is dead. Act III finds Martha alone. Nick has proven himself impotent in their sexual encounter, and when he arrives again on the scene, she expresses contempt for him. She also reveals to him that George is the only man who has ever satisfied her. George appears at the front door, bearing flowers and announcing that there is one more game to play- —Bringing Up Baby. First, he induces Martha to talk about their son in the most loving and idealized terms; then, he announces the death of their son. Martha's furious reaction that George —cannot decide these things leads Nick to understand at last George and Martha's secret. Their son is a creation of their imagination, a fantasy child that they have carefully harbored as a means of helping them survive the pain of their failed lives. Nick and Honey leave, and George and Martha are alone, with just each other as shields against the world. Only the future will tell whether they have been strengthened or made even more vulnerable by the traumatic experiences of the evening.

**THEMES:** Here are some of the major and minor themes of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The themes often overlap and support one another in ways that make the play complex and richly textured.

## **MAJOR THEMES**

**1. TRUTH AND ILLUSION:** Both George and Martha state this theme explicitly in Act III, as the line between the real and the imaginary begins to blur, particularly for Martha. Their marriage, possibly their lives, has been held together by an illusion- the imaginary child that they have created together and that must now be —destroyed if they are to face reality.

Admitting this illusion to themselves and to Nick and Honey calls into question other things George and Martha say in the play. For example, did George really cause the death of his parents, or is this, too, a myth that has become real for them? Other elements underscore the theme: Honey's imaginary pregnancy; the shotgun that turns out to be a toy; the chimes accidentally struck, that George uses to herald the pretended arrival of the telegram. Throughout the play the characters use many devices to keep from facing the real world: alcohol, sex, and constant verbal assaults on one another. Also, the surface —truth of the characters masks their real selves; the characters are not what they seem. The brash and vulgar Martha is truly vulnerable, the one who may need the most protection from the real world. George, seemingly passive and dominated, is the one who finally takes control of his and Martha's lives. Nick, an apparent —stud, turns out to be impotent in bed with Martha. And Honey, the seemingly simple and ingenuous personality, has been deviously using birth control to prevent a pregnancy. This is the play's most important theme: that people today have been forced to create illusions for themselves because reality has become too difficult and too painful to face. What examples do you see of the need for illusion in your own life or in the lives of those around you?

**2. THE INABILITY TO COMMUNICATE:** The characters are constantly, but unsuccessfully, attempting to communicate on a deeper level with each other. Martha and George trade competitive insults and verbal cruelties until the last scene, when they finally achieve some sense of mutual understanding. Yet their attempts to communicate seem more genuine than those of Nick and Honey, who seem to know each other only superficially and who deliberately deceive each other—Nick with his adulterous act with Martha, and Honey with her secret use of birth control. The usual social communication is parodied throughout the play through the use of trite remarks and common phrases that suggest the emptiness of language. Early in the play, George seems determined to confuse Nick with wordplay, rapid shifts of subject, and deliberate obtuseness. Violence as a form of communication is demonstrated through the tale of George and Martha's boxing match, his fake rifle, and the physical scuffles between George and Martha. Psychological violence as a form of communication is evidenced by George and Martha's repeated attempts to humiliate each other, and by George's decision to —get the guests.¶ In this media age, the word communication is heard often. Is Martha and George's problem in truly reaching each other a universal problem? In what ways do you see the problem affecting those around you?

**3. SEX (STERILITY AND IMPOTENCE)** Sex is a strong motif in the play. Martha is a sexually aggressive —earth mother, who presumably seduced the gardener at her boarding school and also —attacked a Greek artist. George even accuses her of having tried to molest their imaginary son. And Martha's seduction of Nick during the play is probably one of many such escapades. There is a great deal of sexual innuendo among the four characters. Honey, Nick, and Martha all seem to be sexual —users. Honey may have used a false pregnancy to get Nick to marry her. Nick hints of plans to sleep with important faculty wives to get ahead at the college. Martha uses sex with others to get even with George, whom she blames for her unhappiness. However, sex in the play represents barrenness and impotence. George and Martha's child is imaginary, Honey's pregnancy was false and she fears childbirth, and Nick can't satisfy Martha, the most important faculty wife. Even the name of the town, New Carthage, suggests the ancient civilization destroyed by Rome and sown with salt to prevent fertile growth. In the world of this play, sex is neither a comfort nor a source of growth.

**4. GAMES AND GAMESMANSHIP:** Games, both literal and figurative, abound in the play. Several are mentioned explicitly: humiliate the host, hump the hostess, get the guest, bringing up baby. There are also abundant references to games, rules, toys, winners and losers. George and Martha are constantly playing games, matching wits, seeking the upper hand. And the scenes between George and Nick have been compared to a chess match, with each player seeking the advantage over the other. The ultimate game in the play is George and Martha's child, an invention of their imagination that must be destroyed now that Martha has broken the rules by mentioning him. The child is a game that is deadly serious. When the game is over, the future of George and Martha is in question.

**5. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS:** The couples in the play can be seen as representative of modern relationships based on deception and sterility, and the picture of the play presents of marriage is bleak. George and Martha face off in a —battle of the sexes that is an age-old theme in plays, from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, to Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, and to Noel Coward's *Private Lives*. But unlike many such plays, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* shows characters who are out for blood. George and Martha hide their need for each other with ferocious assaults on one another. Their names suggest the —first couple, George and Martha Washington, a grim joke that underscores the corruption of the American ideal. But their fierce battling may be seen as preferable to the

shallowness that marks the relationship between Nick and Honey. The family relationships referred to in the play are hollow and sad: Martha and her father, George and the parents he might have killed, Honey and her father, and George and Martha's —child. Sterility is evidenced by the play's use of imaginary and would-be children: George and Martha's fictitious boy and the pregnancies that Honey has deviously avoided. As an ironic twist, Albee has peppered the play with allusions to —baby: George and Martha use the term as a dubious endearment; they also use coy baby talk; Honey becomes a baby, curled on the bathroom floor in the fetal position as a sign of her inability to grow up. Some readers, however, see the play's depiction of George and Martha in a more optimistic light. They interpret the play as the story of one couple's desperate attempt to salvage, rather than destroy, a relationship. After the evening's emotional turmoil, notably the —death of the child, George and Martha have cleared up some of the matters impeding the relationship, and they may be able to function better as a couple in the future.

## **MINOR THEMES**

### **1. DEATH AND MURDER**

The theme of death pervades the play. George and Martha's son is killed symbolically by exorcism (as George reads from the mass for the dead). George himself may have murdered his mother and caused his father's death. Threats to kill and accusations of murder occur several times in the play. 2. **RELIGION** References to God and Jesus (often used as swear words) are frequent, forming an almost subconscious thematic element. Other religious references are more apparent. Martha declares herself an atheist. The second act title —Walpurgisnacht, refers to a pagan ritual. The third act title, —The Exorcism, is taken from the Catholic rite of driving out demons. George recites the Dies Irae, the mass for the dead, as Martha is forced to accept the death of their son. Some readers feel that Albee used the name —Nick, part of an old term for the devil (—Old Nick) to suggest that it is Nick's presence that brings chaos to George and Martha's lives. Others see significance in the fact that the play takes place very early on a Sunday morning, a day of holiness for Christians. Does this abundance of religious symbols and allusions suggest a possibility of redemption for George and Martha? Some say yes. Others suggest that there is no hope for them, and that Albee is pointing a finger at the failure of modern religion to supply answers to the problems of people today.

**3. HISTORY VS. SCIENCE:** George is a history professor; Nick teaches biology. George's work concerns the endless variety of human motivation and endeavor, while Nick's work-

according to George- will result in the —perfect man, a creation with no need for art, philosophy, diversity, or real pleasure. Since Albee gives the eloquent speeches to George, it has been suggested that Albee is using George's character to condemn science for many of the ills of mankind.

**4. AMERICAN VALUES:** Albee painstakingly dissects the —American dream in many of his plays; he even gave one of his early one-act plays that title. In *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* he attacks many of the values that traditionally comprise that dream: marriage, children, success, wealth, education, religion, and so on. He claims each of these values to be empty, resulting in loveless and sterile marriages, failed careers, ill-gotten wealth, squandered education, powerless or corrupt religion. With these values so decayed, Albee seems to be saying, the country is a barren wasteland, where people must imagine another reality in order to compensate for what is missing. In *Virginia Woolf*, Albee has painted a bleak and unflattering portrait of a country whose ideals have degenerated so fully that they can be portrayed by a desperate, sad, and seemingly hopeless couple.

## STYLE

Soon after *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* opened on Broadway, Harold Clurman, a noted theater critic, wrote the following about Albee's dialogue: —It is superbly virile and pliant; it also sounds. It is not 'realistic' dialogue, but a highly literate and full-bodied distillation of common American speech. Clurman is not alone in his admiration for Albee's dialogue. Even those who found the play's themes too unsettling or the subject matter unsavory had high praise for his skill as a playwright. His sharp and incisive dialogue is only one of the elements that make Albee's style both recognizable and memorable. Here are some others:

**HUMOR:** For all of the play's savagery and bleak outlook, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is often very funny, George and Martha are so verbally skillful that their exchanges often make you laugh at the same time you feel the pain they inflict. Examples of Albee's humor come in several categories:

**WIT:** As an example (there are many)- George responds to Martha when she has changed into a revealing outfit: —Why, Martha... your Sunday chapel dress!

**FARCE:** George appears with the shotgun that —explodes into a colored parasol. Also, George opens the door to their guests as Martha screams —Screw you!

**INSULT HUMOR:** George and Martha are expert at pointed bitchery. Their insults are accurate, deadly, yet often hilarious. (Martha to George: —If you existed I'd divorce you.)

**BLACK HUMOR:** Albee's ability to evoke laughs out of the darkest of situations is one of his hallmarks. Black humor (an influence of the Theater of the Absurd) is used throughout the play, from the —games that turn out to be psychological torture to the description of Martha's father as a white mouse who nibbled the warts of his second wife. There are those who feel that the whole notion of the imaginary child is an elaborate —sick joke'.

**CRUDE HUMOR:** A great many laughs result from Albee's use of —foul language: —up yours, —screw you, —angel tits, etc. Not only does this language stand in contrast to the educated diction George and Martha occasionally use, but it demonstrates the low level their battles have reached. **CLICHES AND JARGON** Absurdist writers often reveal the uselessness of language to communicate by creating dialogue that is filled with cliches and empty phrases. Albee's characters use a great many slang terms and cliches, but usually with an awareness of their emptiness. Phrases like —never mix, never worry, —down the hatch, —the little bugger, —quite a guy, —the little woman, and so on, are used ironically, often with a cutting edge.

## **REPETITION AND PARALLELISM**

The dialogue of the play has a great rhythmic feel. Listen for the way Albee repeats words or phrases within speeches or dialogue exchanges to create a variety of rhythms. This technique is used frequently throughout the play, but, for example, read the exchange in Act I when Martha first tells George that she has invited guests. Or review the section of Martha's opening monologue in Act III where she talks of crying all the time. Or examine the repetition of —Yes|| in the last moments of the play. For parallelism, look at Martha's beautiful speech in Act III that begins, —George who is out somewhere there in the dark...|| These techniques are often used so subtly that you might not notice them, but they give the play an extraordinary unity and sense of movement. There are those who feel that Albee has carefully planned every word, even the —"Ohs" and —Unhhunhs. Finally, be aware of the wide range of language Albee uses. Each character has his or her own style. George usually speaks clearly, often elegantly. Nick is characterized by his off-hand macho cockiness. Honey's speeches tend to trail off or are filled with prudish inanities. Martha is perhaps the most interesting of them all. Her dialogue moves from the swearing, foulmouthed cries of a fishwife to the melodic sound of a tender, silver-tongued poet when she speaks of her son. The range of language encompassed by this one character alone marks Albee as an abundantly gifted writer.



**ALLUSIONS:** George and Martha's education allows Albee to use a great many allusions in their speeches- literary, historic, and religious. References to Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, the Punic Wars, the Lamb of God, the Catholic mass, and others make the play a rich tapestry of ideas. Notice that Albee rarely, if ever, uses an allusion without making it work for the characters or the theme. Such allusions add complexity to the work and invite several readings in order to fully appreciate the play.

**SYMBOLISM:** Although *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is not as heavily symbolic as some of Albee's other plays, it does use extensive symbolism as part of its literary structure. Some readers see the play as an allegory (a work in which the characters symbolize concepts or ideas). For them, George represents the past (specifically, American ideals of the past); Nick, the threatening future (perhaps Communism); Martha, the primitive and pagan instinct; and Honey (the emotionally unstable daughter of a preacher), the failure of religion. Yet there are others who feel that such a reading asks the play to carry more weight than it can bear. It is widely thought, however, that George and Martha symbolize the American couple on one level and the failure of the American dream on a higher level. The imaginary child may symbolize not only the spiritual sterility of the modern age, but the illusion that man creates in order to survive the horrors of life. Nick and Honey represent the future in this scheme, a future full of self-interest, deception, and more sterility. Other more minor symbols are used: the fake gun that suggests George's impotence; the bottle whose label Honey peels off that suggests the —peeling away of the characters' defenses; the story of the boxing match that suggests the power structure of George and Martha's marriage; and so on. Albee's later plays (such as *Tiny Alice* and *The Lady from Dubuque*) are often criticized for being top-heavy with symbolism, more symbol than play. But in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* he never seems to lose sight of the human dilemma that lies at the play's core.

**FORM:** The three-act structure of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is unusual in an era when most plays are written in two acts. It's not certain what drew Albee to this form; and it may be that the length and intensity of the play demanded that audiences be allowed two respites from the action instead of one. Whatever the reason, the three acts divide the play neatly into three segments, each of which has its own climactic point. (See the accompanying diagram, next page.) It is also uncommon for a playwright to name his acts, but Albee's choices provide important clues as to what goes on in each of them. Notice that all the acts are named after

rituals. Act I is called —Fun and Games, a name that is an ironic twist on a common phrase for party activity. The games that go on in this act (and the others) are scarcely fun. They are games of psychological torment and hostility, with dangerous repercussions for all concerned. The outcome of the games is not revealed until the last two acts.

Act II, —Walpurgisnacht, is named after the evening in German legend when witches gather to commune in wicked deeds and sexual orgies. It's in this act that the battle between George and Martha festers to the point of total war, that Nick is revealed as a ruthless cad, and that the sexual attraction between Nick and Martha grows close to the point of physical union.

### **THE THREE ACT STRUCTURE ACT I**

**A. EXPOSITION:** The characters are introduced, and tensions among them are revealed.

**B. RISING ACTION:** The tensions increase as Martha continues to humiliate George, George acts condescendingly toward Nick, and the flirtation between Martha and Nick continues.

**C.** The tension snaps as Martha's verbal assaults make George lose his temper, and the accompanying turmoil sends Honey from the room to vomit.

### **ACT II**

**D.** After a short lull in the action as George and Nick talk about their wives and jobs, the energy level increases again as George and Martha continue to square off. Martha punishes George even further by talking about his unpublished novel. He retaliates by attacking her, then proceeds to —get the guests by exposing their secrets.

**E. CLIMAX:** Goaded by Martha's sexual excursion with Nick, George hatches a plan to —kill their imaginary son.

### **ACT III**

**F.** After Martha expresses her disappointment with Nick's sexual performance, and Nick's role has turned from male sex symbol to houseboy, George reenters and urges Martha to talk about their son.

**G. FALLING ACTION:** Delivering a shattering blow to Martha, George announces the death of their imaginary son.

**H. DENOUEMENT OR CONCLUSION:** Martha and George are left alone to face the future, uncertain of their existence together without their fantasy son.

## ARTHUR MILLER – ‘DEATH OF A SALESMAN’

Capitalist America in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*: A Re-consideration It would be a task well beyond the scope of the present piece to consider at length whether Arthur Miller is or is not against capitalism. While it is true that he has never openly praised it, he has neither, with the possible exception of his early Michigan plays, completely condemned it. Adhering to the popular view that Miller was always a declared enemy of capitalism would amount to affirming that he never moved beyond his youthful flirtation with Marxism, and he certainly did, his insight gaining in complexity and losing in Manichaeism over the years. He ended up feeling about it as he does about nearly everything else, that, as a human creation, it can be good or bad, depending on who, where, how, and when. *Death of a Salesman* is a good example of such ambivalence. Devastating though capitalism might seem for Willy Loman or his family, capitalism has given Charley and Bernard, two good men from Willy's same background, neighborhood, and social class, considerable happiness, which they well deserve even though they are, in Willy's terminology, simply —liked instead of —well liked (33). If a writer wishes to condemn a given system, he does not usually care to show examples of nice, decent people living quite contentedly within that system. We would like to demonstrate in this essay that although Willy Loman seems destroyed by capitalism, in reality he is not. To do that, we will consider the case of those two characters, Charley and Bernard—as well as that of Howard Wagner. We will examine how these characters fare within the same capitalistic system that destroys Willy Loman in order to better show that people can live and be happy within it and that, using again Willy Loman's words, in the system, —some people accomplish something (15). In passing, we will also try to expose the real causes of Willy's destruction, only to further show that capitalism is not among them. We do not mean that capitalism contains no serious blemishes, that it is undeserving of criticism, or that Miller himself neglects to criticize certain aspects of it, even in such a play as *Death of a Salesman*. The point is, simply, that capitalism's police record does not include the murder of Willy Loman. While it is true that the young Miller, while a student at Michigan, felt considerable hostility towards capitalism and seemed convinced that an alternative existed, in the form of Marxism, a very attractive ideology for many young Americans in the 1930s, the more mature playwright who managed to make his mark on Broadway with *All My Sons* and many plays thereafter had already moved away from that early standpoint and was no longer a political pamphleteer: capitalism was neither the absolute villain nor was Marxism that much of a savior, either. Any reading of his insightful theoretical work immediately suggests that he accepts or is resigned to capitalism as the best

or least detrimental system devised so far by humankind to regulate social and economic relations. Even in *All My Sons*, Joe Keller is scolded not for owning a factory but for being a selfish factory owner who failed to realize until it was too late that all those whose lives were being jeopardized by his fraudulent business practices were also his sons. This is already the Miller who tells us what is wrong with capitalism but who does not tell us all that is wrong with it, who argues in a word that a more ethical capitalism is possible, naïve as some cynics would believe such a position to be. For Miller, moneymaking is perfectly ethical (even as part of that vague —pursuit of happiness<sup>11</sup> Americans were said by their Declaration of Independence to be entitled to), but risking human lives for it is certainly not. There is nothing wrong with being a salesman, but old salesmen should have some kind of future to look forward to when they get too old to go on selling. Howard tells Willy that the salesman needs a rest (83), which is true, but perhaps Howard's firm should pay for this rest because it is working for such a firm that has exhausted Willy. Old salesmen certainly should not have their salary taken away and be left strictly on commission, or even have to go home —carrying two large sample cases,<sup>12</sup> as we see Willy doing, with considerable difficulty, at the outset of the play (12). We could also detect a complaint of mass production of poor quality items in the following speech by Willy: Once in my life I would like to own something outright before it's broken! I'm always in a race with the junkyard! I just finished paying for the car and it's on its last legs. The refrigerator consumes belts like a goddam maniac. They time those things. They time them so when you finally paid for them, they're used up. (73) Although Miller complains about some facets of capitalism, it does not necessarily signify that he preaches its overthrow. Miller, for instance, suggests that Charley, unlike Willy, operates successfully within the capitalist system. Charley's most distinctive feature is that he operates within the hegemonic economic system, while, paradoxically, not being obsessed either with capitalism or with the myth of the American Dream. In the Introduction to *The Collected Plays*, Charley is explicitly described by Miller both as —a capitalist<sup>13</sup> and as —the most decent man in *Death of a Salesman*<sup>14</sup> (37). In many respects, Charley functions as Willy's double because—despite the physical proximity of their houses—these two men embody radically opposite approaches not only to moneymaking but to life in general. The antagonism that exists between them is made explicit several times in the text, such as when in one of his frequent attacks against his father, Biff compares him to Charley in a negative way; this remark brings about the immediate reaction of Happy and, especially, Linda, who angrily reminds Biff that his father is Willy Loman and not Charley, and that he has to put up with that fact, whether he likes it or not. As the events in the play suggest, had Charley been the head of the Loman household, such a

heated family argument would probably not have taken place. The relationship between Charley and Willy is presented throughout the play as more of a confrontation than a real friendship. Miller creates an underlying feeling of rivalry and even competition between the two neighbors, which is symbolically enacted in the card games they play—a device Tennessee Williams had successfully used two years before in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It seems hardly coincidental that the first time Charley appears on stage is when he comes to Willy's house one night to play cards, so that from the very beginning their relationship is based on competition. Realizing that Charley is a more successful businessman and father, Willy resorts to insulting his manhood, castigating his neighbor for being unable to construct a ceiling. It is also worth recalling that already in that first game Willy seems to be cheating, thus reproducing his behavior in everyday life because he normally lies and distorts reality to suit his needs. His conduct during the card game echoes not only his conduct in life but also the behavior he has deeply inculcated in his two sons, ever since they started stealing at an early age with their father's support. At one point, Willy even advises Biff to cheat on his exams, thus encouraging him to break that most elemental ethical rule in the U.S. educational system: the so-called —honor code.¶ During the card game, Willy becomes very upset with Charley and starts insulting him repeatedly, calling him —ignorant¶ (42) and an —[i]gnoramus!¶ (47) with no justification whatsoever and when the insults should actually point in the opposite direction. Willy even questions his neighbor's manhood with a rude statement no guest ever deserves, least of all kind Charley: —A man who can't handle tools is not a man. You're disgusting¶ (44). Willy brags about his talent as a builder yet fails to realize that one will fail in the capitalist system if one chooses the wrong profession, such as choosing sales over carpentry. Willy chooses manual work as the weapon to humiliate Charley because he knows that it is one of the few areas in which he clearly outdoes his neighbor and because he feels upset after failing, unlike Charley, at the capitalist system. Throughout the play, Willy suffers from a latent feeling of inferiority and envy regarding Charley, whose existence is portrayed by Miller as balanced and harmonious (perhaps too much). The realistic Charley is well aware that Willy's inferiority complex has complicated their relationship; at the end of their last conversation—and once Willy has rejected his job offer— Charley insists that his neighbor has always been jealous of him, a fact that Willy will not acknowledge, of course. In fact, in one of his few open and honest conversations with Linda, Willy even admits that Charley is a respected person, implying by juxtaposition that he himself is not. In the highly consumerist society depicted in the play, there is probably no better manifestation of the envy Willy feels than when he bitterly complains to Linda that Charley's refrigerator has been working fine for twenty years, while

theirs keeps breaking down, even though it is rather new and still being paid for on credit. This commodity from everyday life metaphorically points at the existential gap that separates both neighbors: while everything in Charley's life seems to be running smoothly, nothing in Willy's life is working any more; everything has broken down and badly needs repairing. While Charley is at ease with the capitalist society in which he lives, Willy cannot manage to find a comfortable place in it. In *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*, Christopher Bigsby offers what must arguably be the most negative interpretation of the character of Charley, describing him as bland, limited, and prosaic.<sup>8</sup> This critique seems a rather severe view of an individual who is repeatedly represented by Miller as extremely patient and generous with members of the Loman family. Charley's behavior is the most evident proof in *Death of a Salesman* that capitalists do not necessarily have to be insensitive or dehumanized human beings. Although Charley functions well in the capitalistic system, despite his evident success, he has not lost his capacity to feel, help, and sympathize with those who have not succeeded in it. Like Bernard does during his encounter with Willy in his father's office, Charley shatters the illusions about success when speaking to an incredulous Willy, admitting that the only key to his achievements is that he never took —any interest (96) in them, that is, he never built his entire life around them, like Willy unfortunately has. —[A] man of few words (37), according to Willy's own formulation, the everpragmatic Charley is never possessed either by the pomposity or by the empty rhetoric that Willy has imposed on his family over the years. Charley makes a crucial contribution to the financial stability of the Loman household, giving Willy fifty dollars a week, but, in spite of that, there is never the slightest trace of arrogance in the way he treats his neighbors, and he hardly mentions that favor, not even when Willy insults him while they play cards. Later on, he even offers a job to Willy, who rejects it immediately, not only because of pride or envy but also in an effort to retain his dignity and his self-respect. As a result of all of this evidence, Thomas E. Porter refutes Bigsby's negative assessment when he defines Charley in Biblical terms as —the good Samaritan (37). In fact, one of Willy's scattered moments of lucidity occurs at the end of the scene in Charley's office when, soon after having rejected the job offer, he tearfully bares his soul to make a painful confession: —Charley, you're the only friend I got. Isn't that a remarkable thing? (98). Rather remarkably for Willy Loman, this statement is painfully accurate because in the entire play no reference is ever made to any other friends of his; his loneliness is complete, for he is totally isolated in the middle of all those towering buildings that surround his little house and has been on the road as a solitary figure while engaged in the Wagner company enterprise. Therefore, one of the functions of his mental conversations with Ben could be to mitigate his profound solitude. A —remarkable thing (98)

is that this heartfelt confession—which serves to fully humanize Willy—involves the very last words Willy tells Charley in the play, for they never see each other any more after the office encounter. Thus, Willy's confession is a farewell by means of which he wants Charley to know that to the Lomans, he has been a wonderful neighbor and a true friend, so Willy wishes to acknowledge that in person before taking his life. The next time Charley appears on stage is at the Requiem, when the fact that he and Bernard are the only people accompanying the Lomans to the cemetery proves that Willy is totally right for once—Charley is his —only friend (98). It is probably as his —only friend that Charley tries to justify Willy's life—and to stop Biff's attack on his dead father—uttering the much-debated —Nobody dast blame this man (138). While it is true that the argument that —a salesman is got to dream (138) seemingly contradicts his previous views on the subject, Charley's last words extend his role as Willy's benefactor until the very end of the play. However, if there is a scene in which Charley seems to mistreat his friend, apparently thus cracking the aura of excellence with which Miller has arguably endowed him, it is probably when he mocks Willy before Biff's crucial Ebbets Field game. But, if on the one hand, it could be argued that he is playing with Willy's illusions in a rather insensitive and even cruel way, on the other hand, it could be said that this ever-pragmatic neighbor minimizes the importance of what, after all, is nothing but a mere sports game for teenagers. If, as it has been suggested regarding his different attitudes toward money and capitalism, Charley functions in many respects as Willy's antagonist, he can also be perceived as the counterpart to two other male characters in the play: Ben Loman and Howard Wagner. At a basic discursive level, the link between Ben and Charley requires no further explanation. There is widespread critical agreement that Willy's brother stands for a —ruthless capitalism (Porter 30) that follows no ethical rules and knows no boundaries, as the scene of the fight with Biff reveals: Ben sums up the credo of hardcore capitalism in Darwinian terms: —Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way (49). It is impossible to picture Charley uttering these words or fighting that way—in fact, even fighting at all; he personifies the possibility of a kinder and nobler form of capitalism, in which personal success is not necessarily attained at the expense of others. Miller makes the connection between Ben and Charley explicit at a structural level; the first time in the play that Willy brings his brother to mind is during the card game with his neighbor, so that in his troubled mind, both men are unconsciously related, most likely as opposite versions of economic success. Willy maintains a simultaneous conversation with both men, which Charley cannot follow, and Willy even confuses the two: —That's funny. For a second there you reminded me of my brother Ben (45). However, soon afterwards, with his repeated insults, Willy forces

Charley to leave the house, symbolically rejecting the honest values his neighbor stands for and embracing the amoral code of Ben, with whom he can now talk without any further disturbances. Furthermore, Charley also stands in opposition to the character of Howard Wagner because they represent two opposing versions of doing business within the capitalist system. The scene in Charley's office (when Willy rejects the job) clearly lessens the negative effect generated by the meeting at Howard's office, which has just taken place, given that these two similar scenes are only separated by Willy's recollection of the day of the Ebbets Field game. If, as it will be later argued, Howard's conduct epitomizes rather cold and impersonal business ethics, Charley, with his kindness and generosity, proves that there exists the possibility of a humane and sensitive way of handling business. Just as Matthew Roudané persuasively argues that —Biff and Happy are flawed extensions of Willy and Linda, the genetic lineage carried on with devastating efficiency and symmetry‖ (69), Bernard can also be regarded as the logical extension of his father's values. Even though, as a lawyer, he does not strictly represent capitalism, throughout the play his attitude and his work ethic clearly function as a corrective against the excesses of the Lomans. Bernard is closer to the myth of the American Dream that so much preoccupies Willy than to the world of business, and he probably embodies the ideal of social success more than any other character in *Death of a Salesman*. In his first appearance, a stage direction describes him in unequivocally positive terms as —earnest and loyall (32), as his serious concern about Biff's failing Mr. Birnbaum's exam clearly shows. Significantly, his first words in the play are about studying, that is, industry and sacrifice, two values that seem to mean little to Biff. He, on the contrary, focuses exclusively on sports, with his father's passionate support. Meanwhile, the detail of Bernard's wearing glasses singles him out among the three boys as the studious type, more inclined to intellectual than to physical endeavors. Miller sets up from the start an opposition between Bernard and Biff, who, at one point, literally asks his neighbor to box with him, thus setting up a symbolic confrontation like the one enacted by their respective fathers playing cards. Despite his constant and sincere warnings about Biff's exams, thefts, and driving without a license, Bernard is systematically mocked and even insulted by the Lomans, especially by Willy, who in front of his sons refers to him as —anemic‖ (32), —a pest‖ (33), and —a worm‖ (40), which is similar to how he verbally abuses Bernard's father. Like the other boys in the neighborhood, young Bernard feels great admiration for the local sports hero: Bernard's admiration becomes manifest when he rushes to the Loman house before the Ebbets Field game, and, instead of the helmet, as he supposedly had been —promised‖ (87), he is —grandly‖ (88) allowed by a pompous Biff to carry the shoulder pads.<sup>14</sup> Evidently, young Bernard's interest in this game



stands in sharp contrast to the mocking indifference of his own father. Ironically, in the very next scene, Willy is painfully forced to realize how wrong he has been in both his simplistic credo of being —wellliked (97) as the key to social success and his expectations about Bernard's future, given that Charley's boy has become a respected lawyer, one of the several —figures associated with the law (that, as Christopher Bigsby points out, are so recurrent in Miller's plays (240)). It is undeniable that witnessing the extent of Bernard's professional triumph makes Biff's and Happy's failures more painfully obvious to Willy, thus contributing to his movement toward self-annihilation. Moreover, Bernard has also triumphed at a personal level, at least according to normative social expectations, because he is married and has two sons (like Willy Loman and so many of Miller's protagonists), while both Biff and Happy have turned into lonely outcasts unable to establish any sort of emotional and long-term relationships. This realization must also be quite painful for Willy, who previously had expressed to Linda his desire to be a grandfather in a brief comment about the future of their house: —Some stranger'll come along, move in, and that's that. If only Biff would take this house, and raise a family . . . (74). Still described in a stage direction as —earnest (32), implying that—as opposed to the Loman brothers—his maturation has been a more normal one and that essentially he remains the same person he once was, Bernard is no longer submissive because he has equally evolved into a —self-assured young man (90, emphasis added). Despite his personal and professional success, he remains a nice and friendly individual who treats Willy with kindness and who—rather unbelievably, perhaps—shows no rancor whatsoever toward the Lomans (Porter 38), although he probably has not forgotten all the abuse and ridicule he had to take from them as a boy. Furthermore, he is still interested in Biff, and the several questions he asks Willy prove that after so many years, he is sincerely concerned about the fate of his old friend. With a character such as Bernard—as opposed to Howard—Miller suggests that it was indeed possible to attain success in a postwar American capitalistic economy while remaining an honest human being who was deeply concerned about the lives of those less fortunate. It is, in fact, Bernard who reveals to an eager Willy that there is no real secret to success, although he also adds that Biff —never trained himself for anything (92), implying that in a highly competitive system such as capitalism, being popular or lucky does not amount to much when unaccompanied by sacrifice and hard work. Despite his professional achievements, Bernard remains humble; for instance, in his conversation with Willy, he omits the impressive fact that he will travel to Washington, D.C. to present a case before the Supreme Court, unarguably the highest reward to which any American lawyer can aspire; he even humbly protests when his father proudly brings up the subject. When Willy expresses his

surprise that Bernard has declined to say anything about his forthcoming case before the Supreme Court, Charley's reply functions as a simple but irrefutable rebuttal to all of the boasting and pomposity that characterizes life in the Loman household: —He don't have to—he's gonna do it! (95). At the same time, Bernard's modesty is also used by Miller to magnify the pitiful nonsense that initiates this conversation between the neighbors: Willy is still lying about Biff's supposedly brilliant and promising job opportunities. But it is neither through Charley nor Bernard that Arthur Miller offers his crudest view of capitalism; Howard Wagner stands in marked contrast to them as the only scene in which he appears forcefully demonstrates. It is Howard who utters in *Death of a Salesman* the ultimate credo of capitalism, a tautological statement that requires no further explanation: —business is business! (80); with these words he lets Willy know that, whenever economic interests are at stake, no other considerations should be taken into account. As a young man of 36, Howard belongs to a new generation that embodies an innovative way of doing business, the dawn of a new economic era after the Second World War in which the United States was soon to emerge as a world superpower. In this new age, there is hardly time to waste with empty sentimental expressions or with personal relations because profits must be obtained at any cost. According to Bigsby, —Howard's values are those of business. He is a man for whom time is money, who has no time for the man who served the company for most of his life and has little time left! (133–134). That is why Howard is blind or indifferent to Willy's increasing despair during the interview, given that —the impersonal business world no longer has any room for personality! (Porter 34–35). If one is to believe Willy's words, when Howard's father ran the company, affairs were not conducted in such a cold and impersonal fashion, but in the new postwar society, —Willy's memories no longer mean anything to his employer! (Bigsby 115); Howard shows no regrets whatsoever in firing an old man who entered the company at about the same time he himself was born thirty-six years ago. In Howard's new business ethics, Willy's desperate attempt to recall his friendship with Frank Wagner is doomed to fail. No wonder Willy looks back with nostalgia to that golden age when business supposedly had a different outlook: —In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance for bringing friendship to bear! (81). Willy has turned into a relic of a way of salesmanship long gone, and consequently, he must be discarded immediately, even though he is already sixty-three years old and about to retire, a personal fact that the new capitalist ethics no longer deems relevant. In his anger, Willy finds the courage—and the lucidity—to make a remark that might well function as Arthur Miller's rebuttal to the principle that —business is business! (80): —You

can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit!! (82). These words—which bear an echo of the youthful idealism of the 1930s—are a plea to treat employees as human beings and not as commodities or as mere figures in a monthly company chart. From the very beginning of their encounter, Howard shows far more interest in his new technological toy—his superb tape recorder—than in the troubled human being who is desperately trying to communicate with him in person. Again, this is a sign of a new era and a new way of doing business, when increasingly sophisticated electronic devices start doing the work of employees and render them less essential. Echoing the dismissive way that Linda is normally treated by her husband, Howard repeatedly interrupts Willy or openly tells him to shut up so that the recorder can be heard. Howard is more concerned with listening to absent voices uttering nonsense than to a present voice begging for help and understanding. At the same time, the fact that he can be so moved by listening to the taped voices of his children further complicates the character of Howard,<sup>20</sup> who is not simply depicted by Miller as a brutally dehumanized individual; at the same time, however, the fact that he can get so emotional about his own family also serves to underscore his lack of sensitivity when dealing with a desperate old man such as Willy. One final detail which also differentiates Howard from both Charley and Bernard is that—as Bernard Dukore points out—Willy's employer is not present at the funeral (29). This absence serves as the very last piece of evidence in the play that under the new form of capitalist activity endorsed by the young Howard Wagner, the personal and the professional have no relation whatsoever. Beyond the attack on such a selfish attitude as Howard Wagner's, the most powerful statement on capitalism contained in *Death of a Salesman* concerns the vast alienation that the capitalist machinery requires in order to run smoothly. We must deceive ourselves, should not think too much, and, above all, should make do with an image of ourselves that is not completely of our own making but rather that has been impressed (or forced) upon us and is therefore slightly distorted in most cases. We must also tell ourselves that we need the very things that others need to sell us. This does not cause much trouble for most individuals. Sometimes we realize that we do not need all of the things we nevertheless buy. Most of us realize that advertising does not exactly brim with truths, but we still listen to it and act on its —advice. In other words, we are alienated and part of a show of deceit that goes on all around us, but most of us can live with that and are even able to see things for what they are worth. Charley and Bernard belong to this group of people. There is, however, another way to cope with capitalism: to reject it altogether (at least to the extent that a rejection is possible) and find alternative ways to reach happiness. That is exactly what Biff and probably Happy as well would have done if only their father had not been so successful

(probably the only thing at which Willy has been successful) in convincing them that there is nothing outside, that one may not be happy if one does not abide by the terms dictated by the capitalist society engulfing them all. Concerning such alienation as living in the capitalist world implies, there are often individuals who are incapable of telling the false from the real. Willy actually has internalized the image of the successful follower of the American Dream, and, though from time to time he seems to see some truths, however dimly, he mostly tries to stay as far from them as possible. He cannot conceive of the idea that well-advertised machines might be worse than poorly-advertised ones, even though he himself is in the sales profession. He has internalized all of the notions with which America has always advertised itself and has accepted them, yet Biff, in the Requiem, accusingly points to them as —[a]ll, all, wrong! (138). Willy never questions an America that has never been, for him, the land of success. But, sadly enough, Willy has not merely become alienated but has significantly infected his sons with his alienation. Biff, for whom, in spite of it all, nothing is —more inspiring or—beautiful than the sight of a mare and a new colt! (22), can envisage happiness outside the mainstream of a business-oriented America and has actually headed west in search of it. But, on account of Willy's frantic insistence that this cannot be, Biff is ridden by a sense of frustration that he is not likely to have reached by himself. The point in all of this is, however, that Willy's attitude is by no means common within capitalism. Concerning Charley, Willy's counterpart in *Death of a Salesman*, Miller has stated in his Introduction to his *Collected Plays* that the crucial difference between both men —is that Charley is not a fanatic. Equally, however, he has learned how to live without that frenzy, that ecstasy of spirit which Willy chases to his end! (37). Charley would be a better representation of man under capitalism than Willy is, not because of his successful career but because of his more detached way of assessing the reality that surrounds him. We now want to examine the foundations of Willy's hyperbolic degree of alienation that makes him such a rare specimen. In our view, Willy is so alienated because he has needed to counterbalance his rebellious strains toward a simple, more pioneer-like kind of life. In other words, he probably once had Biff's same inclinations but then told himself so often that he should not have them that he ends up becoming a mere caricature of what a salesman or a businessman under capitalism actually is. He has been so afraid of falling short of the mark that he has gone too far beyond it, and his alienation is such that he can no longer find a way to get rid of it. He has so frantically and repeatedly told himself that American business is great, afraid as he is of those other leanings within himself, that he now lacks the small distance necessary to live within the system and not be swallowed by it. Of the rebellious impulses that Willy tries to keep at bay by transforming into a fanatic of capitalist America, we

have examples from the very beginning of the play, such as when he claims to have been on the brink of a fatal accident because he has decided to look at the natural scenery. Oddly enough, for a salesman who should stick to the pursuit of gain, Willy has never been a conventional salesman. Willy is passionate about manual work (evidenced by his efforts to keep his home in decent condition), open-air living, and a self-reliant life in which one produces what one needs without needing to buy or sell. Such passion does not seem to fit the lifestyle he has chosen and will thus exact a toll that Willy will pay by the end of the drama. The unusual inclinations evinced by his remark to his wife, —But it's so beautiful up there, Linda, the trees are so thick, and the sun is warm. I opened the windshield and just let the warm air bathe over me, are counterbalanced by Willy's immediately sobering up into more appropriate salesman's talk: —I'm the New England man. I'm vital in New England (14). This pattern of alternative rebellion and its suppression continues throughout the play. That has been in all likelihood the most usual manner in Willy Loman's vital course. With each new lapse into his old ideals and leanings, Willy's embrace of a capitalist ethos has been fiercer and fiercer, the old Willy more and more chastised, with the protagonist living a life that is little more than posturing. Every fleeting reappearance of his old self only serves to make Willy a more wildly alienated man. Although *Death of a Salesman*, after a superficial or cursory reading, would indeed look like a savage indictment of the system that victimizes Willy Loman, the more one thinks about it, the less plausible does that initial reading seem granted by the text. It is true that in a way, the system swallows Willy Loman, as the sharp focus on the apartments surrounding the Lomans' place, symbolizing the modern world, seems to suggest, but the system is not to blame for it. Willy is on the brink of ruin. He is, moreover, exhausted but cannot take a day off because he cannot afford it, besieged by bills that have to be paid. But it is not capitalism that has placed him there but rather the fact, put simply, that he is a bad salesman. We do not mean to suggest that he is the kind of salesman that the new postwar American business world needed. Those critics who hold this position seem to imply that at least according to the standards of the old business practices, Willy would be a good one. But he would not. Even in the old days, he did not sell much; as Linda explains to Happy, in those old days, which were considerably less selfish, —the old buyers . . . always found some order to hand him in a pinch (57), which does not present Willy as a first-rate salesman but rather as a man who fared just well enough (often out of a certain pity on the part of customers) to get along. One of the passages most often quoted by those who believe that the play serves as an indictment of capitalism is the following: I'm talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see—I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't

pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away— a man is not a piece of fruit! . . . Now pay attention. Your father—in 1928 I had a big year. I averaged a hundred and seventy dollars a week in commissions. (82) But the statement that follows, Howard's response, has often been overlooked: —Now, Willy, you never averaged— . . .! (82), a statement interrupted by Willy, who does not want to be told how things truly happened. Willy's reaction clearly reinforces the view that he is not a down-on-hisluck salesman but rather a man who never sold as much as he should have, not even in the old days when things were different and he was younger. Both threads, that Willy suffers from an extreme form of alienation and that he is not a good salesman, coalesce at this point. He is a bad salesman in part because he must successfully convince himself that he is a salesman, even though his talents lie elsewhere. The occasional intrusions of Willy's old self show that he has never fully embraced his job with the conviction of someone such as Dave Singleman. Otherwise, he would not say to Ben, shamefacedly: —No, Ben, I don't want you to think . . . It's Brooklyn, I know, but we hunt too . . . there's snakes and rabbits . . . Biff can fell any one of those trees in no time! . . . We're gonna rebuild the entire front stoop right now! Watch this, Ben!! (50). Unlike Singleman, Willy is a salesman who mocks those in the professional world who are truly intent on selling or on success because they (Charley and Bernard) —can't hammer a nail!! (51) between the two of them. Actually, for Biff, there is more of Willy in the front stoop, which he had made with his own hands, —than in all the sales he ever made! (138). Willy feels ashamed of his choices but actually dreams of being something else, albeit never very clear what exactly, whether he is thinking of becoming a travelling salesman who constructs his own products, as his father had apparently been, or a more self-reliant shark like his brother Ben, or simply an independent farmer out in the West. But whatever the dream is—and Willy is not much help in clarifying it for us—he lacks the courage or the naïveté to pursue it. It is also unclear whether the accomplishment of such a dream would make Willy happy. Be that as it may, he has a divided personality, feeling, as he himself confesses to Ben, —kind of temporary about myself! (51), a salesman who dreams of the rewards of successful salesmanship while having serious doubts as to whether he has chosen the right job; he is a dreamer who does not dare to follow his dream, probably envisaging that such a dream would not have made him happy either. Willy is at two places at the same time, but he is at none of them in reality, certainly not in the dream but not completely in the reality that he has chosen either. And in view of such a thing, it seems reasonable to conclude that if Willy had gone to the West, he would have wondered if he would have been better off staying in New York. Willy's divided mind seems to have been inherited by his two sons, as the following dialogue betrays: HAPPY:

Wait! We form two basketball teams, see? Two water-polo teams. We play each other. It's a million dollars' worth of publicity. Two brothers, see? The Loman Brothers. Displays in the Royal Palms—all the hotels. And banners over the ring and the basketball court: —Loman Brothers.¶ Baby, we could sell sporting goods! WILLY: That is a one-million-dollar idea! LINDA: Marvelous! BIFF: I'm in great shape as far as that's concerned. HAPPY: And the beauty of it is, Biff, it wouldn't be like a business. We'd be out playin' ball again . . . And you wouldn't get fed up with it, Biff. It'd be the family again. There'd be the old honor, and comradeship, and if you wanted to go off for a swim or somethin'—well, you'd do it! (63–64)

Once they have finally settled down to talking business, they become enthusiastic over the idea that it would not be like business at all! The Lomans can never talk business in earnest because inadvertently the other —sidell creeps into their talk: freedom and open air. But compromise is not possible in this kind of world, and either one is completely in it or completely out of it; one cannot be in the world of business and every now and then take a day off to go swimming. When Act One is about to finish and the Lomans are excited over the prospect of Biff finally finding his path in business, Willy's last sentence is, —Gee, look at the moon moving between the buildings!¶ (69). It is a striking combination of the happiness over their prospects of success in business and the other impulse toward nature that will prevent such prospects from ever materializing. It is such a natural inclination that has prevented and will continue to prevent Biff from making headway in business; as he tells Willy when they have their final encounter at home: I ran down eleven flights with a pen in my hand today. And suddenly I stopped, you hear me? And in the middle of that office building, do you hear this? I stopped in the middle of that building and I saw—the sky. I saw the things that I love in this world. The work and the food and time to sit and smoke. And I looked at the pen and said to myself, what the hell am I grabbing this for? Why am I trying to become what I don't want to be? What am I doing in an office, making a contemptuous, begging fool of myself, when all I want is out there, waiting for me the minute I say I know who I am! (132) Curiously enough, Act Two, in which the characters feel great enthusiasm over Biff's future in business, initiates with Willy's announcement of his intention to buy seeds on his way back home that afternoon and to start a farm! It seems that as soon as the Lomans believe that they can achieve success in business, they are all ready to return guiltlessly to the farm that they have never actually owned to begin with. It could be argued that all of the above, while explaining Willy's frustration, does not explain his demise. In a different society, with labor organized along different lines, a frustrated Willy would at least have been able to look forward to a future in which he and his wife could be free from starvation by a decent pension (whether from the state or otherwise). That would

have relieved him of the duty to fight on until the very last of his days, which the play shows us. But even with the hope of a future pension, let us not forget that Willy commits suicide to set his son on the right track. Biff is, besides the salesman's lack of skill in his profession, Willy's other major problem, tormented as the father is by his inability to get along with his beloved son. Actually, Willy does not get along well with Happy, either, but this strained relationship does not seem to trouble him so much because, as seems obvious, he has always envisaged great possibilities only for Biff but has been simultaneously afraid, consciously or not, that he thwarted them all by the unfortunate episode in the Boston hotel. Again, Willy here shows a divided mind, blaming himself for his son's failure<sup>26</sup> yet fighting hard against assuming such blame, which explains why he has never apologized to his son or talked to him in earnest about the embarrassing encounter. Willy's insecurity in this sense proves fatal. If he had not felt guilty at all or afraid of discovering in Biff the very rebellious impulses he has so earnestly endeavored to fight in himself, he would probably not have demanded Biff's complete success. In a way, his son's success would dispel Willy's guilt, which is why he is so obsessed with Biff attaining it; then the relationship with his son would not have been so difficult. If he had felt guilty but had confronted his remorse, he would have tried to make his peace with Biff, and the latter would have probably agreed to it. But again, Willy's divided consciousness wins the day. Toward the end of the play, after his emotional final talk with Biff, Willy seems convinced that the Boston episode is not responsible for his son's subsequent failures; yet he then kills himself because he still holds himself responsible for them and tries to make it all up to his beloved son. After pocketing the money of his insurance policy—assuming that the company will agree to pay—Biff will surely start his long delayed social rise, the only thing that, in Willy's poor assessment of his son's personality, can bring him happiness. Capitalism has been proven free of guilt in Willy's destruction, even if it could be responsible for part of the frustration that Willy experiences. Even after losing his job, Willy could have accepted the job that Charley (thanks to the rewards he has obtained from capitalism) has repeatedly offered him. Willy, through Charley, may receive from capitalism what another capitalist, Howard, has deprived him of, so the same capitalism that seems to have brought his downfall would strike a clean balance and rescue him. And the fact that Willy Loman finally kills himself (a death that the very title of the play invites us to think about) for his son and not for his mortgage is one that Miller emphasizes at the end of the play when Linda stresses that they are finally—free and clear<sup>l</sup> (139). Miller thus absolves that most telling characteristic of the tokens of capitalism: mortgages and the high cost of owning property. Willy's conflict with his son can be ultimately traced, through a sinuous path, to the



impossibility of being at two places at the same time, living a life and wishing all along to have lived another one. As Bernard tells Willy at one point, —sometimes, Willy, it's better for a man just to walk away (95). When Willy asks, —But if you can't walk away? Bernard concludes: —I guess that's when it's tough (95). Despite the invitation to suicide that Willy appears to detect in Bernard's words, what is tough and might drive him to death is when he cannot walk away from a certain kind of life, yet he cannot stay contentedly in it either.

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**UNIT – IV– AMERICAN LITERATURE– SHSA5102**

**AMERICAN LITERATURE – SHSA5102**  
**Course Materials**

**UNIT IV – FICTION**

**Detail:** Ernest Hemingway – *The Old Man and the Sea*

**Non-Detail:** Ralph Ellison – *Invisible Man*

Saul Bellow – *Seize the Day*

**ERNEST HEMINGWAY – ‘THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA’**

The Old Man and the Sea was started and more than half-finished during the visit of Adriana Ivancich and her mother with the Hemingways in Cuba in late 1950 and early 1951. Making his own life imitate his art, not unlike the impotence he produced after *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway was delighted to fancy he generated a remarkable rebirth of creative energy from Adriana’s presence. He started the novel just after Christmas and completed it on February 23, though he still had to revise to achieve its full “implicaciones.” It was his fastest stretch of writing on a major book: eight weeks. As Baker details the history of composition, the author first perceived this novel as part three of his long novel. When another section was written immediately after, he changed this part three to part four, envisioning it as a coda to the earlier sections. But more than a year later he decided to pull it from the big book and publish it by itself. Many circumstances had pushed him glacially to this decision: the intense enthusiasm of those who read it, Leland Hayward’s urging of a one-issue publication in *Life* magazine, perhaps a desire to “show” critics and reviewers with a book more powerful, less vulnerable, and easier to understand than *Across the River and Into the Trees*. But doubtless his best reason was his deep perception that the coda was so much better than the rest of the novel that it had to stand alone. In early 1952, he informed Scribner’s of his decision and the long publishing process began. As part of the tetralogy, the novella had been called “The Sea in Being”; a phrase that Hemingway and Charles Scribner used casually to describe it in letters became its final, famous title. No other novel brought Hemingway such instant acclaim from both reviewers and formalistic critics, as well as bringing—at last—Pulitzer and Nobel prizes. The rest of the long novel, finally *Islands in the Stream*, scarcely impinges upon this severed portion; almost all insights it brings to *The Old Man and the Sea* illuminate only the chronicle of composition. Yet contrarily, the shorter book powerfully illuminates the one that it left and so reduced, and *Islands in the Stream* is immeasurably strengthened when viewed in the perspective of its lost, best part. That part has been seen as a paradigm of the human experience;

in it, certainly, are compounded and transmuted its author's deepest psychic ordeals and triumphs. The friend had seen an old Cuban fisherman beating sharks off a big fish tied alongside his skiff. His weapon was the oar of the boat. Immediately on publication, it was perceived that the book was layered with meanings beside the naturalistic, which was itself an overpowering universal. In attendant reviews and essays in books, Baker, Breit, Schorer, and Young considered all of the cardinal interpretations. These were the naturalistic tragedy, the Christian tragedy, the parable of art and artist, and even the autobiographical mode. Baker saw the realistic and Christian tragedies as almost inseparable and the dominating aspect of the book; he pointed also to the art-artist and autobiographical strands. Young felt that the triumph of the work was the triumph of classical tragedy and saw it as the ultimate fusing of Hemingway's personality and art; he too saw the art-artist implication and the autobiographical elements as closely linked and noted the Christian symbology. Breit was most impressed with the universality of the realistic tragedy, and Schorer with the work as a drama of the artistic struggle, a struggle by no means confined to the author. Most subsequent criticism, and it has been voluminous, has proceeded essentially from those lines set down so immediately. However, the possibility that the novel is a deliberately constructed, three-tiered (and possibly four-tiered) fable perhaps should be considered. The view here is that the naturalistic, the Christian, and the art-artist modes are all constructed carefully enough to stand alone, yet are so tightly laminated that no joining shows, and that the autobiographical is intuitive. Together these are, in final aspect, an unbroken unity. And the commitment to fable that Hemingway exhibited in *Across the River and Into the Trees* is consequently even more in evidence here. Yet the first level, the naturalistic, is not a fable at all, and its realistic strength enhances and is enhanced by the fabulistic narratives. It is tragedy, the most complex Hemingway has written, and all the fables built upon it are equally tragic and are tragedy cast in that same design. For it intersects many species and variations of tragedy, the Aristotelian being only one. These include: (1) the tragedy of the fatal flaw of hubris, in the sense of overreaching (Aristotle); (2) the tragedy of fatally conflicting imperatives or states of being (Hegel); (3) the tragedy of the fateful choice (HeilmanBradley); (4) the special case of Aristotelian tragedy in which fatal flaw and supreme virtue are the same. As always, the different conceptions finally merge into a unity. The novella is much less weighted toward the concept that dominated the earliest novels—that man is reasonlessly punished by a hostile universe. Santiago acknowledges himself as the author of his own ruin: he knows that he has tried to go beyond the limits of human possibility in making his choices and obeying his imperative, and he knows that he must be punished for it. His over punishment is one of the eternals of tragedy. His serene

acknowledgment of his responsibility inevitably recalls that of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, and though there is no evidence whatever to suggest the play as even a minor source, another vital resemblance exists. Santiago is first encountered after the fall, and sometime after; he is not only in a cast-down state but an accursed one. No longer champion, eighty-four days without a fish, he is “salao”—the worst kind of unlucky. His beginning in these depths makes his rise to the pinnacle of taking the fish more thrilling, the catastrophe of its loss more heartrending—and his victory of spirit inside and after that catastrophe more life-enlarging and transcendent. The tragic action that starts in those depths clusters about certain dominant elements. These may be seen as (1) the magnitude and implicitly ordained quality of the struggle, (2) the heroism of the protagonist in that struggle, (3) the power of the forces arrayed against him and the inevitability of catastrophe once those forces are set in maximum motion, (4) the unalterable operation of a great and harmonious order. Fate as a presence is always powerfully felt, but Santiago is never displaced as the generator of his own tragedy. In the Hemingway sonata-allegro conflict of key areas, his will is home key, and all that drives against him is the opposing key. In the necessarily rough parallel between novel and sonata-allegro, the magnitude of Santiago’s struggle, its fated quality, and the sense of order that invests it serve as a rich, dense harmony between his heroic resolve and the forces arrayed against it. Intimations of all these tragic elements appear in early passages, before the collision of keys. The power of the enemy is evoked in lines that set forth Santiago’s continuing undeserved punishment. He has gone eighty-four days without a fish, but there is a careful comparing to forty days in a fishless desert, a clear link to the Eucharistic fable, and his patched sail seems the “banner of permanent defeat.” His is old and has old scars, and he is a failure in the eyes of his fellow fishermen; he has no food until the little boy begs some for him. But immediately posed against these manifestos of cosmic hostility are those of his own heroism: his sea-blue eyes are “cheerful and undefeated” (2); he maintains a ritual of dignity against his poverty and hunger; he insists he is still strong enough for a huge fish. When the old man says with prophetic confidence that the greatest fish come in September, he is forecasting both magnitude (the size of the fish) and order (September: life’s autumn: a time of harvest). The old man himself has perceived the working of order almost from the outset. He does not complain or indulge in even secret self-pity about his eighty-four days without a fish; he remembers that he has gone eighty-seven empty days once before. Both numbers are crucial to the Christian interpretation, but he simply feels such vacancies are part of a great cosmic cycle. When he wakes and prepares to go to sea, he follows a ritual that is his private order; he joins the larger order of community in carrying his mast to the harbor in the progress of all the fishermen, then

rowing to sea to the accompaniment of the oars of his fellows. Now he is entering the largest order, the order of the sea and of the universe and the novel clearly advances it as divine order. Yet already Santiago intuits he will transgress that order: he knows he is “going far out” (13). The hooking of the fish is not only the first climax of the composition: it is a passage of definition, an objective correlative, and it has a complex, if compact, unity. The keys come to full collision for the first time. They pound each other in an almost regular alternation, and in the repeated shocks many of the tragic conceptions of the work are urgently set forth. The old man’s “yes, yes” as he feels the fish take the hook at a great depth is the signal that it has happened: the anticipated has become the reality. He has found the fish by his knowledge of the order in which he lives. He has steered intuitively by the birds and fish he sees; among the lines he has conscientiously put out at varying depths, he has been sure that one goes very deep, and that it is skillfully baited on a strong hook. And he is always aware, in his reflections, that he is “far out” (13, 21), that he is pushing the margins of that order. The awe he feels at the weight and strength of the fish is the first undisguised declaration of the magnitude of the action, a magnitude made even larger by the first major reversal of the work—the fish’s taking command of the skiff and commencing to tow it. In the old man’s soliloquy, he makes clear that he and the fish are incarnations of different states of being, that each is noble, and that each is dominated by a single imperative of existence. It is equally clear that the old man has made the choice that sets the tragic action in motion. He reiterates that it has been his decision to go far out; to overreach, but an equally strong, if implicit, choice is his automatic and unspoken decision not to cut the line. “His choice had been to stay in the deep dark water far out beyond all snares and treacheries. My choice was to go there to find him beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world. Now we are joined together and have been since noon. And no one to help either one of us. Perhaps I should not have been a fisherman, he thought. But that was the thing I was born for” (26). Thus the Aristotelian hubris of overreaching, the Hegelian war of imperatives, the fateful choice of Heilman and Bradley are all openly in operation. So are the ideas of magnitude and order, and strongly suggested is the idea of fate, not impossibly preordination. Now the battle of the keys has been fully joined, and for a time the fish is to be the dominant voice in the opposing key: it is the old man’s will and strength against his. After the fish is taken, however, he will be in effect transposed to home key, and the conflict will then be between the fused nobility of the man and the fish against all the destructive forces that attempt to negate their now shared achievement. From this point, the key battle maintains a steady intensity, rising imperceptibly, sometimes striking minor climaxes, always developing the conceptions now revealed. The motifs of magnitude-orderimperative resolve-ordeal make

a densely textured pattern in the conflict, one in which they cannot be cleanly separated from one another. Yet an arbitrary and approximate division may be useful. Santiago knows his ordeal has begun the moment the fish demonstrates that he, not Santiago, is in control: a continuing element in Santiago's heroism is his knowledge that he is up against a force far more powerful than himself, and his attendant resolution to fight it anyway, and to the death—his own or his adversary's—"I do not care who kills who" (31). But pain by pain his sufferings mount, and they bring the naturalistic tragedy ever closer to the Christian fable: the agony of his back braced against the line (in the New Testament reference Jesus' back against the cross); the easing of the contact with a burlap sack (the cloak or robe); the raw rim his straw hat makes on his forehead under the scorching sun (the crown of thorns); the bleeding hands (the nail wounds); the forcing of his face into the raw dolphin (an act of communion); his hunger and thirst and the need to eat and drink to keep sufficient strength. But he is always aware that the fish is suffering, too, that the fish is weakening from hunger, that the fish is as heroic as himself. In the ordeal he suffers and knows the fish is suffering, he sees them as fated brothers, as heroes foreordained to fight: in the Christian fable, they will emerge as twin Christ. But the entire battle remains a demonstration that the old man knows that both the fish and himself are fulfilling their imperatives with absolute fidelity. Not only is his determination to prevail constantly affirmed: so is his growing love for the fish, and an almost mystic desire to identify, to become one with him. Thus Hegelian imperatives indeed clash as external physical entities, but they have now also taken shape inside Santiago's mind as opposing components. They're of a somewhat different shape, however, as Santiago's love for the fish struggles sadly with his determination to achieve it by the death triumph. The issue is never in doubt, but it thrusts upon Santiago a whole new complex of emotions. He is sorry for the fish even as his resolve to kill him remains steady. Because of the fish's "behavior and great dignity" (41), no one is good enough to eat him. But Santiago's fateful choices have been made, and he stays with them. The magnitude of the struggle—dimly foreseen at the outset, exploding into shape when the fish strikes and takes command of the boat—is constantly expanding. Aristotle's "action of a certain magnitude" has been triumphantly established; the old man's daring in going out so far and winning will emerge more and more clearly as Aristotle's fatal flaw after the killing of the fish; his violation of the ordained order then is to receive its inescapable punishment. One of the beauties of the book is that steady unfolding of the order, image by image: each thing has its place in a giant symbiosis—sometimes kind, often cruel, but decreed and immutable. One by one, before the joining, Santiago has encountered its manifestations: flying fish, birds, dolphins, in their interrelationships; the Portuguese man of war, a poisonous

intimation of evil; the comic turtles with their usefulness; the schools of fish in movement. Santiago notes lovingly that they are in their proper place, so to speak—even as he is proceeding to go beyond his own place. When he is being towed by the fish, having transgressed, the harshness that is part of the order is illuminated by the little bird that rests briefly on the taut line, before it proceeds landward to encounter the predatory hawks and likely its death. The episode of the two marlin fixes not only that harshness, but seems deliberately presented as a compaction of the universal fate. In retrospect, Santiago catches and butchers the female marlin “as quickly and as kindly as possible” (27), while her mate refuses to leave the area of the boat. His commitment and fidelity, like Frederic Henry’s, has brought him in the end grief and loss: the universal catastrophe, says the author, comes to all living beings. It, too, is part of the order, and the order is clearly established as the governor of the world well before Santiago comes to the killing of the fish. Order’s most intense compaction may be the stars. Santiago looks at them three times to be sure of where he is, to reassure himself of the unchangeability of things, and, finally, to identify himself in a close kinship with them, “the stars that are my brothers” (92). Inevitably, the appearance of the stars at the end of each of the three parts of *The Divine Comedy* asserts itself; though there is nothing in this work proper to support the deliberate parallel, there is an abundance of evidence in the parent novel, *Islands in the Stream*, where Dantean references are heavy. So the stars here do seem invocations of Dante, and as Dantean manifests of eternal, even divine order, they are not accidental. The first part of the battle of imperatives ends in the killing. In that drama, the power of those commitments, the intensity of ordeal for man and fish, the magnitude of fish and event reach their greatest intensification and become most awesome when the fish jumps high out of the water as the harpoon is killing him. Both the jump and the first rush of blood are decisive incidents in the Christian fable, but they add a less explicit mystery to and thus increase the magnitude of the naturalistic tragedy; so does the circumstance of the marlin circling the boat three times, after the third sunrise, before he succumbs and takes the spear. The fish has been a tragic protagonist, too, though an observed one, in its own Hegelian drama, and it is reasonable to consider that this secondary tragedy has had its catastrophe in the death of the fish: it has lost its fight for life. Yet the fish is to suffer mutilation even after death, and it may be equally reasonable to conclude that this mutilation is the final phase of its catastrophe and so coincides with the prolonged catastrophe of Santiago. At that point, Santiago is viewing himself and his catch as one. The dying leap of the fish has underlined the highest point in Santiago’s quest and struggle: here, he has apparently won the war of imperatives and achieved the fish. It seems for a moment that he has indeed won. But he fears he has not; knowing his



violation, he already has forebodings of approaching nemesis: "If sharks come, god pity him and me" (37). The sharks do come. Now he and the fish are to be their co victims: the fish has been transposed to home key, at last in complete unity with Santiago, and the dominating image, or phrase, in the opposing key has become the sharks. In the design of one species of tragedy, they are nemesis; the old man's violation of order has called them up in an obvious and inevitable stream of causation. If he had not gone further to sea than his proper limits, he would not have caught a fish big enough to tow him to sea for three days; if the fish were not so big, he could have put it, butchered, inside the boat and kept it safe from sharks; if it were not big enough to pull him to sea for three days, the sharks would not have had time and space to destroy it completely. The end was in the beginning, when he first went "too far out"; the stream of blood that went a mile into the ocean and drew the shark was simply a step in an inexorable process more than well advanced. All this is the ultimate implication of the sentence, "The (first) shark was not an accident" (56). He is not: he is an inescapable part of both natural and tragic orders. Santiago's suffering up to this point has not yet been catastrophic in this perspective; it has been, rather, a great ordeal that he must and does withstand to achieve a triumph on that same material plane. With the coming of the first shark, his true catastrophe begins in the naturalistic mode of the story— in the Christian fable, it is hard not to consider that he has completed one cycle of crucifixion and is beginning another. Even as he is battling them with mythic courage, he reflects often on his violation, his going "out too far," and is aware that this retribution is part of the order and ultimately just. He knows his fight is lost from the start; he strikes at the sharks "with resolution and complete malignancy" but with little hope. Yet even without hope, he is defining himself by the force of his struggle against catastrophe: he is not, like Jake, simply enduring bravely and gracefully. He is fighting back with all his personal resources, and his battle is the more heroic, and the more defining, because he knows it is lost from the start. Two incidents join catastrophe to crucifixion beyond doubt: when he sees approaching sharks, he makes a sound "as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood" (60). And having broken knife and oar and striking with his unshipped tiller—the number three again—he feels something "break" in his chest and he spits out blood to mix with water, just as the blood from the fish so mixed. When the fish is devoured and destroyed, except for the head, the catastrophe is done and reconciliation may begin. Santiago pronounces not only his understanding but his acceptance of what has happened to him when he acknowledges, "You violated your luck when you went out too far" (66). In spite of the great over punishment it has inflicted on him, Santiago accepts the order whole and still pronounces it good. "The wind is our friend anyway, he thought. Then

he added, sometimes. And the great sea with our friends and our enemies. And bed. It is easy when you are beaten, he thought. I never knew how easy it was. And what beat you, he thought. „Nothing“ he said aloud. „I went out too far“ ” (68). He has reflected, too, that many will worry about him, that he lives in a “good town” (65). When he sees and then enters the glow of Havana—a more decisive event in the Christian fable, where he is entering blessedness—he is entering, here, reconciliation and acceptance. The fish itself is destroyed, but nothing can destroy his heroic action in having taken it and endured so much with it. The greatness of this triumph is underlined by the shift to the point of view of the little boy, who understands all, the measuring of the skeleton by the other fishermen, the conversation with the boy. Both the physical finality of the destruction and the ineradicable triumph of his act are possibly intimated in his final trip up the hill with his mast, his cross, in which he falls seven times. He looks back from the hill and sees by the street light the great tail and the head of the fish “with all the nakedness between” (68). He has won the triumph of the spirit in the deed itself, though its physical substance has been destroyed. That triumph is both clarified and intensified by his plans to go out again with the boy, using renewed parts of scrapped machines as tools. He has risen from physical defeat to transcendence: we know he will always go out again as long as his body obeys him. He has already defined the core of himself and provided us with one variant of the theme of the tragedy in his pronouncement, “A man may be destroyed but not defeated” (58)—that well-known Hemingway double-dicho that means almost the same if it is reversed. And he has attained the final crown of the tragic hero: awareness. The whole theme of the literal tragedy, as well as each of the other modes, is concentrated into a double final image: the skeleton of the fish, waiting to go out on the tide with the other garbage, and, shortly afterwards, the old man’s dream of lions, the last line in the book. The first, so like the image of man’s coffin and bull’s ear in *The Sun Also Rises*, objectifies once more the impermanence of all physical beings and states. The second, the lions, suggests that deeds once done are fixed forever in memory, and not impossibly, somehow in time. They are man’s only real monument against defeat, and death. The most visible fable beneath the naturalistic tragedy of the book is the Christian fable, and it seems so much a part of the first that division may be a violence. It, too, is unambiguously tragic, and it is so in the face of a continuing cogent argument that Christian tragedy is impossible. However, the novel as Christian tragedy is a complex vision, and those who come to it are apt to give it final shape for themselves. The links between Santiago and Christ—literal events and things made symbolic representations of events and things in the New Testament—are as profuse as they are unmistakable. They have been deeply explored, and each reading is apt to discover new, quite real, and obviously

intended correspondences. At this point, it might be enough to accept that Santiago is established as a parallel of Christ, whatever else he might be, and go on from there. A less crudely perceived function of Santiago is that he plays a double representational role. As well as Christ figure, he is also in the elaborate fable a follower of Christ, an acolyte. He is aspirant to the priesthood, to an earned communion with the Eucharist, and finally to a species of Christhood himself. These two roles— that of functioning Christ and of man aspiring to spiritual Christhood— ultimately fuse. As Christ figure, he repeats the ordeal of the Crucifixion; as acolyte, he invokes the apparatus and ceremony of the Catholic church in the same order, culminating with the rite of priestly ordination. Each Santiago is indispensable to the other in the final equation of meaning. He becomes at last both human and divine, and tragic in both roles in his spiritual victory over crushing physical disaster. At the end, indeed, he stands as a figure of all men, his experience the universal human experience at its highest. This view of the double identity of Santiago may be one of two compatible explanations as to why he completed parallel periods of trial. The first is an eighty-seven-day span without a catch, mentioned as having taken place at an earlier time; the second is his present eighty-four-day stretch of similar bad luck. The eighty-seven-day period may be the sum of Jesus’ forty days in the desert, the forty days of Lent, and the seven days of Holy Week. The second, eighty-four-day period needs the three days of Crucifixion to match the first: Santiago as acolyte must pass the three-day test of his “crucifixion” to become the peer of Santiago as Christ. A simpler and yet completely complementary view is that the two long periods present the view of life as an ordeal that eternally repeats itself. Less numerous than the linking of Santiago to his role as Christ, the situations that identify him as acolyte are nonetheless convincing. It is widely noted that his name is Spanish for St. James—a disciple. He eats raw fish several times; communion acts a man would perform. He invokes “the great di Maggio” (6, 37) as a man would invoke a saint. As disciple, he eats food that he himself has divided— possibly but not certainly a simultaneous appearance in both roles. When the big fish pulls him down in the skiff so his face is buried in the flesh of a raw, small fish, he is performing both an act of communion, eating a representation of the Body, and the preliminary obeisance of the priest at ordination. The washing of his hands in the ocean is like the washing of the ordinate’s hands with holy water so they may be fit to administer the sacrament. The climax and culmination of the development of Santiago as ordinate is focused when he lies collapsed and prone on the bed covered with newspapers, arms “out straight and the palms of his hands up” (69). The author carefully avoids saying whether they are stretched forward in the manner of the priest at ordination, or to the side in the crucifixion posture. The ambiguity must be

deliberate and it points to the simultaneity of both positions: of Christ and tested priest. There is another Christ figure in the fable—the great fish—and his symbolic identity is developed equally systematically if less fully. He and Santiago become twin Christs, and Santiago makes increasingly more of their oneness. At the end his body becomes the Host, the Eucharist, the physical substance of the faith itself. When Santiago as acolyte brings him in and later eats his flesh, he has achieved the Host by ordeal and by persevering in an ever-strengthening faith. Thus Santiago as acolyte and the fish as Eucharist have merged. Santiago and the fish as twin Christs have merged in the consummation of the fish's death and joining to the skiff. Both Santiagos merge, certainly no later than the simultaneous image of crucifixion and ordination at the end. And the three identities have merged and inevitably become the Trinity, though the relationship between the parts is suggestive rather than precise. It would seem that Santiago in part of his identity is Father and, in the other part, Son. The fish is the Holy Spirit. Other interpretations are at least equally feasible. One of the most important ideas in the story is that life is cyclical—and that the cycle is one of unending crucifixion ordeals. It is hard not to be convinced that two cycles of crucifixion are completed by Santiago between the time he catches the fish and when he walks back up the hill with the mast. The first seems to end when the line—the cross—is removed from his back, after he takes the fish and has the mystical moment of seeing him rise in the air, followed by the more prosaic one of bringing him alongside. But when he sees the sharks, he makes the kind of sound a man might make “feeling the nail go through his hands and into wood” (60)—a crucifixion beginning. Yet the cross already had been on his back almost three days before it was removed. The ordeal of the sharks has to be another crucifixion, one that ends when Santiago spits out blood and it mixes with water. Here his bleeding matches the fish's bleeding into the water from the harpoon wound he has inflicted, and the gush of blood and water from Jesus' side when the soldier's lance pierces it. His acknowledgment of termination—that he is “finished” (68)—equates with Jesus' “It is accomplished,” though necessarily reversing chronology with the spear thrust. Two crucifixions. But how many more? Certainly the fish has undergone one, completely documented symbolically right up through his ascension—the great leap in the air. But Santiago's long dry spell before he hooks the fish, the significant eighty-four fishless days and his attendant humiliation, may reasonably be seen as something of one. It has, incontestably, been a trial and an ordeal for him though not a match for the three days. And when he starts up the hill on his return, carrying his mast again, the implication is powerful that he is beginning yet another crucifixion. And the key to the cyclical concept is presented early in the story, when it is revealed that Santiago has earlier endured that eighty-sevenday ordeal, which he repeats

in the story, and, it seems, will go on repeating forever. The last few pages have several culminating images that focus themes, each a powerful example of meaning through poetic concentration, but none more powerful than that of life as a cycle of trial by pain. The first is that of Santiago ascending the hill with the mast. This is as agonizing as his first trip with it was routine, and itself becomes a minidrama of the entire crucifixion, though its more obvious reference is to Jesus' identical task. But an image within the passage is even more concentrated and thematic than the whole. In a pause, he looks back and sees the skeleton of the fish still lashed to the skiff. The fictional camera has frozen on one Christ with his cross on his shoulder, another a maimed corpse bound to his. Beginning and end are juxtaposed: Christ starting to Golgotha, Christ dead and lashed to the cross. The image is at once an illumination of the commonalty of all living creatures, the crucifixion as the shaped pattern of life experience for all, the cyclical and unending nature of that experience. It even suggests the simultaneity of time. The next major image in the section is one already cited—of Santiago with his arms so ambiguously extended—in which both human and divine in Christ and, by extension, in all men is declared. It is followed by the view of the fish's bones become floating garbage, with its intimation that all that is physical is doomed to physical destruction, and that only acts and the memory of acts survive. In the last image of all, the last line of the book, the lions of the dream are as lions have always been, an emblem of life at its strongest and finest, suggesting youth, great deeds, sometimes wonderful to dream about and to long to return to, to possess again. In this context, they make a splendid resurrection symbol, unlikely as they might seem for it. Just as, a few moments earlier, the plans of Santiago and Manolo to use part of a junkyard Ford to make a new lance also make a fine miniature of renewal and resurrection: the ultimate triumph over mortality. The Christian base of the tragedy has developed at length the theme that the Christ experience is the concentrated representation of all experience—and that that experience is tragic. All who follow their appointed mission with total commitment and dedication will suffer the irreversible catastrophe but will also achieve a spiritual, transcendent victory over it. And they will come through tragedy to a knowledge of their unity with the universe and know that all things are only different aspects of that unity. All is ordered; God exists; through suffering man becomes a part of him. The art-artist fable has less urgent and unmistakable identifications than the Christian. Rather, it declares itself by the cumulative force of its connotations. And like both the naturalistic and Christian modes, it functions as tragedy by itself, though naturally all are stronger perceived as one unified tragic work than as an addition of separates. Seen as such a separate, the art-artist drama, however, is simple and direct. The fisherman is the artist, fishing is art, and the fish the art object. Santiago the

archetypal fisherman becomes Santiago the archetypal artist. Even more uniquely, this fish is the great work of art, and Santiago's struggle with it is the agony of the artist attempting to achieve the masterpiece. Forces destructive of art inevitably mutilate the masterpiece and block the artist from deserved recognition. But he has already won his triumph of the self over this material catastrophe in the performance of the great artistic act, and he reinforces it in his achievement of serenity in his abiding creative vision. The act is indestructible, and transcendence is built into it. Simultaneous with this generic mythos is an autobiographical one, which makes Santiago a projection of Hemingway himself. It is only half developed, sometimes almost ostentatiously visible, finally almost submerged in the larger design. That it may be intuitive and unplanned simply makes it more intriguing. In this, Santiago is Hemingway, once the greatest of all in his *métier* but now fallen and derided; Hemingway of scrupulous craft and burning personal vision; Hemingway, who has not been destroyed by his economic activity—journalism—but has used it both to survive and to nourish his real work; Hemingway, who will come back from scorn and again defeat all others with a master achievement; Hemingway, who considers he has done it and sees his just prize wrested from him by a hostile reviewing establishment; Hemingway, who is still the tragic hero, serene in the knowledge of his feat and comforted by his vision. So Santiago is thus Hemingway as artist—and champion—as well as the universal artist. This pattern is absorbed by the larger generic pattern, however, and that larger one makes certain fairly distinct assertions about the process of art and working at art. These may be conveniently, if a little Teutonically, seen as grouping into a few cardinal categories. Imperative and isolation. Both of these are first sounded in the very first line—Santiago fishes, and he fishes alone—though their import begins to emerge forcefully only when the voyage begins. At sea, he reflects repeatedly that he was “born” to be a fisherman and that he must think of no other purpose; when the fish is towing him far out to sea, he reflects that he has no help in the challenge of the masterpiece except what comes from himself, and the surrounding sea reminds him of his aloneness. He asserts that he will prove his commitment to his work again though he has proved it many times before, and he reiterates his determination to follow the imperative—execute the masterpiece, kill the fish—until death. His affirmation is stronger after he has glimpsed the awesome shape of the masterwork. Nor does his fidelity ebb after he has executed the great work—tied the fish alongside; it is simply directed against new challenges. He must try to protect the work against those forces that would destroy it, and possibly all art, and he reiterates that hopeless determination as he battles the sharks. These represent not only reviewers and critics here but imperception, exploitation, that whole part of the apparatus of cynicism that attaches itself to

each of the arts and will destroy it if unchecked. And the artist strong enough to obey the imperative will be strong enough to perceive an alleviation of the aloneness, though it will not be provided by other men until the task is over. It appears, rather, in an awareness of the unity of the cosmos and all living things in it, which comes gradually to the striver in the depths of his self-imposed exile for his art. Santiago acknowledges as he sees a flight of ducks against the sky that he knows “no man . . . [is] ever alone on the sea” (32); later, the physical part of his masterpiece destroyed in total catastrophe, he can embrace the very element which, in the largest sense, destroyed it: the sea itself. He affirms himself at one with the sea, the wind, the town where he lives, the destroyed masterpiece itself. And though he grieves for this ruined master work, he appears to have attained the deep, ultimate happiness of the noblest tragic hero, in his role as artist as well as in his other identities. He knows both that the great creation will always be his, and that he himself is as ultimately responsible for its destruction as he was for its execution. Craft, method, and luck. The first two are constantly in view in Santiago’s careful preparation before he goes out—his systematic check of his gear and provisions, the care he gives to the smallest tasks, from stowing his gear to baiting the hooks—and is crystallized by his careful maintenance of his lines at exact depths and positions. He keeps them more precisely than anyone else, he reflects—not impossibly the author’s tribute to the author as craftsman. He has not had luck, but he prefers skill to luck. Yet from the first Santiago acknowledges the supreme importance of that other element, luck. He is “unlucky,” the boy is on a “lucky” boat, eighty five may be a “lucky” number. Is luck the same as that psychic indefinable, inspiration? It would seem not. Santiago speaks later of having violated his luck when he went “outside too far.” Yet the shark is carefully presented as an inevitability, not an accident, and the catastrophe as a pure cause-and effect event. Perhaps he means his hubris destroyed the luck that would have protected him from the harshnesses of order. For luck seems to lie outside the orderly world, to be almost a caprice of the cosmos in action, as Tyche, the goddess of luck, was considered to be essentially unrelated to any other force, even the Fates, a force apart from everything, by those Greeks of the first century b.c. Yet luck has some kind of relationship with inspiration, the text suggests. It is luck that may reward skill, in the example of the carefully maintained lines, and luck may manifest itself in inspiration, or idea, *donnée*, subject. It may manifest itself there, or anywhere, but it is not the same thing. Inspiration, imagination, creativity—whatever it is named—is one of the two prime and almost equal partners in the hard labor of art. Imagination and discipline-craft are fixed as such partners in the image of the two hands and the fish they work together to bring in (Baker’s Trinity image). Santiago proclaims all three brothers: masterpiece, craft, and imagination. But which hand is which?

That ancient maxim, “the left hand is the dreamer,” suggests the left as the delicate and unpredictable, even uncontrollable component of imagination, with the stronger and ever faithful right as discipline and skill. Santiago’s denunciation of the left as “traitor” reinforces that view, and it is the right hand with which he wins the hand wrestling championship. The left might even be characterized as the unconscious and the right as the conscious. The powerful black man Santiago beats in the “championship” wrestling contest with his right hand seems pretty obviously the devil in the Christian tragedy, but what is he here? Less clear: perhaps the despair and doubt of both self and the validity of art that assails every artist from time to time, perhaps autobiographically one writer whom Hemingway felt he had to beat and did beat to become “champion.” Who? The guess here is Faulkner, but it may be a bad guess; the whole concept has to be avowed as tenuous, and all nominations consequently speculative. The mysterious and the miraculous. There is something in the making of the super work that lies beyond that partnership of craft and inspiration, however, and even beyond the capricious and not at all holy element of luck. This is the awesome benediction of mystery and miracle; the artist’s own exertions, however wise and strenuous, can only take him so far. Then the great work is bestowed or it is not. The first intimation of mystery impending appears, dim and precise yet with unmistakable connotation, as Santiago starts out in his skiff. The silence of the sea, broken only by the sound of unseen oars stroking, is an evocative context for Santiago’s reflection that he is going “far out”; in addition to its hubristic declaration, it suggests the start of a voyage into the unknown, into mystery. These notes intensify, first subtly, and then directly and powerfully when the fish takes the bait. Santiago’s prayerlike invocations more directly belong to the Christian story but also strongly point to the emerging aspect of the miraculous in art. The fish is “unbelievably heavy” (21), “of great weight” (22), and Santiago marvels at his size as he envisions him “moving away in the darkness” (22). The mystery of the bestowed masterpiece is constantly deepened. When Santiago is actually taken in tow by the fish, the work assumes control of its creator; for four hours he does not see it, and he thinks of the fish as “wonderful and strange” (25), of a great and mysterious age. He reflects that the fish chose to stay in “deep dark water” and that he found him “beyond all men” (26); their joining is thus hinted as a kind of miracle as well as mystery, in the art parable as in the others. These aspects are constantly strengthened by his reflections on the size and nobility of the marlin and flower in the great death leap, the Ascension image in the Christian mode. The “great strangeness” (55) he feels in remembering it and the dimmed eyesight that accompanied it, make that sight a different kind of holy vision for the artist: this is the grail of the achieved masterpiece he has always sought. It may be glimpsed and briefly possessed if it has been truly earned, but it is



not permanent and it cannot be shared—not even by fellow artists who can at least understand its magnitude and the agony it represents. The emerging oneness of artist and masterpiece. Even greater than the agony of execution is the agony of the destruction of the achieved masterpiece, for by this time, creator and work have become one. They have been “brothers” during their battle; when the fish is tied to the boat, they almost immediately become a single entity. Which is bringing the other in, he wonders; when the sharks mutilate the fish, he feels as though their teeth are ripping him. Later he tells his sorrow to the fish; by going too far out—creating too big a work—he has destroyed them both. This may be the climax of the development of their ever-tightening oneness. The thematic implication is instantly perceived: in the execution of the masterpiece, the masterpiece ultimately becomes part of the artist. What is inflicted upon it is inflicted upon him. Here, Backman says, Hemingway’s fusion of active and passive, slayer and slain, finds its strongest expression. Fate of the masterpiece. The masterpiece is always maimed by the events that are subsequent to its creation: that is, it can never be completely and truly perceived by any but the artist. It never survives intact in the dignity and honor it deserves. Developed directly by the battle and its outcome, this theme is culminated by the last image of the fish: a skeleton with a tail and fin that is now floating garbage, awaiting total oblivion by the tide. But though the masterpiece itself may be destroyed (by hostility, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation, maiming critical attacks), the achieving of it cannot be. The execution of the work of art is not only a performance but a fact: though it may not survive in space, it will survive in time and in the greatest dimension, memory. This is one of the implications of the awe of the other fishermen at the size of the fish’s skeleton and their understanding of Santiago’s ordeal which attended its taking. Another is that the achievement of the work of art is understood by the elect, the brothers in the art, and it exists as example and inspiration to them. Concomitantly, the nonelect, those who do not know, in their obtuseness confuse the achievement of the work with the destruction of it: the destroyers are honored, the creator shunned. This last, bitter irony is rendered in the comment of the tourist gazing at the ruined fish: “I didn’t know sharks had such handsome beautifully formed tails” (72). But for the true artist, for him who has reached awareness in his suffering and achieving, all of this recedes into unimportance. For him, only one thing endures and is of final significance. This is his vision, from which this work and all the artist’s work comes, and it is projected in the last line, “The old man was dreaming about the lions” (72). The fate of the work, as caught in the destruction of the fish by the sharks, is one of those phases of action that inevitably seems to belong in the autobiographical parable, too. An early view had it that the fish was this very book and the sharks were the critics, an inaccurate precognition since they

had not had a chance at it during its composition and liked it when they did. The better surmise probably is that they suggest the undervaluation that Hemingway felt reviewers had accorded him since *In Our Time*, as his 1927 poem "Valentine" demonstrates. The only real single possibility is *Across the River*, as Young suggested in 1966.<sup>14</sup> Hemingway prized it and was dismayed at what he felt was a critical failure of perception toward it. A reasonable hypothesis is that Hemingway fused the fate of *Across the River* with that of the book-in-being. The artistic vision. The lions that are decisive symbols in the other modes of the story are equally strong as a synthesizing and culminating image in the tragedy of art. The dream of lions is a great sustaining force for the old man as he lives in failure and charitable scorn; he summons them in his most agonized hours during his ordeal of execution, and at the end they supply the final definition to this layer of tragedy as to the others. His great work as a physical entity has been destroyed. His achievement has not only been ignored and unperceived by those who do not know, but these give credit for achievement to the very ones who have destroyed it: the tourists think the remains of the fish are those of a shark, and comment on the shark's beauty. But Santiago does not care: he has achieved the sublime indifference of the artist to everything but his deepest vision of beauty and life and of his work in relation to them. It is unshakable and enduring and will always renew him. He is dreaming about the lions: he is warming himself with the artistic vision. One would judge that this is Hemingway's idealized self-portrait in the crucial dimension—not himself as he knew he was, but himself as he knew he ought to be, the artist as he ought to be. Critics, criticism, and the artist. The sharks are forces of destruction in every fable of the book but they are splendidly unlimited in each. Yet, as with the lions and the other images in the complex symbology, their unclosed, larger identities also enclose quite exact lesser identities. Thus at the first level they are all the unnameable elements of a hostile universe that crush man, but they are more narrowly nemesis; in the Christian tragedy, they are all the forces against Christ, but touches link them uniquely with the Pharisees; here, they are the huge conglomerate of the forces that assault all art: exploitation, neglect, public indifference and ignorance, self-doubt, despair—and of course the reviewers and critics. That much advertised last identity is not "wrong," but it is only one part. Still, it is the most interesting part, apparently to the author and literate public as well. And certain aspects of the author's attitude toward the sharks as reviewers-critics have not been so widely observed as his hostility. The hostility, in fact, is directed, and carefully directed, toward only the "scavenger" sharks—the reviewers who are frantic to play follow the leader. The first shark, the Mako, is accorded a scrupulous if unloving accolade: he is as beautiful as the marlin except for his jaws, he fears nothing, he is built "to feed on all the fish in the sea" (45). This authentic, super critic is the

equal of the artist but is different in function, a differentiation that is underscored by the resemblance of his teeth to “cramped” human fingers (the cramping suggesting a freezing of the creative function). Exercising his admittedly “noble” purpose, he attacks bravely. But Santiago has only contempt for those scavengers who can only follow their better and bite the fish “where he had already been bitten” (61). Thus, the great critic is as great as the great artist—but those who can only follow him and each other are cowards and unworthy. Sharks more diffusely suggest the entire critical activity: when they are dismembered, stripped, and processed, as critics break down a creative work, at the “shark factory” (3), they make a stink that permeates the bay. Yet Santiago makes a bow to the critical activity when he acknowledges taking shark liver oil regularly; it helps the eyes, as a little pure criticism helps the artist’s vision. The economic, physical sustenance of the artist. This is the most quotidian of all the considerations developed here and it becomes most interesting when the author uses it in a candid autobiographical representation of the relationship between journalism and literature. Yet careful justice is done to the more general parallel: the old man is artist, as he was Christ at the Last Supper, when the boy brings him the gift of food to strengthen him for the next day’s fishing. For after his long bad luck Santiago cannot buy for himself, and without physical nourishment, the spiritual labor of art cannot be performed. The repeated rituals of eating smaller fish in the boat, more important as communion ceremonies in the Christian fable, here stress the need of continuing physical and economic sustenance for the artist in his most elevated creative endeavor. They may be more interesting, however, as a suggestion that the artist proceeds from his own lesser work to the greater, gaining strength through the smaller for the creation of the larger. And among Santiago’s reflections on the fish are many with a definite economic facing. He wonders if taking the fish were a sin, though it will keep him alive and “feed many people” (59). He thinks of the money the fish will bring in the market, enough to feed him through the winter. And he declares that he did not kill the fish just to stay alive himself—his imperative to create and pride in work were infinitely stronger than economic necessity. Yet the biggest image of the economic activity—as the sharks were of the reviewers and critics—is the turtles, and within this generic representation there is a more piquant one of Hemingway himself. More generally, turtles and anything pertaining to them are objectifications of the economic process—the turtles themselves, their eggs, “turtling,” and turtle boats. Broadly speaking, the artist must resort to some activity or practice to support himself—hiring out on turtle boats that catch them or eating their eggs. Sometimes this lower activity not only keeps the artist alive but instructs and tempers him for his real work: the practice of art—catching big fish. But the turtles are both larger and infinitely more provocative

when seen as objectifications of journalism and even of journalists in Hemingway's own career. When the boy tells Santiago that Santiago's years on the turtle boats did not hurt his eyes, Hemingway is declaring that his stretches of journalism did not hurt his own artistic vision. When Santiago speaks of eating turtle eggs to keep himself strong in the winter, the author is not only speaking of the physical nourishment but of the experience that can be fashioned into art which journalism has given him; the figure recalls certain lines from the introduction to his collected short stories, "In going where you have to go, and doing what you have to do, and seeing what you have to see, you . . . blunt the instrument you write with." But the instrument can always be rewhetted, he contends. When Santiago says he feels no mysticism about turtles, Hemingway is saying he feels none about the newspaper or magazine business, as many former newsmen profess to do. He expresses friendly contempt for the ordinary journalists, the "stupid loggerheads" (18), but admiration for the excellent journalists—i.e., his good friends in the ranks—by praising green turtles and hawkbills for their "elegance and speed and great value" (18). So the book demonstrates overwhelmingly the author's turn toward fable that became markedly evident in *Across the River and Into the Trees*. And these layers of the story are constructed to the measure of many kinds of tragedy, that fuse as the levels of the work fuse. Whether one considers this novel to be Hemingway's best or not depends on what he expects from a novel. But none is more powerful as an expression of the tragic, and none should define him so finally as one of fiction's most powerful, and subtle, prophets of the tragic vision. Certain dim resemblances between *The Old Man and the Sea* and *Oedipus at Colonus* have been noted: they are purely emotional, tonal, and—it seems safe to say—totally accidental. Like *Oedipus*, Santiago begins in a cast-down, even an accursed state, but he has achieved humility and serenity. The ordeal he experiences only confirms him in that humility and serenity, which carry him to an ultimate and transcendental triumph—again like *Oedipus*. That is all there is between the two, and there is nothing in the record to suggest nor it is suggested here that the earlier work had any influence whatever on the later. Yet, paradoxically, "A Man of the World," a short story published five years after the novel, seems to have been modeled directly if in a sardonic fashion on the play: situation matches situation, incident pairs with incident. And the biggest part of the paradox lies in the difference in tone. Instead of the note of loftiness, the story strikes one of black comedy, even of coarseness and brutality, through most of its duration. One work is larger than life, the other perhaps smaller. Still in the end it sounds something of the same theme as *The Old Man and the Sea*, though admittedly a little more that of *The Sun Also Rises*: that we define ourselves by our confrontation of catastrophe—or, better here, the existential void. The

likenesses and the polarities are sufficient, perhaps, to justify an indulgence and look at the story as a kind of satyr play to the larger tragic work—so long as one knows perfectly well he is justifying an indulgence. It seems likely that Hemingway never thought of them that way. The strategic foundation of the story is the way its tone plays against the Colonus structure that is its narrative foundation. The protagonist Blindy is foul-smelling, a slot-machine cadger and drink-moocher, repulsive to all perceptions. People in the bar avoid him. The appearance of his pus-packed eyesocket, and the details of the fight in which he lost it are almost subhuman in their coarseness, a coarseness that has turned many of the author's most sympathetic critics away from the story. Yet at the end there is, simply in retrospective, the absolutely classic Aristotelian reversal: the retelling of the maiming fight with Joe Sawyer suddenly invests Blindy with dignity; he is called Blacky again; he is invited to sleep in the backroom of the bar. His crude declaration—that he has made and is making the most of his condition and his acceptance of responsibility for it—heightens the affirmation. He has won what might be seen in a suitable context as tragic triumph—but it has taken place here in a deceptively surreal world of dark comedy. The victory thus is Sartrean; here, it is not tragic but a warped, crazy-mirror reduction of the tragic idea. The linkings to Oedipus begin early. As blind as the one time king of Thebes, Blindy declares, "I been on lots of roads. And any time I may have to take off and go on some more";<sup>15</sup> he is obviously providing the clue link between Oedipus' unending journey, led by his daughter-sister, on the roads of the world. When he says to the man at the slot machine, "Your night is my night" (65), he is handing us the parallel to the Delphic prophecy that Oedipus would bring luck to those who helped him. The sacred wood, a forest of sorts, at Colonus is the place of final confrontation in the play; with tongue deep, deep in cheek, surely, the author has Blindy drink the whiskey, Old Forester. As Theseus offers sanctuary to Oedipus, so Frank the bartender tells Blindy he can sleep in the back of the bar. The decisive, thematic pairing occurs in statements made by principals near the end of each work. Oedipus proclaims that his great suffering and noble nature make him know that all is well. In the lower-than-life matching utterance, Blindy declares that he has earned his life, sorry as it may be, and he is happy with it. This comes after the recounting of the fight with Sawyer the years before. Each has maimed the other hopelessly, and it may be one of Hemingway's more notable feats that for the moment it counts, he can make us accept the brutality as a self-defining action. In fact, Blindy asserts his right to his responsibility and self-definition: "Only just don't call me Blacky anymore. Blindy's my name. I earned it. You seen me earn it" (66). Finally, in what is almost a grotesque played by gargoyles, we see a strange version of the human triumph enacted. Blindy has met catastrophe and the existential void, and they are

both his. One of the real significances of the repelling, morbidly intriguing little story is its clear illumination of one of the really new developments in Hemingway's work after 1950: his use of literary source. It showed in *Across the River and Into the Trees*, could be perceived in the New Testament base and Dantean references to the stars in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and was to flower in *Islands in the Stream*—which was written before the story.

## **RALPH ELLISON – ‘INVISIBLE MAN’**

The title character of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, a novel about an unnamed young black man's political and racial self-discovery, admires Louis Armstrong's song "What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue." In the prologue, he asks the same question about his own life, wondering at his fate as a black man in an indifferent racist society. The novel itself is structured like a jazz performance; the narrator adopts a fluid, improvisational voice and introduces themes in the prologue that run, elaborated and varied, throughout his story. The setting of the prologue is surreal: the narrator, who has rejected society after years of hope and political involvement, lives on the border of Harlem in an underground room brilliantly lit by 1,369 light bulbs. The heat and electricity are pirated from Monopolated Light & Power, which, because of the speaker's "invisibility," cannot detect the source of the power drain. There are subversive advantages, the narrator comically implies, to going unseen in society. This invisibility clearly symbolizes the racism indigenous to America in the first half of the century—the speaker says he is unseen not because he is a "spook" but because "people refuse to see me ... they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination." The narrator's comedy quickly mixes with rage as he recalls the constant affronts his imperceptibility has engendered. In one instance, an accidental jostle and automatic slur spurred him to demand an apology from a white passerby. Receiving instead only confused epithets, he beat and kicked the man, preparing even to cut his throat before he realized that the victim regarded the assault as terrifyingly unmotivated, "a walking nightmare." Stunned by his own inefficacy, the narrator burst out laughing and ran from the scene. These often grotesque strains of comedy and violence, as well as the motifs of sight and blindness, darkness and light, recur throughout the book. Added to these are the themes of hallucinogenics, drunkenness, nightmares, music, and oratory, the powers of which the narrator also explores in the prologue. Smoking marijuana and listening to Louis Armstrong, he leads the reader into the cultural "depths" of the music, hearing below the fast tempo a slower black spiritual, the call and response of a black congregation's sermon, and the laughter and tears of a slave woman whose master has died. The prologue ends with a reaffirmation of the narrator's belief in action and a defense of his phantom attacks on society's "dreamers and sleepwalkers," who refuse to perceive him. The narrator then begins to tell his life history, in some ways an extended series of initiations into various institutions, each ending in betrayal, explosive violence, nightmarish perceptual distortion, and a loss of control. The first of these experiences takes place in chapter one, when the narrator, the high school valedictorian, is asked to give his

speech on black humility as the “very essence of progress” to a gathering of his town’s leading white citizens. The other entertainments are to be a boxing match or “battle royal” among nine black roughs and, the boys learn on entering the ballroom, a striptease. The narrator reacts with horror as the moral leaders of the community, drunk, force the black boys to stand in front of a naked blond dancer as she tantalizes them with her movements. The tempo of the dance music quickens, the white men begin to touch and chase her, and she narrowly escapes, leaving the traumatized black youths to go through with the fight. The narrator is forced to participate, and all ten youths are blindfolded and egged on with racial slurs in a crazed battle, which ends with the narrator getting knocked out. They are then urged to collect their prize money from a pile of cash strewn on a rug, which turns out to be electrically wired. Scrambling for coins, shoved and pushed by the drunken audience, they are repeatedly shocked with intolerable volts of electricity. Only after this wild manhandling is the narrator asked to give his valedictory address. Showing him weak, bloodied, yelling, and choking over the noise of the audience, Ellison depicts his hero’s speech on racial harmony with heavy irony. The performance nonetheless earns him a scholarship to a prestigious southern black college, an idyllic bastion of learning where he hopes to follow in the footsteps of the distinguished black president, Dr. Bledsoe (chapter two). But the speaker’s dreams are shattered in the spring of his junior year when, during Founder’s Day, he gets the job of chauffeuring one of the college’s wealthy white trustees. Mr. Norton asks the narrator to drive into the countryside during a break between meetings, meanwhile lecturing him on his luck at being part of a “great dream become reality.” Instead of showing him the sanitized, idealized version of black life in the South that Dr. Bledsoe would like him to see, the protagonist unintentionally drives Mr. Norton through an impoverished black area, thus, in the words of Dr. Bledsoe, “dragging the entire race into the slime!” Mr. Norton, first unaware of his surroundings, continues with a story about his beautiful daughter, “too pure for life,” to whose memory he has dedicated his philanthropy. The trustee then notices a rundown shack—a former slave cottage— belonging to Jim Trueblood, a delinquent black sharecropper, and orders the car to stop. Here Mr. Norton learns with horror of Trueblood’s incestuous relationship with his daughter, who, along with her mother, is visibly pregnant. Mr. Norton listens to the farmer with a mixture of horror and fascination, hearing the man’s story of poverty, lust, nightmares, and violence. The effect on the white man is catastrophic; he appears on the verge of a stroke and, pleading for whiskey, orders the narrator to drive on. As in so many of the narrator’s misadventures, his well-intentioned decision, in this case to take Mr. Norton to the closest bar, the Golden Day, only leads to greater calamity. The Golden Day is a brothel to which a group of mentally ill black war veterans is taken once



a week. In chapter three they have already arrived when the narrator brings his half-conscious charge inside. With the ironic clairvoyance of the insane, they recognize Mr. Norton as a Thomas Jefferson, a John D. Rockefeller, and even the Messiah. A riot breaks out almost immediately. Their supervisor, a giant black man named Supercargo, calls for order, but the veterans charge him, knocking him down and beating him unconscious. The narrator rescues Mr. Norton by taking him upstairs. He is greeted by prostitutes and a deranged former doctor who, after reviving the trustee, describes his wrongful treatment as a member of the medical profession. The doctor accuses the hero of delusional submission to white society and laughs scornfully at Mr. Norton's patronage of the college, driving the two back downstairs. Mr. Norton narrowly escapes the riotous crowd below and returns to campus in a state of shock. Dr. Bledsoe's wrath falls on the narrator with unanticipated fervor (chapter four). Bledsoe tells him that he should have manipulated Mr. Norton: "We take these white folks where we want them to go, we show them what we want them to see." In a gesture emblematic of this maxim, Bledsoe composes his rage-distorted face to address the white trustee with humility and concern. The narrator then attends the proceedings of Founder's Day with guilt-ridden veneration, anticipating his expulsion. Ellison's imagery in chapter five, describing the gathering students with "limbs stiff and voices now silent, as though on exhibit even in the dark, and the moon a white man's bloodshot eye," is typically vivid and surreal. The students sing black spirituals for the benefit of the visiting white patrons, and then the Reverend Homer A. Barbee gives a speech remembering the college's original black founder. In one of the striking examples of oratory that fill Ellison's novel, he passionately invokes the messianic life of the Founder—born a slave. The narrator stumbles from the chapel, shamed beyond words for his betrayal of the college. He then goes to Dr. Bledsoe, who reprimands him ferociously (chapter six). The college president describes the necessity of lying to whites ("[T]he only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie!") and talks about the black man's social invisibility ("You're nobody, son. You don't exist ..."). He proclaims that he has created a place for himself in the country's all-white society by playing the role of the deferential black yea-sayer. The interview evokes memories of the dying words of the narrator's grandfather who, as Ellison describes in chapter one, led a life of exemplary humility and obedience but declared on his death bed that his acquiescence to whites was actually a subversive ploy to wrest control from them: "I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins ... let 'em swoller you till they vomit or burst open." At Dr. Bledsoe's office, the speaker is shocked but relieved to hear that his punishment will be only to leave for the semester. He is sent to New York with Dr. Bledsoe's sealed letters of introduction and told to find work for the summer.

On the bus to New York (chapter seven), the despondent narrator meets the doctor from the Golden Day again, who also advises him to drop his idealistic notions of race. “Play the game, but don’t believe in it..,” he tells the hero. Yet the narrator arrives in New York filled with dreams of success. The bustle of the big city temporarily startles him—the intermingling of blacks and whites and the crush of the subway, where he is pushed against an indifferent fat white lady—but he makes his way eagerly to the Men’s House in Harlem. The narrator optimistically reports to various Wall Street offices with Dr. Bledsoe’s personal letters but without success. Finally he delivers his last letter to an assistant of a Mr. Emerson (chapter nine). In a room draped with exotic tapestries, the dapper white man drops references to Freud and speaks enthusiastically of Harlem nightclubs. After reading the letter, he tries to dissuade the narrator from returning south. Finally he reveals that he is Mr. Emerson’s son and shows the narrator Dr. Bledsoe’s note, which vows permanent expulsion on the grounds that the narrator, who “has gone grievously astray,” is a threat to the school. This betrayal shocks the narrator deeply. He vows revenge on Dr. Bledsoe and applies for a job at a Long Island paint factory mentioned by Mr. Emerson (chapter ten). The narrator is hired because the company does not have to pay union wages to the “colored college boys” it employs. This segment contains some of the most explicit racial symbolism in the novel. Liberty Paints is famed for its “Optic White” paint color, “the purest white that can be found,” which it supplies to the government. The paint can only be made by mixing ten drops of a secret formula into buckets of murky black paint. The narrator is set to this task, working frantically but accidentally ruining a batch by using the wrong formula. He is reprimanded and sent to assist Lucius Brockway, the engineer of paint production. Deep in the basement among the rattling furnaces he meets this wiry old black man, who prefigures his own later underground self. Brockway is both paranoid and belligerent, convinced that the narrator has been sent as a spy. Tenaciously independent, he boasts that he alone knows the secrets of paint making, which the management has tried for years to acquire. He orders the narrator to watch several valve gauges and sets him to work shoveling coal. During his lunch break, the narrator enters the locker room and discovers a union meeting in session. When the others learn that he works for Brockway, they turn against him, calling him a fink and voting to investigate him. The encounter makes him late for work. When Brockway hears his explanation, he attacks the protagonist in a rage, threatening to kill him, but the narrator eventually overpowers the older man, who breaks down and admits his deep hatred of unions. But at this point one of the valves begins to shriek. Brockway yells to the narrator to turn the white knob and then escapes, laughing, as the valve gives way and the hero is caught in an explosion of white paint. The painful loss of control and

consciousness (“Somewhere an engine ground in furious futility, grating loudly until a pain shot around the curve of my head ....”) recalls the end of the boxing match, when the narrator was brutally knocked out. Chapter eleven recounts one of the most surreal episodes in the novel. The hero wakes up in a white room in the factory hospital. He is strapped to a machine and given electroshock therapy intended (as he overhears a doctor explain) to “produce the results of a prefrontal lobotomy .... as complete a change of personality as you’ll find in your famous fairy-tale cases of criminals transformed into amiable fellows.” As his body shakes with the effects of the shocks, he hears one doctor remark, “They really do have rhythm, don’t they?” When the treatment ends, he finds that he can no longer remember his identity. A doctor tells him, “Well, boy, it looks as though you’re cured....” The narrator is released, sent to see the director, where he reacts with stabbing pain to the sound of his own name, which begins to trigger his memory. Told to seek work elsewhere, he stumbles back to Harlem, where a maternal woman, Miss Mary, takes pity on him and brings him to her home (chapter twelve). He moves into her boarding house and remains there for several peaceful months, unemployed and dependent on Mary’s charity but quietly resistant to her lectures on leadership and responsibility. One cold day he wanders the streets of Harlem and comes across an eviction (chapter thirteen). A crowd has gathered near a house where two white men are depositing an old black couple’s belongings onto the street. Memories of his childhood return as he stares at the sad household clutter exposed to public scrutiny. When one of the men tries to block the old woman from reentering her home, the crowd threatens to grow violent. The narrator intervenes, calling the people to order with a rousing speech. Yet the man continues to refuse the woman entrance, and the crowd attacks him. The narrator then organizes the crowd to carry the furniture back inside. He controls the carnival atmosphere until the police arrive. Then, running to escape, he is approached by a short red-haired man who calls him “brother” and praises his speech. The man, Brother Jack, invites him to coffee and offers the wary hero a job in his organization. The narrator declines but reconsiders when he remembers his debts to Miss Mary. In chapter fourteen the narrator is introduced to the Brotherhood, a secret quasi-Communist organization whose members meet at swank parties and talk elliptically of their mission to work “for a better world for all people.” The narrator is stunned by the posh apartment to which he is taken and moved by Brother Jack’s pronouncement of his future as the next Booker T. Washington. The Brotherhood offers him a large salary, provided he sever all ties with his past and adopt a new name and residence. During the ensuing cocktail party, one of the white brothers, thoroughly intoxicated, asks the narrator to sing a black spiritual. Others are embarrassed by his racist stereotyping, and the narrator downplays the offense.

Nonetheless he goes home wondering how much he can trust his fellow brothers. The narrator regretfully leaves Mary's boarding house to the banging of a broken furnace pipe, buying new clothes and moving to an apartment on the Upper East Side (chapter fifteen). That evening Brother Jack and a coterie of party members take him to give a speech at a rally in Harlem (chapter sixteen). After an initial hesitation, he forges a bond with the audience, rousing them to a fever pitch. The brothers are appalled, deeming the speech politically irresponsible. Because Brother Jack defends him, the narrator is allowed to keep his job on the condition that he go through three months of indoctrination into party principles under the guidance of Brother Hambro. He agrees, leaving the meeting convinced that he has finally found a way "to have a part in making the big decisions, of seeing through the mystery of how the country, the world, really operated." The novel leaps over the narrator's tutoring to his first assignment as chief spokesman of the Harlem District (chapter seventeen). Brother Jack brings him to the district headquarters, where, at the committee meeting, he meets Brother Tod Clifton, a handsome, charismatic young black leader sporting a scar from a recent fight with a rival organization of black nationalists. The hero also meets the head of this organization, the radical black separatist Ras the Exhorter, when he and Clifton organize a street rally. Ras's henchmen break up the gathering, knocking out street lamps and beating men with lead pipes. The scene, pitting blacks against blacks, recalls the earlier battle royal. At one point Ras knocks Clifton down and threatens him with a knife, demanding his reason for staying with the interracial Brotherhood: "You my brother, mahn. Brothers are the same color.Â.Â.Â." In an impassioned speech Ras emphasizes the need for black solidarity and repeatedly tries to convince Clifton, whom he calls a "black king," to join his party. The narrator breaks up the fight and ignores Ras's threats, but Clifton admits that he is troubled by the speech and wonders if "sometimes a man has to plunge outside history." Nonetheless the narrator proves a successful organizer, and within weeks the Brotherhood clinches power in the district. The narrator's fame spreads rapidly: for a short stretch he lives "dominated by the all-embracing idea of Brotherhood." Then he receives an anonymous letter warning him of jealousy among the white leaders (chapter eighteen). Soon a white member, Brother Wrestrum, accuses the narrator of self-promotion. In a scene evoking the arbitrary vindictiveness of the union meeting, the members vote for an investigation and order the narrator temporarily demoted, sending him downtown to lecture on the "Woman Question." In chapter nineteen the narrator gives his first speech on women's issues, and an eager female member of the audience invites him home to discuss the question further. In her elegant apartment, she aggressively seduces him. Afterward, he worries that the affair might have been a setup to orchestrate his downfall. But a more urgent problem

intervenes. Brother Clifton disappears, and the narrator is asked to return to the rudderless Harlem District. He finds that during his month-long absence the Brotherhood has fallen into disrepute in Harlem (chapter twenty). Patrons confront him at the local bar, the district headquarters are deserted, and he is pointedly excluded from the central committee's meeting. Walking along Forty-third Street after enduring this latest affront, he stops to listen to a street vendor's spiel and recognizes Clifton selling "Sambo Boogie Woogie paper dolls." Before the narrator can confront him, Clifton disappears to avoid the police. The hero, amazed, wanders on and runs into the sideshow a second time. When a policeman barks at Clifton, his patience breaks, and he turns and knocks the officer down. As Clifton crouches to spring, the cop shoots him dead. After witnessing this horrific tableau, the narrator roams the streets bewildered by Clifton's desertion. He watches a group of apolitical zoot-suiters riding the subway back to Harlem and witnesses a petty shoplifting, wondering what real effect the Brotherhood has had on the black community. Returning to his office, the narrator throws his energy into an open-air funeral for Clifton. The public showing is tremendous, yet when he stands to give the funeral address the narrator finds his political ideology falls flat. He makes a despondent, fatalistic pronouncement. He returns to his office to discover it full of grim-faced white party members, who call Clifton a traitor and accuse the narrator of playing up the race issue (chapter twenty-two). When the narrator insists that he was giving the people of Harlem the guidance and action they craved, Brother Jack answers, "We do not shape our policies to the mistaken and infantile notions of the man on the street. Our job is not to ask them what they think, but to tell them!" Brother Jack shocks the narrator by pulling out his own eye—it is artificial!—and dropping it in a glass of water. His real eye had been lost in the name of discipline, he says, admonishing the hero to obey with the same selflessness. The brothers leave the protagonist to wander the darkened streets of Harlem, where he runs across Ras leading a rally (chapter twenty-three). The two argue about Clifton's death, and the narrator leaves to escape Ras's henchmen. He decides to disguise himself, but when he buys a pair of dark sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat, he is immediately mistaken for someone named Rinehart. A heavily perfumed young woman tries to pick him up. Above the summer blare of cars and radios, he hears Ras continuing to incite the crowd. The black leader yells, "It is time Ras the Exhorter become Ras the DESTROYER!" and calls for action. In this mood of increasing tension, passersby continue to mistake the hero for Rinehart. He learns through his various encounters that the man is a womanizer, gambler, mob leader, and pimp. Then he stumbles into a church meeting and realizes that Rinehart is also a crooked minister, robbing his elderly congregation of their cash. The narrator makes a last-ditch effort to restore his beliefs, visiting his former party tutor,

Hambro, who tells him that the party's control of the Harlem District will have to be sacrificed for the greater good of the Brotherhood. Here he learns that "Rinehartism—cynicism" is not far from party policy: Hambro dismisses his charges of charlatanry with the argument that "it's impossible not to take advantage of the people." The narrator sees in the party's call for "scientific objectivity" the cruelty of the factory hospital's shock-therapy machine. He leaves angry and disillusioned, determined to imitate Rinehart and follow his grandfather's advice to gain control of the organization: "They were forcing me to Rinehart's methods, so bring on the scientists?" He begins by downplaying his district's incidents of violence and falsifying a new list of members. The tactic seems to work, and he regains favor at the next meeting. He also hatches a plan to seduce an important member's wife to learn secret information. He finds a willing partner in a rich, lonely white woman named Sybil, married to one of the Brotherhood's "big shots," whom he invites to his apartment. Here he plies her with drinks and presses her for secrets. Unfortunately she has nothing to tell but, in an increasingly drunken fervor, urges him to enact a rape scene with her. The hero, both disgusted and amused, watches her drop off to sleep. They are roused by a phone call reporting riots in Harlem. Drunkenly stumbling into the night, the narrator tries to procure Sybil a taxi, while she begs to be taken along. He sends her downtown, but she reappears, running barefoot along 110th Street. He finds another cab, finally cajoling her to leave. The narrator arrives in Harlem to find a nightmarish cityscape of shattered storefronts and surging bands of looters (chapter twenty-five). Alarms wail and gunshots ring out. He falls, nicked in the head by a bullet, but some men help him up, and he joins their band of looters, passing through streets of carnivalesque abandon. Their leader, Dupre, organizes the burning of a run-down tenement that his landlord has refused to fix. Amid various protests, he and his men torch the disease-ridden building. The narrator runs on in the dark, stopping to help a man twist his own tourniquet and dodging police. He realizes that the Brotherhood must have planned the race riot, sacrificing Harlem for the sake of propaganda. His cynical acquiescence has not served as resistance to the Brotherhood, but rather as a tool, facilitating the party's plan. A final chilling image arrests his thoughts—seven naked white female mannequins hanging from a lamppost. Then, as in a nightmare, he sees Ras the Destroyer dressed in the costume of an Abyssinian chieftain charging at him on horseback. The narrator protests that Ras, too, is being manipulated by the Brotherhood: "They deserted you so that in your despair you'd follow this man to your destruction." Ras throws a spear at the narrator, calling him a traitor and ordering him to be hanged. As he faces imminent death, the narrator realizes the absurdity of the causes he has supported and the hatred soon to bring about his death, as well as the truth about his own invisibility—he is just one small black man about

to be extinguished by another. Empowered by the thought that it is “better to live out one’s own absurdity than die for that of others,” he throws Ras’s spear, catching the chieftain in the jaw, and narrowly escapes through a looted store. He tries to make his way downtown, stumbling with the blind disorientation experienced in so many of the novel’s climaxes. A gang of hoodlums see him and give chase. While running, he falls through an open manhole into a coal cellar. When he refuses to give the gang his briefcase, they cover the hole, trapping him. He tries to burn a torch by lighting all of the important documents he has saved—his high school diploma, his Brotherhood papers, the paper doll from Brother Clifton—but cannot find a way out. Caught in a “state neither of dreaming nor of waking,” he has a vision of disputing his former role models and disavowing his earlier illusions. He awakes to the realization that he cannot return to his former life. Ellison’s narration now returns to the fictional present, with a tentatively optimistic epilogue. Having made the cellar his home and having realized that the world outside is just as “concrete, ornery, vile and sublimely wonderful as before,” the narrator finally tells us “that America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain.Â.Â.Â. Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in the face of certain defeat.” Despite the fact that he cannot be seen, he concludes that “there’s a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play.” In a decision that suggests Ellison’s lingering hope for public action in race relations, the narrator ends by announcing his plan to break his hibernation.

## SAUL BELLOW – ‘SEIZE THE DAY’

### Plot:

Tommy Wilhelm is a man in his mid-forties, temporarily living in the Hotel Gloriana on the Upper West Side of New York City, the same hotel in which his father has taken residence for a number of years. He is out of place from the beginning, living in a hotel filled with elderly retirees and continuing throughout the novel to be a figure of isolation amidst crowds. The novella traverses one very important day in the life of this self-same Tommy Wilhelm: his "day of reckoning," so to speak.

As the novella opens, Tommy is descending in the hotel elevator, on his way to meet his father for breakfast, as he does every morning. However, this morning feels different to Tommy, he feels a certain degree of fear and of foreboding for something that lies in the hours ahead of him and has been building for quite some time.

The reader begins to discover through Tommy's thoughts and through a series of flashbacks that Tommy has just recently been fired from his job as a salesman, he is a college drop-out, a man with two children, recently separated from his wife, and he is a man on the brink of financial disaster. Tommy has just given over the last of his savings to the fraudulent Dr. Tamkin, who has promised to knowingly invest it in the commodities market. Amid all of this, he has, apparently, fallen in love with a woman named Olive, who he cannot marry because his wife will not grant him a divorce. Tommy is unhappy and in need of assistance both emotionally and financially.

In the first three chapters the reader follows Tommy as he talks with his father, Dr. Adler, who sees his son as a failure in every sense of the word. Tommy is refused financial assistance and also refused any kind of support, emotionally or otherwise, from his father. It is also within these beginning chapters that the flashbacks begin. The flashbacks highlight, among other things, Tommy's meeting with the duplicitous Maurice Venice, the talent scout who shows initial interest in a young Tommy and his good looks. Wilhelm, however, is later rejected by the same scout after a failed screen test but nevertheless attempts a career in Hollywood as an actor. He discontinues his college education and moves to California, against his parent's will and warnings.



The chapters that follow focus on Tommy's encounters and conversations with Dr. Tamkin, a seemingly fraudulent and questionable "psychologist," who gives Tommy endless advice and thus provides the assistance he had looked for from his father. Whether Tamkin is fraudulent and questionable as a psychologist, and whether he is a liar and a charlatan is a question that is constantly being posed to us. Regardless, Tamkin is quite charming and appeals to Tommy. Dr. Tamkin claims to be a poet, a healer, a member of the Detroit Purple Gang, as well as claiming a number of other positions and titles. Despite his lies, he gives Tommy kernels of truth that become significant in the novella and for Tommy. Moreover, Tommy entrusts Tamkin with the last of his savings to invest in the commodities market, since Tamkin claims a certain stock market expertise.

The rest of the novella consists of Tommy and Dr. Tamkin traveling back and forth to and from the stock market, meeting several characters along the way. The novel finally illustrates Tommy's terrible loss in the commodities in which Tamkin has invested Tommy's money. Tommy has lost all of his savings but still has the monetary demands of his family to meet. Furthermore, Tamkin has disappeared. After an attempt to look for Tamkin in his room at the hotel, the novella comes to a close with three climaxes—two minor and one large, final climax.

First, there is the final confrontation with his father in the massage room of the hotel in which Tommy is denied any assistance one last time, as he stands before his naked father. Afterward, Tommy has a loud and almost raving fight with his wife on the telephone in which he claims to be "suffocating" and unable to "breathe." Full of rage, he exits out onto Broadway where he believes to see Dr. Tamkin at a funeral, nearby. He calls out to Tamkin but receives no reply. Suddenly he is swept in by a rush of people and finds himself carried into a crowd within the chapel where the funeral is taking place. It is here that the final climax comes because Tommy finds himself before the body of a dead stranger, unable to break away and he begins to cry and weep. He releases pools of emotion and "crie[s] with all his heart." It is here that the book ends. Other people at the funeral are confused as to who he is, wondering how close he had been to the deceased. The deceased is a stranger but Tommy, however, is left in this "happy oblivion of tears."

## **Themes:**

### **The Predicament of Modern Man**

*Seize the day* is a reflection of the times in which it was written. The novel was written in a post-war world. WWII created several factors that serve as a backdrop to Wilhelm's isolation in the novel, an isolation that represents the feeling of many during the time period.

First and foremost, war creates dissolution and in many cases dislocation because of forced immigration. During the war many people, Jews especially, were escaping the Germans and, thus, fleeing, when they could. Also, American troop and other members of the alliance were disillusioned to see that such horrors could exist. Finally, and in opposition to the above, the war had a positive effect of creating an economic boom. There was also a surge in technological interest in America. The reasons for this surge are two-fold: America was rich and America was involved in a post-WWII cold war with the Soviet Union, since the countries competed technologically. It is in this world that a man like Tommy Wilhelm is lost.

Tommy is an idealist surrounded by the pressures of the outside world. He is isolated and, thus, is forced to turn inward. The urban landscape is the symbol that furthers his isolation, for he is always "alone in a crowd." Bellow wants the reader to understand this isolation and thus has almost the entire novel take place within Wilhelm's head. We experience the back and forth of uncertainty, the wavering of watery thoughts, the sadness and frustration of being that person that is "alone in the crowd."

This isolation and inner struggle is the predicament of modernity. Bellow would not be the only modern master to touch up the subject. For instance, T.S. Eliot had written *The Wasteland* in which he discusses many of the same subjects as Bellow, albeit in a very different fashion and style. Eliot discusses the "unreal city" which can be compared to the city that Wilhelm feels so uncomfortable within. Eliot also claims that there are many "dead" within the crowds. This symbolic death points to the fact that the modern man seems only to be going through the motions of things. Wilhelm, for instance, at the beginning of the novel, is like a character seemingly dead, both in appearance and in the way he claims he will simply go about the actions of his day. Other similarities between *The Wasteland* and *Seize the Day* include the images of "drowning" and "water." Both writers used these images to illustrate a person drowning in life.

*Seize the Day* is not a regular day in the life of the modern man because it is a "day of reckoning," a day in which someone that is truly dead will give the protagonist a jolt of life.

Unlike many modern masterpieces, Bellow has chosen a positive ending for his novel. He has also allowed his protagonist connections with the modern world. In Times Square, for example, Wilhelm had felt connected to the "larger body" of humanity. Furthermore, Bellow complicates the predicament of modernity by adding a very human and positive element. Bellow seems to be saying that the predicament of modern man goes far beyond the typical pessimism, cynicism, and isolation because it has the potential of reaching understanding and love.

### **The Internal Life of a Human Being**

The critic Julius R. Raper, in an essay entitled "Running Contrary Ways," wrote that Saul Bellow's writing marked the end of a tradition of "close-mouthed straight-forwardness," a substituted it with "a confessional literature that feels no shame in being introspective and self indulgent." Bellow is not afraid to have his character talk about feeling and emotions. The way in which he achieves this shift from the sparse Hemingway style that had prevailed to his own is that he takes the reader "inside" the head and emotions of the characters. This shift in style was often called a shift from the "Gentile" literature that dominated to a more hyphenated American style. However, it is important to remember that although Bellow does address the subject of the Jewish-American, he had considered himself "American" writer, not a "Jewish" writer or a "Jewish-American" writer, perhaps because the immigrant experience is so much a part of America itself.

Moreover, the fact that Bellow moves the action inward helps achieve a stylistic feat. However, style is not its only achievement. This internal world becomes complicated and points to the complicated state of the human being. The device helps to outline the role of psychology in the novel, for instance and also helps to pose characters in concordance or dissonance with each other. For example, Wilhelm does not understand the inner life of his father and his thoughts, but he is attracted to the way in which the eccentric Dr. Tamkin thinks.

In short, the internal life of the protagonist allows Bellow to illustrate a world of wavering emotion that would not have been possible otherwise. Being inside the protagonist places the reader in the same position. It gives the reader an understanding of the problems Wilhelm faces, what makes him angry, what makes him frustrated, sad, and lonely. Therefore, throughout the book, the reader has accompanied Wilhelm in his frustrations and in his burdened feelings. In the end, we are also released and reborn in much the same way as Tommy. The reason is both because of literary catharsis and also because the reader has been following Tommy and has no other choice but to join him.

**Motifs:****Psychology**

Throughout the entire novel, the idea of psychology is present as both an illuminating force and one that is to be mocked. Bellow presents this motif through both the characters' names, because they are all the names of famous psychologists, and through the character of Dr. Tamkin, the self-professed psychologist. Furthermore, one of the biggest struggles in the novel is a Freudian one: the Oedipal hatred Tommy holds for his father. However, the character that personifies Bellow's commentary on psychology is Dr. Tamkin.

Dr. Tamkin is both a character that, like the motif of psychology itself, serves as the perfect subject of parody and capable of illumination and truth. He talks about the conflict between the true soul and the pretender soul that is burdened by the forces and demands of the outside world. Bellow does seriously address the issues of the internal world of the human being. However, because Bellow makes fun of Tamkin constantly, it is important to remember that the field of psychology is a part of that problematic "external" world.

**Naturalism (the animal)**

Almost every chapter in the novel has an animalistic reference. Tommy calls both himself and his father an ass, a bear, and other names. Tommy was also once called "Velvel," by his grandfather (Velvel means wolf). This motif serves many purposes. It may serve to illustrate man's animalist natural tendencies and the internal instincts of a person. It may serve also to show the struggle between naturalism and the mechanical world, a topic that is satirized in Tamkin's poem. And, it may be taken one reference at a time. For example, the fact that Tommy had been called "wolf" can point to his loneliness and his need to "howl."

**The City (The Urban Landscape)**

The city serves to create the background of crowds and technology in Tommy's world. It serves to illustrate his disjunction with the outside/external world, the world that surrounds him. The city is mentioned at many points throughout the novel: Tommy is constantly claiming his hatred toward it. He would much rather live in the country, as he is unaccustomed to it. However, there are moments when he finds himself at one with the crowds of the city. Thus, this urban landscape can both serve as the dark backdrop of Tommy's life, the very symbol of what he is trying to escape, or it can be a force that allows him to feel solidarity with his fellow man.

## **Symbols:**

### **Water**

Water is one of the most important symbols in the book. It is present in every chapter and serves different purposes at different points in the novel. Water because it can be both an unstable element as well as a dangerous one, is used by Bellow to show that his protagonist is seemingly drowning. Water is also unstable and, thus, all of the water imagery points to the fact that nothing is certain and that Wilhelm lives in this world of uncertainty. The "water" is present from the beginning when Tommy seems to be descending into an underwater world that suffocates him. However, in the end, the water turns into a beautiful symbol of rebirth. The tears Tommy cries are tears that, ironically, bring him out of his drowning state.

### **Clothing**

Clothes are pointed to throughout the novel in the descriptions of characters. It appears as a symbol from the beginning when Tommy is discussing clothing with Rubin, the newspaperman at the hotel, they talk about the clothes they are wearing. This is important because it points to the significance of appearances in the novel. Tommy is constantly putting on "layers," trying out roles and is constantly trying to conceal his true self.

### **Olive**

Olive is the woman that Tommy loves. She is the woman he wants to marry but cannot because his wife will not grant him a divorce. His thoughts are constantly drifting toward her and his need for her is shown to the reader by the end of the novel. She signifies love, therefore. The importance of her name is what makes her a "symbol." The name Olive can refer to the symbolic Olive tree that signifies peace. Moreover, this would mean that it is "love," in the end is what brings "peace."

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**SCHOOL OF SCIENCE & HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**UNIT – V– AMERICAN LITERATURE– SHSA5102**

## AMERICAN LITERATURE – SHSA5102

### Course Materials

#### UNIT V – SHORT FICTION

**Detail:** Eudore Wetly – *A Worn Path*

**Non-Detail:** O.Henry – (i) *One Dollar's Worth*  
(ii) *The Cop and the Anthem*

#### EUDORE WETLY – 'A WORN PATH'

##### Summary:

"A Worn Path" is a short story by Eudora Welty. It was published in Atlantic Monthly magazine in 1941. The story describes a journey by an elderly black woman named Phoenix Jackson, who must walk a long way into Natchez from her home in rural Mississippi to retrieve medicine for her grandson. Jackson encounters various obstacles on the way, some physical (dense forest and a creek crossing), some psychological (an unpleasant encounter with a white man on the road, from whom she steals a dropped nickel); the story's overarching theme is its protagonist's persistence in making this repeated journey through the harsh landscape of the Depression-era South for the sake of her grandson, who she loves. "A Worn Path" was included in Welty's first collection of short stories, *A Curtain of Green*, and was praised for its poignant sense of place. The story received the second place O. Henry Award in 1941 and remains one of Welty's most famous short works.

On an early December morning, an old African-American woman, Phoenix Jackson, walks slowly through the forest. Her shoelaces are untied, and she taps the ground with a cane. She calls out to the animals to stay out of her way, and hits the bushes with her cane. She follows the path up a hill and down the other side. Her dress gets caught on a bush. She reaches a creek. A log serves as the bridge. She manages to cross it. She sits down on the bank to rest. She imagines a little boy offering her a piece of cake. Phoenix continues through a barbed wire fence and across a field. She's glad there are no bulls out. She walks on through a corn field with stalks taller than she is. There's a ghostly figure that turns out to be a scarecrow. She reaches a wagon track, which makes for easier travel. She passes fields, trees and cabins. She stops for a drink in a ravine with a spring. The track goes into a declining road. The trees meet overhead, making it dark like a cave. A black dog comes out of the ditch and approaches her. Startled,

she hits it lightly with her cane. She falls into the ditch. She can't get up. Eventually, a young white man with a dog happens upon her. He's out hunting. He helps her up. He asks her a few questions and tells her to go home. While they talk, she sees a nickel fall out of his pocket. She comments on the black dog that surprised her. The hunter sics his dog on it. The dogs fight. The hunter runs after them. There's a gunshot. Meanwhile, Phoenix picks up the nickel and puts it in her pocket. The man comes back. He points his gun at Phoenix and asks if it scares her. She says no. He smiles and again advises her to go home. She says she has to go on. They part ways. She hears the gun go off a few more times. She emerges from the tree-covered road into Natchez. There are green and red lights strung up in the city for Christmas. A lady walks nearby with an armful of presents. Phoenix asks if she would lace up her shoes for her. Having them undone won't look right in the city. The lady obliges. Phoenix enters a large building and announces herself. The attendant asks her some questions, but Phoenix doesn't answer. A nurse enters and recognizes her. She tells Phoenix to sit down. She asks if the medicine has helped her grandson's throat. Phoenix just stares straight ahead without answering. Phoenix snaps out of her reverie. She had forgotten the purpose of her trip. Her grandson's throat is still bad. He swallowed lye two or three years ago. She's come to get his medicine. She talks a bit about her grandson. They're by themselves. The nurse brings the medicine, marked "Charity." The attendant gives Phoenix a nickel for Christmas. She looks at both her nickels and has an idea. She's going to go buy her grandson a little paper windmill. She leaves the doctor's office.

**Theme:**

**Perseverance:** Phoenix Jackson perseveres through her conflicts with her environment and people, including herself.

**Environment:** There are many environmental elements that make the trip difficult:

- It's December—it's cold and there's snow down.
- It's a long walk through the woods, with uneven terrain and sometimes uphill.
- There's a thorny bush that catches her skirt.
- To cross a stream, she has to balance on a log.
- She has to crawl through a barbed-wire fence.
- There are animals in the forest; she gets startled by a dog and falls into a ditch.



Phoenix keeps going despite the natural obstacles. She travels at her own pace, resting if needed, until she succeeds.

**People:** Phoenix Jackson perseveres through her dealings with other people:

- The hunter tells her the town is too far away. He twice tells her to go home.
- He trivializes her trip, assuming she's going to see Santa Claus.
- He refers to her by the casual "Granny".
- He points his gun at her for his amusement.
- The woman who ties Phoenix's shoes calls her "Grandma".
- The staff at the doctor's refer to Phoenix as "Grandma" and "Aunt Phoenix". Every person she has interacted with has addressed her casually rather than with a more respectful title, like "ma'am" or "Mrs. Jackson".
- They show impatience with her diminished abilities, and scold her for taking up their time. Phoenix copes with all of these slights as she keeps her eye on completing her trip.

**Herself:** Phoenix perseveres through her own limitations:

- She's very old, probably 80 at the least.
- She uses a cane.
- She has to do the bulk of the trip with her shoes untied; presumably, she was unable to tie them herself before leaving home.
- Her sight isn't sharp.
- Her mind wanders to the point of hallucination while she rests on the bank.
- She too frail to get up on her own after falling into the ditch.
- When she reaches the doctor's office, she has forgotten why she came.

Phoenix's long, difficult journey is all the more arduous due to her age, frailty and diminished senses.

### **1. What is the symbolic significance of the protagonist's name?**

The protagonist's name, Phoenix, obviously has some symbolic meaning. The phoenix is a mythological bird associated with fire, known for rising from its own ashes, being reborn or resurrected. It could be said that Phoenix Jackson figuratively dies after each successful trip due to the effort involved. She then figuratively rises every time she has to make her difficult trip again.

This comparison is supported in the text:

- Her coloring is warm— her head is tied with a red rag, a "golden color [runs] underneath" her skin, and there's a "yellow burning" under her cheeks.
- Her hair has "an odor like copper", another color suggesting warmth.
- Her tapping cane is like the chirping of a bird.
- Phoenix likens her grandson to "a little bird".

### **2. Is the title symbolic?**

In fiction, a journey is often seen as a parallel for the figurative journey of life. Phoenix Jackson uses a worn path for her trip to the city. It's noteworthy, though, that being worn isn't the same as being smooth. The path she walks is very difficult. Similarly, a person could be living in "a worn path", that is, going through the same routine over and over. This doesn't mean their life is easy. Phoenix's journey to the city could be symbolic of her life's journey, which would have been filled with challenges as well.

## O.HENRY – ‘ONE DOLLAR’S WORTH’

### Summary:

In One Dollar’s Worth by O. Henry we have the theme of revenge, honesty, sacrifice, pity, love, change, compassion, gratitude and justice. Taken from his Selected Stories collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and from the beginning of the story the reader realises that Henry may be exploring the theme of revenge. Mexico Sam’s letter to Judge Derwent suggests that Sam is not prepared to forget that he was sentenced to prison by Judge Derwent. Nor is Mexico Sam prepared to forget that Littlefield was the prosecuting district attorney. It may also be important that both Judge Derwent and Littlefield show no concerns when they read the letter as this suggests that not only are they comfortable with their prosecution of Mexico Sam and the fact that he was guilty but they also appear to be used to the fact that people they have either sentenced or prosecuted often seek revenge. There is a calmness within both men that may surprise some readers and it is this calmness that suggests that both Judge Derwent and Littlefield are comfortable about upholding the law. Mexico Sam’s letter is part and parcel of life for Judge Derwent and Littlefield. Which may be important as the lack of fear shown by both men suggests that both are again comfortable about upholding the law.

Henry also appears to be exploring the theme of honesty through Joya’s character. Though there is no need for her to come to the courthouse and tell Littlefield that she is responsible for the counterfeit dollar she still takes the risk even though it may cost Joya her freedom. This may be significant as it suggests not only is it possible that Joya is being honest with Littlefield but she may also be very much in love with Rafael. So in love with him that she is prepared to sacrifice her freedom in order to ensure Rafael’s release from prison. It might also be important that Kilpatrick tells Littlefield ‘never trust a woman that’s in love.’ Not only is this remark a generalization about all women but it also offends Nancy who is very much in love with Littlefield. Kilpatrick appears to be blinded by his own arrogance. Which may be something that Henry is deliberately doing. He may be attempting to highlight to the reader that at times the law can be blind. Which appears to be the case when it comes to Joya’s testimony to Littlefield. Littlefield is adamant that Rafael is guilty.

It is also interesting that when Joya tells her story to Littlefield the only one who can identify with her is Nancy. She can feel Joya’s pain and asks Littlefield ‘doesn’t the law know the

feeling of pity?’ This identification between two women in love is completely at odds with how Littlefield and Kilpatrick think. Both of them believe in following the law as strictly as possible. To them love is not a valid enough reason to commit a crime. They do not appear to see the possibilities that Nancy sees. For Nancy Rafael’s actions are the result of a man desperate to help the woman he loves. For Littlefield and Kilpatrick it is a cut and dried case with Rafael’s guilt being self-evident. For them love plays no role in justice. Both are men who deal in facts rather than emotions and as such are confident of Rafael’s guilt despite what Joya has said. Though some critics might suggest that Littlefield is being heartless it is important to remember that it is his role to prosecute people. He looks on a case from one side. A side that is advantageous to assuring prosecution.

The end of the story is also interesting as Henry appears to be exploring the theme of change, justice and gratitude. It is only after using the counterfeit dollar to shoot Mexico Sam that Littlefield changes. Though he no longer has the evidence to convict Rafael, he also no longer has the heart to convict him. Littlefield knows that the counterfeit dollar has saved both his and Nancy’s life and the reader suspects that Littlefield also begins to understand just how deeply in love Joya is with Rafael. If anything there is a sense of justice for Rafael at the end of the story. Littlefield’s change of heart and his gratitude to Joya is something that surprises the reader. As throughout the story Littlefield has lived his life (as a district attorney) following the letter of the law. Now he finds himself open to compassion just as Nancy had been. The fact that Littlefield also asks Kilpatrick to find out where Joya lives may also be significant as it suggests again that Littlefield and Nancy are both grateful to Joya and wish to thank her. It is as though Joya’s testimony to Littlefield has opened Littlefield’s eyes. For the first time in the story Littlefield can see the reasoning behind Joya and Rafael’s actions.

## **O.HENRY – ‘THE COP AND THE ANTHEM’**

### **Summary:**

#### **Beginning:**

The short story " The Cop and The Anthem " by O. Henry is about a homeless man called Soapy who notices once in a cold night on his park bench that he has to try to do everything that is possible in order to get into prison for three months to survive the winter.

Attempts...

His first attempt to get there is to dine in an expensive restaurant and to tell the waiter afterwards that he cannot pay the bill. When Soapy goes into the restaurant the head waiter has him thrown out directly because of his outward appearance.

For his second attempt he throws a stone into a shop window. But this attempt also fails because the policeman doesn't believe that a real "lawbreaker" would stay still waiting to let himself voluntarily be arrested and when the policeman sees a man running along the road he assumes that the running man must be the guilty person and pursues that man.

In his third attempt Soapy eats in a restaurant and says afterwards that he can not pay the bill. But the waiter doesn't call the police and isn't interested in Soapy anymore...

... and more attempts

When Soapy discovers a young woman near a policeman he sees his chance to get into prison. He walks towards the woman in order to harass her but she behaves as if she wanted to talk to Soapy at the same moment and hangs on to him so much that he must shake her off at the next corner.

Because this attempt fails he behaves as if he were drunk in the proximity of a policeman. But the policeman ignores Soapy because all the policemen had been informed that the students from Yale are celebrating a party that night.

Even his sixth attempt namely stealing a man's umbrella, fails because the man had stolen the umbrella from somebody else before.

#### **End:**

When Soapy walks along the road he suddenly stops in front of a church. The atmosphere created by the light shining through the coloured windows of the church and also by the organ music to be heard on the road outside the church makes Soapy start thinking about his life. At the same moment as Soapy decides to start a new life a policeman comes towards him and

arrests him because he is not allowed to stand there. Soapy is condemned to three months in prison as he had wanted it all the time!

### **The Cop and the Anthem Introduction**

The story is a humorous one. Soapy, the vagabond was looking for a shelter in winters. He was young but did not work. He wanted to be arrested for three months of the winter season. So he tried every effort to be jailed but when he decided to live a dignified life, he was arrested. Not for the harm he does, but for arguing with a cop.

### **The Cop and the Anthem Summary of the Lesson**

Soapy was a homeless and jobless man. He was restless because of approaching winters. Birds moved to the south, leaves fell from trees, men wanted new warm clothes.

These signals intimidated him of winters. He wanted a shelter and he could think of Blackwell's Island prison. Instead of choosing southern skies or Bay of Naples, he chooses prison where he could have food and shelter.

He kept himself warm by covering and wrapping himself with newspaper. Soapy could keep his body and soul together by begging but he might be asked to do in return to the favor.

Thinking about all the pros and cons, he assured himself that he would be on the wrong side of the law. So that the count might punish him and sent him to jail.

Soapy went out of Madison Square to the great street. He went into a restaurant after checking his looks and appearance. But he was stopped by the head waiter.

The next idea that struck his mind was to break a glass window with a stone. Seeing a policeman arriving at the scene, he stopped. But his second idea had failed as the cop thought that wrong does would run away from the crime scene.

Then, he entered a restaurant where he ordered food of his choice but refused to make payments. Rather than handing him over to police, they threw him out. A policeman was present on the scene but laughed away.

He tried his luck again; in front of the theatre, he started shouting and acting like a drunk man. Yet the cop spared him by saying that they were instructed not to arrest college students.

When he saw the umbrella of a man who was buying a newspaper, he decided to steal it. He dared to confront the man so that he would be arrested. The man, however, was humble enough and admitted it was his mistake.

Depressed he walked south toward Madison Square. He stopped at an old childhood home. He became nostalgic and mesmerized by the soft music, he stopped there. He remembered the days when there were friends, beautiful thoughts that turned into hopeless days.

He heard his conscience and reassert as to pull his strength to become a man of dignity. As he was young, he could change his life. He pulled up his socks to live his life with honor.

By then, a cop enquired about his intention at as Soapy just turned into a confident man argued and tried to justify his presence. Yet in contrast to his supposition, he was sent to jail.

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