



**For
Advanced
Scholars**

THE CRUCIBLE OF CONCISION: MASTERING CRITICAL READING OF THE SHORT NARRATIVE"

**by Olena Bahatska, Andrii Kovalenko,
Hanna Podosynnikova**

Book Two of the Duology

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**"The Crucible of Concision:
Mastering Critical Reading
of the Short Narrative"**

for the Advanced Literary Scholars

Book Two of the Duology

**Міністерство освіти і науки України
Сумський державний педагогічний університет
імені А.С. Макаренка**

**ОЛЕНА БАГАЦЬКА, АНДРІЙ КОВАЛЕНКО
ГАННА ПОДОСИННІКОВА**

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FOREWORD

In the ever-evolving landscape of literary scholarship, the short story has long held a revered and multifaceted position, captivating readers and scholars alike with its ability to distill the complexities of the human experience into a concise yet impactful form. As the field of literary criticism continues to expand and diversify, the need for a comprehensive and theoretically grounded guide to the critical reading of the short narrative has become increasingly pressing.

It is with great enthusiasm that we present this volume, "The Crucible of Concision: Mastering Critical Reading of the Short Narrative." This work aims to equip students and scholars with the necessary tools and frameworks to engage with the intricate tapestry of the short story, empowering them to delve deeper into the nuances of character, narrative, and thematic development that define this beloved literary genre.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), **social-emotional learning (SEL)** is "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions."

Achieving this goal becomes possible through the interaction of teachers with the classroom (SEN instructions, appropriate climate), school administration (SEN culture, practice and policy), families or guardians of students (partnership) and local communities (coordinated educational opportunities) (CASEL, 2023).

The CASEL 5 addresses five broad and interrelated **areas of SEL competence**, two of which will be under thorough analysis in this chapter:

- responsible decision-making,
- social awareness,



Short story as a genre of literature can form a rich, communicative and motivational basis for developing analytical and critical reading skills with focus on SEL, as it contains all necessary elements for raising the awareness of: 1) social orientation; 2) integrity of perception; 3) expressiveness and completeness of contents and form.

To **SEL-related competencies in reading and analyzing short stories** the following ones can refer (Korobova, Podosynnikova, 2024).

- Recognition and proper labeling of feelings that are conveyed through dialogue and narration in short stories. If students are not able to accurately recognize feelings and distinguishing between anger, frustration, annoyance, and disappointment, reading short stories help them become relatively more differentiated regarding their own emotions.
- Developing empathy for characters and being able to take others' perspectives is rooted in emotions' recognition and labeling. When students tend to have difficulty with understanding feelings of a character, his or

her actions will seem hard to explain. Just to the contrary, when the emotions are recognized and labeled properly, the flow of stories will take less cognitive work and the plot will be less frustrating to follow.

- Managing strong emotions while reading follows from the students' ability to manage their own feelings. During the course of developing analytical and critical reading skills, frustration, confusion, and annoyance are the expected feelings that students should learn to manage. If they are put off with encountering story lines and character actions that don't seem to make sense or with words they don't understand, it will inevitably determine their long hanging or failing with a reading assignment.

- Relating to others, especially in groups is born while facing challenges of receiving and giving feedback. To gain optimally from discussing short stories in pairs, small groups, or full classrooms, students learn to wait their turn, listen carefully to what others are saying, or focus attention to what and how others are reasoning, that is the desired characteristic of the best pedagogical approaches.

Problem-solving around difficulties happens at micro and macro levels when the process of acquiring reading skill stops in its tracks. The ability to handle these roadblocks and problem-solve around them is a key determinant in making progress. At a micro level, this can be connected with some difficulties within a sentence, multiple sentences, paragraphs, chapters, etc. When students feel puzzled or frustrated by words they don't understand, or descriptions or messages that evoke strong emotions they are not able to manage, reading progress is blocked. Guided analytical and critical reading instruction based on SEL enables students to learn and practise strategies not to let these blocks accumulate and form strong negative anticipations.

Divided into three illuminating chapters, this guide explores the poetics of tension, the narratives of the self, and the imagined alternatives that permeate the short form. By delving into the theoretical foundations of these critical approaches, readers will gain a profound understanding of the analytical frameworks that underpin the interpretation of suspense, identity construction, and speculative storytelling, preparing them to navigate the rich and diverse canon of short narrative fiction with enhanced critical acumen.

Through a carefully curated selection of illustrative texts, ranging from the classic works of Saki and Malamud to the contemporary masterpieces of Bisson and Winterson, this volume provides readers with

a robust set of case studies, enabling them to put these theoretical concepts into practice and hone their skills in critical analysis and interpretation. In doing so, the guide aspires to cultivate a new generation of literary scholars who are not only versed in the scholarly traditions of the past but also poised to push the boundaries of short narrative criticism in the years to come.

It is our sincere hope that this volume will serve as an indispensable resource for students and scholars alike, inspiring a deeper appreciation for the short story and its ability to illuminate the human experience in all its complexity. May it be a catalyst for further exploration, critical engagement, and the continued advancement of the field of literary studies, empowering readers to uncover the multifaceted layers of meaning that lie within the pages of this captivating literary form.

CHAPTER 1. Poetics of Tension: Interpreting Suspense and Surprise in the Short Story

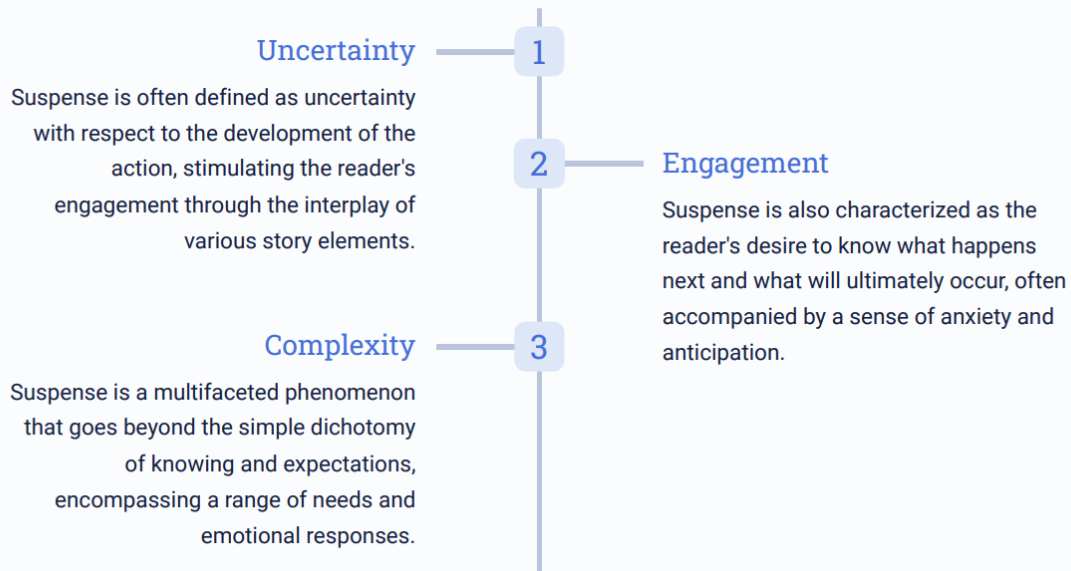
Exploring the Complexities of Suspense

Suspense is a multifaceted literary device that has captivated readers and scholars alike. It is a curious mixture of anticipation, uncertainty, and emotional engagement that arises from the interplay between the reader's mind and the structure of the work. Suspense is not a simple reaction, but rather a complex phenomenon that encompasses various needs, desires, and contradictions inherent in the human psyche. This exploration delves into the nuances of suspense, examining its typology, the factors that contribute to it, and the paradoxical nature of its persistence even in repeat readings.

Delve on the approaches to suspense definition and typology. Try to generate the interpretation of the phenomenon of your own.

Analyze the nature of suspense and the factors that account for it. Make the list of the notions suspense is correlated to and explain them providing examples.

Defining Suspense: Uncertainty and Engagement



Trace the ontology of need as a crucial trigger of suspense. Dwell upon intellectual and emotional suspense in detail. Explain the ways they can interact with each other.

The Ontology of Suspense

Cognitive Suspense

Suspense can be driven by the reader's need to learn and understand, leading to feelings of interest and curiosity. This intellectual suspense is primarily focused on the objective information and dynamics of the story.

Emotional Suspense

Suspense can also be rooted in the reader's emotional needs, such as the desire for a particular outcome or the confirmation of their worldview. This emotional suspense is characterized by feelings of hope, fear, and the pleasure of anticipation.

Interplay of Needs

Suspense often arises from the interplay between the reader's intellectual and emotional needs, as they may simultaneously desire objective understanding and a specific narrative outcome.

Elicit the plausible reasons of the so-called paradox of suspense.

The Paradox of Suspense

1 Repeat Readings

The so-called "paradox of suspense" refers to the persistent tension and suspense felt by readers even when they know the outcome of a story, such as in repeat readings.

2 Memory and Expectation

Theories have attempted to explain this paradox in terms of memory gaps, the reader's fictional immersion, and the expectation of unique events, but the underlying reasons remain complex.

3 Anticipation and Fulfillment

The pleasure of repeat readings often lies in the anticipation of a familiar outcome and the fulfillment of that expectation, rather than in the discovery of new information.

4 Intellectual and Emotional Needs

Rereading a work can satisfy both intellectual needs, such as a deeper understanding, and emotional needs, such as the re-experience of pleasurable moments, leading to a mix of suspense and satisfaction.

Search for all of the peculiarities related to artificial vs natural suspense. Explain the basic ways artificial suspense is created in literary texts.

Artificial vs. Natural Suspense

1

Natural Suspense

Suspense that arises naturally from the action and development of the story, driven by the reader's needs and expectations.

2

Artificial Suspense

Suspense created through literary devices such as selection, viewpoint, and anachrony, which introduce gaps and omissions to trigger the reader's curiosity.

3

Interplay

Artificial suspense relies on the foundation of natural suspense, as the reader must be engaged with the action for the literary devices to be effective.

Techniques for Creating Artificial Suspense



Omission

Withholding information from the reader to trigger their curiosity and desire to know more.



Viewpoint

Presenting the action from a limited perspective to create gaps in the reader's knowledge.



Foreshadowing

Hinting at future events through transparent or non-transparent clues to build anticipation.



Conventions

Leveraging literary conventions and expectations to create a sense of suspense and uncertainty.

Study the alternative approach to suspense typology. How does it add to your understanding of the phenomenon?

Resolved and Unresolved Suspense

Resolved Suspense

Suspense that is ultimately satisfied through the revelation of a secret, the resolution of a mystery, or the fulfillment of an expectation, as often found in genre fiction.

Unresolved Suspense

Suspense that remains unresolved, challenging the reader's desire for closure and mastery of the text, as can be found in more literary and experimental works.

Responsibility of Reading

Embracing unresolved suspense requires a thoughtful and scrupulous approach to reading, acknowledging the complexities and ambiguities inherent in literary texts.

Suspense as a Literary Function

Literary texts can be seen as sites of suspense, where questions are more complex and challenging than can be reduced to a single determined meaning.

The Multifaceted Nature of Suspense

Suspense Type	Description	Examples
Result-oriented	Suspense focused on what will happen	Thrillers, detective stories, romances
Process-oriented	Suspense focused on how events will unfold	Mysteries, literary fiction
Cognitive/Intellectual	Suspense driven by the need to understand	Novels exploring complex themes
Emotional	Suspense rooted in the reader's desires	Melodramas, popular fiction
Resolved	Suspense that is ultimately satisfied	Genre fiction with clear resolutions
Unresolved	Suspense that remains open-ended	Experimental, literary works

Make conclusions about the complicated nature of suspense as a literary phenomenon.

Embracing the Complexities of Suspense



Multidimensional Experience

Suspense is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a range of intellectual, emotional, and even contradictory responses from the reader, defying simplistic categorization.



Ambiguity and Responsibility

Embracing the ambiguities and unresolved tensions in literary suspense requires a thoughtful and responsible approach to reading, acknowledging the complexities inherent in the text.



Enriching the Reading Experience

Engaging with the various forms of suspense, both resolved and unresolved, can lead to a deeper and more rewarding reading experience, challenging the reader's assumptions and expanding their understanding.

HECTOR H. MUNRO (SAKI)



Saki's collection *The Toys of Peace, and Other Papers* was published posthumously in 1919. Saki had died three years earlier, the victim of a sniper's bullet, and the stories in this volume – which included sketches of pre-war England as well as tales of war – were written while he served in France. "The Interlopers" was included in this collection. With its fundamental theme of the deadly repercussions of long-standing feuds and a willingness to commit violence, "The Interlopers" clearly represents the experiences of a man who is caught in a global conflict of massive proportions.

Study the biographical information about the author. Highlight the major facts which are sure to influence his choices of literary themes, characters, settings, moral implications, etc. Search for extra information about Saki that may interest you as an interpreter of his literary works.

BIOGRAPHY

Hector H. Munro, who adopted the pen name Saki upon embarking on his literary career, was born on December 18, 1870, in Burma to a British army officer and his spouse. Following the death of his mother in 1873, Saki and his siblings were sent to Britain, where they were raised by their

aunts. In 1888, Saki's father retired from military service, subsequently taking his children on various journeys across the European continent.

In 1893, Saki returned to Burma as a police officer; however, he contracted malaria shortly thereafter and returned to Britain the following year. In 1896, he relocated to London with aspirations of becoming a writer. Saki published his first short story, "Dogged," in 1899, and the subsequent year released a nonfiction work concerning Russian history. During this period, he collaborated with political cartoonist Francis Carruthers Gould to produce "Alice in Westminster," a series of satirical pieces critiquing the British government's management of the Boer War in South Africa. This series was initially published in the Westminster Gazette and later compiled into a book titled *The Westminster Alice* (1902).

Saki and Gould partnered again two years later on a similar endeavor. In 1902, Saki assumed the role of foreign correspondent for the *Tory Morning Gazette*, while simultaneously continuing to publish short stories in the *Westminster Gazette*. In 1908, he departed from journalism to concentrate solely on fiction writing. He maintained a steady output of short stories until 1914, at which point he resumed his journalistic pursuits.

With the onset of World War I in August 1914, Saki enlisted in the military and was deployed to the trenches in France by November. Despite his active participation in numerous battles, he continued to produce written work throughout the war, contributing articles on military life to the army newspaper. Tragically, Saki was killed by sniper fire on November 14, 1916. His posthumous collection, *The Toys of Peace, and Other Papers*, which included "The Interlopers," was published in 1919. Another collection, *The Square Egg, and Other Sketches, with Three Plays*, was released in 1924 and featured Saki's writings from his wartime experiences.

Read the story INTERLOPERS and fulfill the tasks that follow.

PLOTLINE ANALYSIS

Chronological Timeline

Using the provided summary as a reference, construct a detailed chronological timeline outlining the major events that unfold in the story. Ensure that your timeline includes the following elements:

- a) The longstanding feud between the Gradwitz and Znaeym families, including the court's ruling in favor of the Gradwitz claim.
- b) The mutual disdain harbored by the young Ulrich and Georg as boys.
- c) The events of the fateful evening, including Ulrich's assembly of the forestry workers, the confrontation between the two men, and the sudden tree collapse.
- d) The threats exchanged between Ulrich and Georg regarding the arrival of their respective search parties.
- e) Ulrich's offer of the wine flask and the subsequent proposal to bury the feud.
- f) The approach of the mysterious figures, which Ulrich recognizes as wolves.

Suspense Analysis

Analyze the various types of suspense employed by the author throughout the narrative. In your discussion, address the following:

- a) Dramatic suspense: identify moments of heightened tension and anticipation, such as the confrontation between Ulrich and Georg, and explain how these instances contribute to the overall narrative suspense.
- b) Verbal suspense: examine the role of the threats exchanged between the two men and how they generate a sense of uncertainty and foreboding.
- c) Situational suspense: discuss how the entrapment of Ulrich and Georg beneath the fallen tree, and their dependency on the arrival of their respective search parties, creates a sense of suspense and tension.
- d) Ironic suspense: explore how the author's withholding of the true nature of the approaching figures (the wolves) from the oblivious Georg heightens the suspense and anticipation for the reader.

Conclusion

In a well-crafted concluding paragraph, discuss the significance of the final, ominous twist in the narrative and its impact on the reader's

overall experience. Analyze how this unexpected development subverts the reader's expectations and leaves the story on a note of profound uncertainty.

Your assignment should be presented in a clear, organized, and academic manner, with appropriate use of textual evidence and literary analysis techniques. The depth and nuance of your engagement with the concepts of chronology and suspense will be a key factor in the evaluation of your work.

PLOT SUMMARY

The protagonists of "The Interlopers," Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym, have been engaged in an intergenerational feud since birth, stemming from a longstanding dispute between their respective families over the ownership of a parcel of forested land. Despite the courts ruling in favor of the Gradwitz family's claim, the Znaeym clan has persistently contested this decision, leading to a deeply personal and increasingly acrimonious rivalry between Ulrich and Georg over the course of their lives.

As young men, Ulrich and Georg harbored a mutual disdain for one another. On the fateful evening depicted in the narrative, the two have reached a point of uncompromising enmity, each intent on confronting and ultimately eliminating the other. Ulrich has assembled a contingent of forestry workers to patrol the disputed territory in search of Georg, hoping to encounter him alone. This wish is granted when Ulrich, separated from his men, comes face-to-face with his adversary, both armed and prepared for a final showdown.

Yet, when the moment of reckoning arrives, neither man is able to bring himself to fire upon the other. Before they can act, a sudden bolt of lightning causes a tree to collapse, trapping Ulrich and Georg beneath its branches. Dazed, injured, and infuriated by their predicament, the two men find themselves in close proximity, their longstanding animosity unabated.

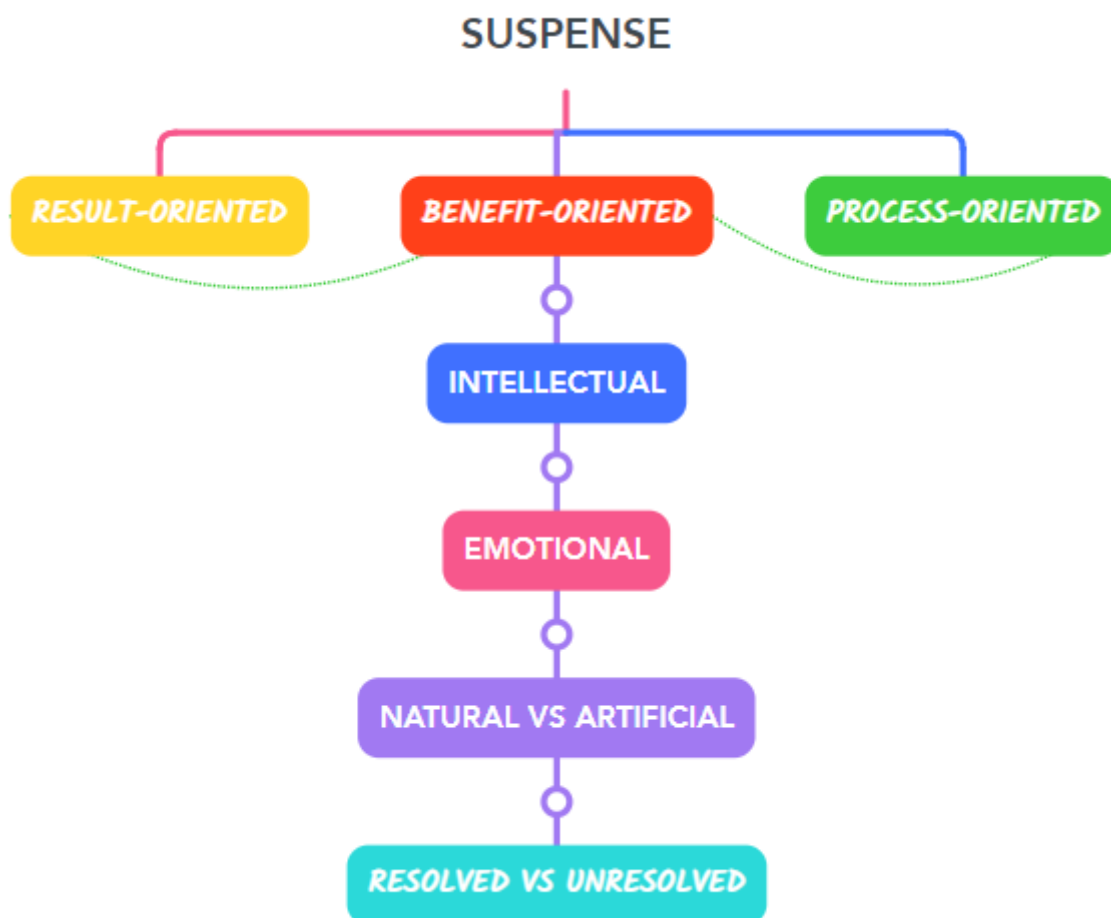
Georg threatens that, when his own men arrive, they will free him but then roll the tree onto Ulrich, a threat that Ulrich counters by asserting that his

forestry workers will reach them first and kill Georg. Both protagonists recognize that the outcome hinges on which group of men reaches them first.

In a moment of unexpected compassion, Ulrich produces a flask of wine and offers it to Georg, who refuses to partake with his enemy. Reflecting on the futility of their feud, Ulrich proposes that they lay aside their quarrel and forge a newfound friendship, a proposal that Georg eventually accepts after a period of contemplation.

As the two men unite in calling for assistance, Ulrich glimpses figures approaching through the woods, which he initially believes to be the arrival of their respective search parties. However, to his horror, he soon realizes that the approaching figures are not human, but rather a pack of wolves.

Ulrich, having seen this alarming development, withholds this information from the still-oblivious Georg, leaving the narrative to conclude on a note of foreboding uncertainty.



Study the basic information about the main characters of the story.

CHARACTERS

In Saki's short story "The Interlopers," the author presents two complex and multifaceted protagonists whose longstanding feud serves as the narrative's central conflict. The characters, Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym, are intricately developed through their actions, dialogue, and internal reflections, offering readers a nuanced exploration of human nature, pride, and reconciliation.

Ulrich von Gradwitz, a man of considerable wealth and social standing, is portrayed as the legal proprietor of a contentious parcel of land. Despite his rightful claim, he is acutely aware of Georg's persistent trespassing and hunting activities within the disputed territory. On the fateful night of the story's primary events, Ulrich has mobilized a contingent of men with the express purpose of locating and, more ominously, terminating Georg. Ulrich's initial characterization is marked by hostility, as evidenced by his pejorative labeling of Georg as a "forest-thief" and "game-snatcher," underscoring the depth of their animosity. However, Ulrich's character undergoes a significant transformation following the catastrophic incident that leaves both men pinned beneath a fallen tree. In this moment of shared vulnerability, Ulrich demonstrates a capacity for magnanimity by offering Georg a share of his wine and initiating the prospect of reconciliation. This gesture reveals a latent nobility in Ulrich's character, suggesting a potential for growth and redemption. Furthermore, Ulrich's role as the first to perceive the approaching wolves adds a layer of dramatic irony to his character arc.

Georg Znaeym, in contrast, is presented as a descendant of a lineage of modest landowners who have steadfastly contested the judicial ruling regarding the land in question. Georg's perspective on the dispute is encapsulated in his reference to the area as Ulrich's "stolen forest," a phrase that succinctly conveys both his sense of injustice and his deeply entrenched resentment. Despite this initial antagonism, Georg's character also demonstrates flexibility and a capacity for change. His eventual acceptance of Ulrich's overture of friendship represents a significant shift in his worldview and interpersonal dynamics. Georg's subsequent musings on the astonishment their newfound amity will elicit within their

community further emphasize the profound nature of this transformation and hint at the broader social implications of their reconciliation.

Study the dominating themes of the story. Which of them do you consider the most acute or close to your sphere of interests or priorities? Are these themes contemporary enough to extrapolate them to the life of today in this country? Draw the necessary parallels.

THEMES

Enmity

Enmity serves as the narrative's cornerstone, manifesting in the generational feud between Ulrich von Gradwitz and Georg Znaeym. This longstanding animosity, rooted in a territorial dispute, has escalated to potentially lethal proportions, transcending the original legal settlement. Saki's deliberate obfuscation of the feud's specific catalysts allows the conflict to serve as a microcosm for broader societal and international tensions. The author, drawing from his experiences as a soldier in World War I, subtly alludes to the larger geopolitical landscape of early 20th century Europe. The characters' inherited antipathy mirrors the complex web of alliances, territorial disputes, and ethnic tensions that precipitated the global conflict, thereby providing a poignant commentary on the futility and destructive nature of protracted hostilities.

Community

Community emerges as another significant theme, with the author exploring the ripple effects of interpersonal conflicts on the broader social fabric. The potential reconciliation between Ulrich and Georg is presented not merely as a personal matter but as an event of profound social consequence. The anticipated "wonderful changes" in the countryside underscore the far-reaching implications of their feud and hint at the transformative power of reconciliation, suggesting that individual actions can have substantial communal repercussions.

Man versus nature

The theme of man versus nature is deftly woven into the narrative, with the forest serving as both setting and metaphorical antagonist. The very

title, "The Interlopers," positions the human characters as trespassers in a realm that ultimately defies human attempts at ownership and control. The violent intervention of natural forces – first the fallen tree, then the approaching wolves – serves to highlight the hubris inherent in human claims of dominion over the natural world. This theme resonates with broader environmental and philosophical discourses concerning humanity's relationship with nature and the limitations of anthropocentric worldviews.

Social class

The theme of social class permeates the narrative, providing a crucial context for the characters' motivations and actions. The disparity between the Gradwitz and Znaeym families' socioeconomic statuses adds layers of complexity to their feud, suggesting that class tensions exacerbate and perpetuate the conflict. The Gradwitz family's extensive landholdings and aristocratic trappings stand in stark contrast to the Znaeyms' more modest circumstances, highlighting the role of economic inequality in shaping social dynamics and personal animosities.

Through these interrelated themes, Saki crafts a narrative that transcends its immediate plot, offering a nuanced exploration of human nature, societal structures, and the often arbitrary nature of conflict. The story serves as both a microcosm of early 20th century geopolitical tensions and a timeless meditation on the human condition, inviting readers to contemplate the consequences of enmity, the power of reconciliation, and the ultimate fragility of human constructs in the face of natural forces.

Study the information about Saki's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.

STYLE

In "The Interlopers," Saki employs a variety of sophisticated stylistic techniques to enhance the narrative's depth and impact. A detailed analysis of these features reveals the author's masterful craftsmanship and the story's literary significance.

Point of View

The narrative is presented through a third-person omniscient perspective, a strategic choice that allows for a comprehensive exploration of the story's themes and characters. This narrative stance enables Saki to provide readers with a panoramic view of the conflict's historical context, delving into the intricate dynamics of the long-standing feud between the Gradwitz and Znaeym families. The omniscient narrator's ability to access and articulate the inner thoughts and motivations of both Ulrich and Georg serves a dual purpose: it illuminates the characters' psychological complexities and underscores the ironic similarities between these ostensible enemies. This narrative approach facilitates a nuanced portrayal of the characters' evolving perspectives, particularly as they confront their shared predicament. The omniscient viewpoint also allows for seamless transitions between present action, historical context, and character introspection, creating a rich, multidimensional narrative tapestry.

Dialogue

Saki's use of dialogue is both economical and pivotal, serving as a critical vehicle for character development and thematic exploration. The verbal exchanges between Ulrich and Georg are particularly significant, as they mark the turning point in their relationship and the story's trajectory. The dialogue is crafted with precision, each word laden with meaning and subtext. Ulrich's initial proposition to "bury the old quarrel" and Georg's subsequent agreement are not merely plot devices but serve as windows into the characters' psyches, revealing their capacity for change and their shared humanity. The dialogue also functions as a means of dramatic irony, with the characters' newfound amity juxtaposed against their impending doom. This juxtaposition heightens the story's emotional impact and underscores its thematic concerns regarding the futility of human conflicts in the face of greater natural forces.

Ending

The story's conclusion is a masterclass in implication and understatement. By ending with the single word "Wolves!" and a description of Ulrich's terrified reaction, Saki employs a technique of narrative ellipsis, leaving the final outcome unstated but unmistakably clear. This approach engages

the reader's imagination, inviting them to envision the gruesome fate that awaits the characters. The abrupt ending serves multiple purposes: it maintains the story's taut pacing, amplifies the sense of impending doom, and reinforces the theme of nature's indifference to human concerns. The juxtaposition of the characters' recent reconciliation with their imminent demise adds a layer of tragic irony, emphasizing the story's themes of fate and the capriciousness of human existence.

Personification

Saki's use of personification elevates nature from mere setting to an active, sentient force within the narrative. By attributing human characteristics to natural elements, the author creates a vivid, animated backdrop that mirrors and magnifies the human drama unfolding within it. The personification of the wind, trees, and the forest at large serves to heighten the sense of conflict between man and nature, positioning the natural world as a formidable antagonist. This literary device not only enriches the story's descriptive palette but also reinforces its thematic concerns regarding human hubris and the ultimate supremacy of natural forces. The violent personification of nature, particularly in the felling of the tree, serves as a metaphorical rebuke to the characters' attempts to claim dominion over the forest, underscoring the futility of their feud in the face of nature's indifferent power.



COMPARE AND CONTRAST

1910s: Following the conclusion of World War I, forty-two nations, excluding the United States, became members of the League of Nations, an organization officially established in 1920 with the aim of fostering global peace.

Today: As of 2001, the United Nations comprises 189 member states worldwide. Established in 1945, the UN succeeded the League of Nations, with a dual mission of preserving international peace and security while deterring acts of aggression.

1910s: By the midpoint of the decade, nations across the globe were engaged in World War I.

Today: Numerous regional conflicts persist in various parts of the world, including the ongoing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East, as well as the sectarian strife between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Over the years, the United Nations, alongside various countries, particularly the United States, has been actively involved in efforts to broker peace.

1910s: On the eve of World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Empire encompassed a vast expanse of territory in Central Europe. The empire's defeat in the war precipitated its dissolution into the independent republics of Austria and Hungary, alongside significant territorial losses that led to the establishment of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

Today: The dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, coupled with the collapse of communism across Eastern and Central Europe, resulted in the emergence of new countries and international borders. The former Czechoslovakia has been divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, while the former Yugoslavia has fragmented into six independent nations: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Macedonia.



Study the historical context of the time Saki created his literary works. Dwell upon the factors you consider to be the crucial to influence his style of writing.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

World War I

In the late 1800s and early 1900s rivalries between European powers began to intensify. Imperialist states were fighting over land in Asia and Africa, ethnic groups were struggling for self-control, and nations were competing to build larger and more powerful military forces. In addition, the region had developed a system of alliances in which nations would

help each other out in disputes. In 1914 a Serbian nationalist shot and killed the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, which proved to be the spark that set off World War I. As tensions mounted between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, Germany (which was allied with Austria-Hungary) declared war on Russia (which was allied with Serbia). Germany expanded the conflict when it declared war on France and marched into Belgium to reach France, thus breaking an 1839 neutrality agreement. Great Britain declared war on Germany that same day. Other nations joined the fray, and eventually Europe was divided between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire) and the Allied forces (Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and dozens of other nations). The western front of the war stretched along eastern France, while the eastern front saw battles deep into Russia. Fighting also took place in the location of present-day Turkey, as well as in the North Sea. In 1916 the war in the west and the war at sea had reached a stalemate. However, early in 1917, Germany decided to use unrestricted submarine warfare and also sent a secret telegram to Mexico proposing an alliance against the United States. In April 1917 the United States entered the war on the side of the Allies. In 1918 the Russians signed a separate peace treaty with the Central Powers. To many people, this signaled that the war would last years longer. Germany withdrew its troops from the eastern front and launched an attack on Allied lines in France. They came within 37 miles of Paris, France's capital; however, the thousands of American troops that were arriving every month helped hold them back. The Allies launched a counteroffensive in July 1918. At the same time, the Central Powers were crumbling. Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire surrendered, and a revolution in Austria-Hungary brought the Hapsburg Empire to an end. Austria and Hungary formed separate governments and stopped fighting. The German government collapsed in November 1918. On November 11, 1918, an armistice was signed ending World War I.

The War in France

The western front of the war stretched through eastern France. The Allies stopped the first German advance in September 1914. In the First Battle of the Marne, French troops launched a counterattack. After this battle, both the French and German armies prepared to hold their ground. They resorted to a strategy known as trench warfare in which each side

defends its position by fighting from the protection of deep ditches. Two massive systems of trenches stretched for 400 miles along the western front. The area between opposing trenches, known as no man's-land, varied in width from about 200 to 1,000 yards. Each side made little progress. In the battle of the Somme, which lasted from July through November 1915, the Allies were only able to force the Germans to retreat by a few miles. Another battle at Verdun lasted for ten months. In these two battles alone, almost one million soldiers died. By the time the Americans arrived in Europe in 1917, German troops were occupying parts of France and Belgium. American units joined the Allies along the western front and were instrumental in keeping the German forces outside of Paris. The Second Battle of the Marne, fought in the summer of 1918, marked the turning point of the war. Allied forces began to force the German retreat from France. By the time the armistice was signed in November 1918, Germany occupied only a tiny portion of French land.

British Society

British society underwent significant changes in the 1910s and 1920s. The discrepancies between the lifestyles of the rich and poor were far less evident than they had been previously. Fewer people had servants, poorer people had access to the same goods as the wealthy, and the middle-class came to hold greater political power. Many homes had modern amenities, such as electricity and plumbing. By the end of the decade, class distinctions had become notably less important in determining social groupings, even marriages. World War I also engendered important changes. Millions of women entered the workforce, finding employment in government and private offices and in factories. Such increased economic opportunities contributed to women's emancipation, and by 1918, the Franchise Act gave all women over the age of twenty-eight the right to vote.



Further Areas of Inquiry and Scholarly Exploration

📖 Envision a scenario where you have been engaged as a mediator on the eve of the narrative's events, tasked with facilitating a reconciliation between Ulrich and Georg. What strategies would you propose to resolve their longstanding conflict?

📖 Critically examine Saki's selection of the title "The Interlopers" for his short story. Who are the entities designated as interlopers, and what qualities or actions render them as such?

📖 Consider that Saki composed "The Interlopers" during his military service in World War I. In what ways might the narrative reflect or incorporate the experiences and perspectives of a soldier engaged in armed conflict?

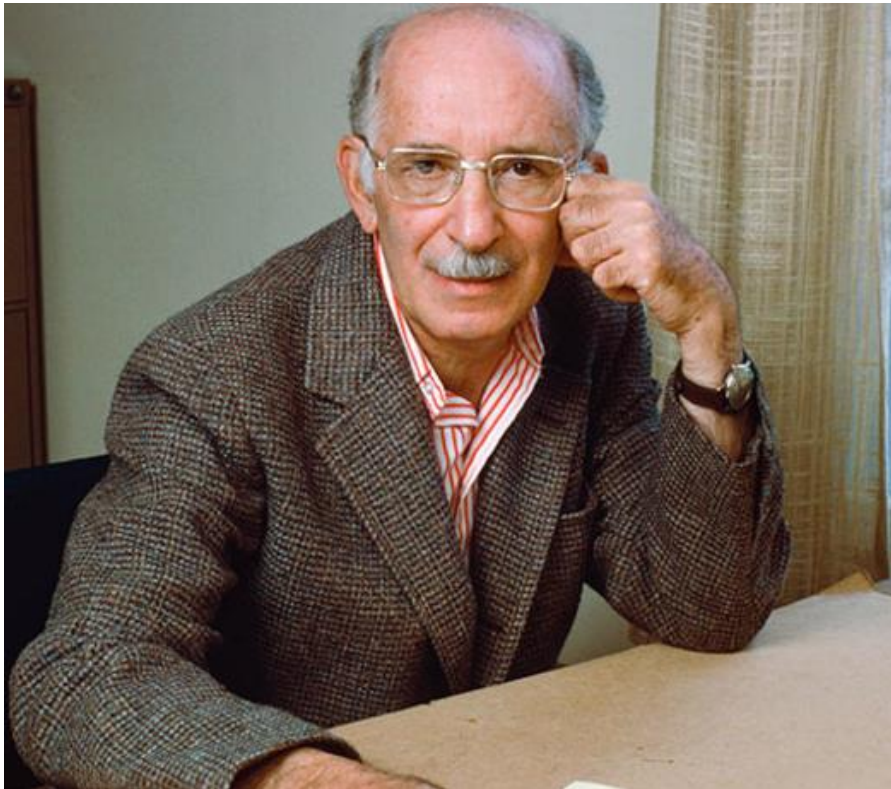
📖 Identify a work of visual art that, in your estimation, effectively captures the setting of the story. Provide a detailed description of the artwork and elucidate why you believe it accurately represents the narrative's physical and atmospheric context.

📖 The story is set within the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the period preceding World War I. Conduct comprehensive research and compose a scholarly essay examining the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural milieu in which Ulrich and Georg existed.

📖 Alexander Malcolm Forbes, in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, characterizes "The Interlopers" as a parable. Provide a definition of the term "parable" and assess the efficacy of this story as an exemplar of the parable form. Support your evaluation with textual evidence and literary analysis.



BERNARD MALAMUD



Bernard Malamud's short story, "The Magic Barrel," was initially published in the *Partisan Review* in 1954 and subsequently included in his first collection of short fiction in 1958. This narrative, which chronicles a rabbinical student's encounters with a marriage broker, received a favorable reception during the 1950s. Malamud's collection, also titled *The Magic Barrel*, garnered the National Book Award for Fiction in 1959.

As Malamud established himself as a prominent novelist in the 1960s and 1970s, his short stories were widely anthologized and garnered significant interest from literary scholars and students. Writing within the Jewish-American literary tradition, Malamud's works often explore themes and issues pertinent to the Jewish community.

"The Magic Barrel" is a love story with an unexpected conclusion, tracing a young man's journey toward self-understanding while posing profound religious questions regarding the nature of love – both human and divine. The narrative queries whether human love is a prerequisite for the love of God. Notably, Malamud's "The Magic Barrel" is distinguished by its narrative economy, employing succinct strokes to craft compelling and multifaceted characters.

Study the biographical information about the author. Highlight the major facts which are sure to influence his choices of literary themes, characters, settings, moral implications, etc. Search for extra information about Bernard Malamud that may interest you as an interpreter of his literary works.

BIOGRAPHY

Bernard Malamud was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1914 to Russian Jewish immigrants Max and Bertha Malamud. He later described his parents as "gentle, honest, kindly people." Max, who managed a small grocery store, served as the inspiration for Morris Bober, the protagonist of Malamud's second novel, *The Assistant* (1957). Malamud completed his high school education in Brooklyn and graduated from the City College of New York in 1936. In 1942, he earned a Master of Arts degree from Columbia University.

Malamud did not begin to write seriously until after World War II, when the atrocities of the Holocaust became widely known. This revelation heightened his awareness of his own Jewish identity. He reflected, "I was concerned with what Jews stood for... with getting down to the bare bones of things. I was concerned with... how Jews felt they had to live in order to go on living." In 1945, Malamud married Ann de Chiara, a union that was viewed as unforgivable by his traditional Jewish family. Following the wedding, Max Malamud undertook the rituals of mourning for his son, a reaction reminiscent of Salzman's behavior in "The Magic Barrel."

In 1949, Malamud and Ann relocated to Oregon after he accepted a teaching position at Oregon State University. There, he noted, "I was allowed to teach freshman composition but not literature because I was nakedly without a Ph.D." It was during his time at Oregon State that Malamud wrote "The Magic Barrel" in the basement of the university library. In 1952, he published his first novel, *The Natural*, which offers a poignant exploration of the American hero through the lens of a baseball player. His second novel, *The Assistant* (1957), presents a poignant narrative about an impoverished grocer and the Catholic drifter who comes to work for him.

In 1961, Malamud and his family moved to Vermont, where he took a position teaching creative writing at Bennington College, a role he

would fulfill for nearly twenty-five years. Despite being a highly respected educator, Malamud expressed skepticism regarding the efficacy of creative writing courses: "In essence, one doesn't teach writing; one encourages talented individuals whom one may be able to assist. I feel that writing courses have limited value, although they do encourage some students to read fiction with care."

Malamud received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his 1966 novel, *The Fixer*, and was awarded the American Library Association's Notable Book citation for *Dubin's Lives* in 1979. He remained actively engaged in teaching and writing until his death in 1986.

Read the story THE MAGIC BARREL and fulfill the tasks that follow.

PLOTLINE ANALYSIS

Construct a detailed timeline that maps the chronological progression of the key events in the story. Be sure to include specific details and page/section references to support your timeline.

Analyze the different types of suspense the author creates throughout the story. Identify at least three distinct instances of suspense (e.g., dramatic irony, foreshadowing, delayed revelation) and explain how each contributes to the overall narrative tension and reader engagement.

Discuss how the author's manipulation of chronology and deployment of suspenseful techniques work in tandem to shape the reader's experience and deepen the thematic exploration of faith, atonement, and familial obligation.

Drawing upon the provided summary and your own close reading, write a 2-page essay that synthesizes your findings. Be sure to:

- a) Organize your essay coherently with a clear thesis statement.
- b) Incorporate relevant textual evidence to support your analysis.
- c) Engage with the complexities and ambiguities present in the story.
- d) Consider how the author's stylistic choices impact the reader's understanding.
- e) Make insightful connections between the chronology, suspense, and the story's central themes.

This assignment requires a deep engagement with the narrative structure and the author's craft. Your essay should demonstrate your ability to analyze how formal elements contribute to the thematic richness of the text. Careful attention to detail and nuance will be essential in crafting a sophisticated, university-level critical response.

PLOT SUMMARY

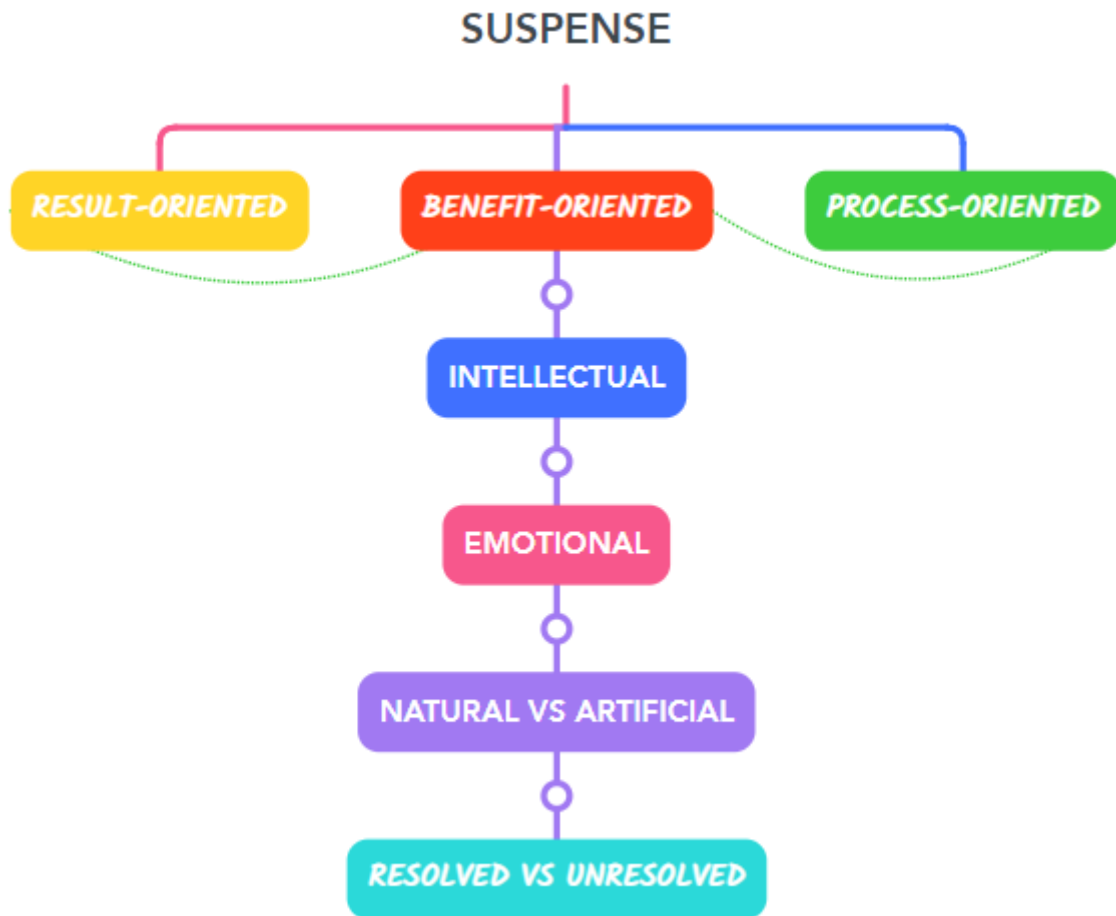
The narrative centers on Leo Finkle, a rabbinical student at New York City's Yeshivah University. Seeking a spouse to bolster his professional prospects, Finkle consults a Jewish marriage broker, or shadchan, named Pinye Salzman. Salzman promotes his extensive client base and describes several eligible young women to the increasingly uncomfortable Finkle, who questions the transactional nature of the arranged courtship process.

Persistent, Salzman particularly recommends the schoolteacher Lily Hirschorn. Finkle reluctantly agrees to meet Lily, sensing Salzman's voyeuristic oversight. During their acquaintance, Lily probes Finkle's religious devotion, to which he confesses a lack of genuine faith. Disillusioned, Lily rejects the potential match, ending the failed arranged liaison.

Dejected by his failed encounter with Lily, Finkle confronts his own spiritual emptiness and lack of authentic religious devotion. Though considering abandoning his rabbinical studies, he ultimately resolves to find a wife whom he can love on his own terms.

When the persistent Salzman returns, Finkle rebukes the matchmaker's misrepresentation to Lily. Undeterred, Salzman leaves Finkle with a portfolio of prospective brides. Perusing the photographs, Finkle becomes captivated by a final image, that of Salzman's own estranged daughter Stella, whom the matchmaker has apparently cast out for her transgressions against tradition.

Finkle becomes desperately infatuated with the enigmatic Stella, perceiving an opportunity for spiritual redemption through his love. He demands that Salzman arrange a meeting, suspecting the matchmaker had intentionally orchestrated this outcome. When Finkle finally encounters Stella, the narrative implies Salzman has resigned himself to mourning his daughter as if she were dead, a devastating condemnation within Jewish custom.



Study the basic information about the main characters of the story.

CHARACTERS

In Bernard Malamud's "The Magic Barrel," the characters are intricately crafted to embody complex psychological and spiritual dimensions, serving as vehicles for the exploration of themes such as faith, love, and self-discovery. The author's nuanced portrayal of these individuals invites a deeper analysis of their roles and significance within the narrative.

Leo Finkle, the protagonist, is presented as a multifaceted character whose journey forms the crux of the story. Initially characterized by his academic pursuits and pragmatic approach to marriage, Leo's character arc is marked by a profound spiritual and emotional awakening. His realization of his own emotional deficiencies, particularly his inability to "love God so well as he might, because he had not loved man," serves as a catalyst for his transformation. This epiphany underscores the story's exploration of the interconnectedness between spiritual devotion and

human empathy. Leo's eventual infatuation with Stella Salzman represents not merely a romantic development but a symbolic confrontation with his own repressed emotions and desires. This character progression invites readers to contemplate the nature of authentic spirituality and the role of human connections in one's religious vocation.

Lily Hirschorn, while occupying a relatively brief role in the narrative, serves as a crucial foil to Leo's character. Her portrayal as an educated, well-rounded individual who is "not unpretty" sets up expectations of a suitable match, only to subvert them. The failure of their potential union highlights the disparity between societal expectations and personal compatibility, further emphasizing Leo's internal conflict and his need for genuine emotional connection rather than a marriage of convenience.

Pinye Salzman, the matchmaker, is a character of considerable complexity and ambiguity. His shabby appearance and apparent poverty contrast with his role as a facilitator of unions, suggesting a disconnect between his material circumstances and his spiritual or social function. Salzman's character oscillates between that of a well-meaning intermediary and a potentially manipulative "trickster," leaving both Leo and the reader uncertain of his true motives. This ambiguity extends to his relationship with his daughter Stella, adding layers of mystery and moral ambiguity to his character. Salzman's role in the story can be interpreted as that of a catalyst, deliberately or inadvertently guiding Leo towards self-discovery and emotional awakening.

Stella Salzman, despite her limited physical presence in the narrative, emerges as a pivotal character whose significance transcends her actual appearances. Her characterization is largely constructed through others' perceptions and descriptions, particularly those of her father and Leo. The contrast between Salzman's portrayal of her as "wild, without shame" and Leo's perception of her "desperate innocence" creates a compelling ambiguity around her character. Stella serves as a projection of Leo's desires and fears, embodying both the allure of emotional authenticity and the potential for moral transgression. Her character challenges conventional notions of purity and sin, inviting a more nuanced understanding of human nature and redemption.

Study the dominating themes of the story. Which of them do you consider the most acute or close to your sphere of interests or priorities? Are these themes contemporary enough to extrapolate them to the life of today in this country? Draw the necessary parallels.

THEMES

Identity

In Bernard Malamud's "The Magic Barrel," the theme of identity emerges as a central and multifaceted construct, intricately woven into the narrative fabric through the protagonist's psychological and spiritual journey. The author's exploration of this theme is nuanced and profound, inviting readers to contemplate the complexities of self-discovery, personal authenticity, and the transformative power of human connection.

Leo Finkle's quest for identity is portrayed as a dynamic process, one that evolves from a state of emotional and spiritual stagnation to a profound awakening of self-awareness. Initially, Leo's identity is largely defined by his academic pursuits and his aspiration to become a rabbi. However, this superficial construct of self is swiftly challenged and deconstructed as the narrative progresses. The author skillfully employs Leo's interactions, particularly his conversation with Lily Hirschorn, as catalysts for introspection and self-realization.

Leo's admission that he "came to God, not because I loved him, but because I did not" serves as a pivotal moment in his journey of self-discovery. This confession not only reveals the hollowness of his religious vocation but also underscores a fundamental disconnect between his outward identity and his inner emotional landscape. Malamud's portrayal of Leo's subsequent epiphany - seeing himself "for the first time as he truly was - unloved and loveless" - is a poignant illustration of the often painful process of confronting one's authentic self.

The author's treatment of identity is further enriched by its juxtaposition with the concept of love. As Leo grapples with his newfound self-awareness, he begins to perceive love not merely as a romantic pursuit but as a transformative force capable of reshaping his very essence. This shift in perspective marks a crucial evolution in Leo's understanding of

identity, suggesting that true selfhood is not a static state but a dynamic interplay between one's inner world and external relationships.

Malamud's narrative deftly navigates the tension between idealism and reality in the formation of identity. Leo's determination to "go on as planned" despite recognizing his imperfections reflects the human tendency to cling to idealized self-conceptions. However, the author subtly subverts this inclination by presenting love - particularly Leo's nascent feelings for Stella - as a means of reconciling the gap between the ideal and the real self.

The symbolism of Stella as a vehicle for Leo's "redemption" adds another layer to the theme of identity. By projecting his hopes for personal transformation onto Stella, Leo engages in a complex process of identity construction that blends self-discovery with external validation. This dynamics raises profound questions about the role of others in shaping our sense of self and the potential pitfalls of seeking redemption through another person.

Furthermore, the open-ended nature of the story's conclusion invites readers to contemplate the ongoing nature of identity formation. The hopeful tone regarding Leo's potential redemption through his relationship with Stella suggests that identity is not a destination but a journey, continually shaped by our experiences and relationships.

In exploring the theme of identity, Malamud crafts a narrative that resonates deeply with the human experience of self-discovery and personal growth. By intertwining this theme with concepts of love, spirituality, and personal authenticity, the author presents a rich tapestry that invites readers to reflect on their own journeys of self-realization and the myriad factors that shape our understanding of who we are. The story ultimately posits that true identity emerges not from isolation or rigid adherence to preconceived notions of self, but through genuine emotional connections and a willingness to confront and embrace one's authentic nature.

God and Religion

In Bernard Malamud's "The Magic Barrel," the theme of God and Religion is explored with remarkable depth and nuance, offering a profound meditation on the nature of spiritual devotion and its inextricable connection to human relationships. This theme serves as a fulcrum for the narrative, underpinning the protagonist's journey of self-discovery and spiritual awakening.

The author presents a sophisticated critique of formalistic religious observance through the character of Leo Finkle. Despite his extensive rabbinical studies, Leo's relationship with God is initially characterized by a sterile intellectualism, devoid of genuine emotional engagement. This portrayal challenges conventional notions of religious devotion, suggesting that academic knowledge alone is insufficient for true spiritual connection. Malamud skillfully employs Leo's discomfort with Lily's probing questions as a narrative device to expose the hollowness of his spiritual foundation, forcing both the character and the reader to confront the disparity between outward religious practice and inner spiritual authenticity.

Central to the story's exploration of this theme is the provocative proposition that love for humanity is a prerequisite for genuine love of God. This concept, encapsulated in Leo's realization "that he did not love God as well as he might, because he had not loved man," represents a radical reframing of traditional religious thought. It suggests a symbiotic relationship between divine and human love, challenging the notion that spiritual devotion can exist in isolation from earthly connections. This idea resonates with broader philosophical and theological debates about the nature of faith and its manifestation in human relationships.

Malamud's narrative further complicates this theme by introducing Stella Salzman as a catalyst for Leo's spiritual transformation. The implication that Leo's potential love for Stella could serve as a pathway to a deeper connection with God adds layers of complexity to the story's treatment of religion. This plot development can be interpreted as a metaphor for the incarnational aspect of faith, suggesting that divine love is often encountered and understood through human relationships. The author's portrayal of Leo's desire to "convert her to goodness, him to God"

underscores the reciprocal nature of this spiritual journey, implying that the act of loving another can be both transformative for the lover and a form of worship in itself.

The narrative's treatment of God and Religion also invites consideration of the concept of redemption. Leo's perception of Stella as a means of spiritual renewal challenges traditional religious narratives of sin and salvation. By positioning a potentially "fallen" woman as an instrument of divine grace, Malamud subverts conventional moral hierarchies and suggests a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of spiritual redemption.

Furthermore, the story's exploration of this theme raises profound questions about the nature of religious vocation. Leo's journey implies that true ordination is not merely a matter of formal study and ceremonial rites but a transformative personal experience rooted in genuine human connection and compassion. This perspective challenges institutional approaches to religious leadership, suggesting that authentic spiritual authority stems from lived experience and emotional authenticity rather than dogmatic knowledge alone.

In weaving this theme throughout the narrative, Malamud crafts a story that transcends simple dichotomies between the sacred and the profane. The author presents a nuanced vision of spirituality that is deeply intertwined with human experience, emotions, and relationships. This approach invites readers to reconsider their own understanding of faith, challenging them to seek a more holistic integration of spiritual devotion and human connection.

Ultimately, "The Magic Barrel" offers a compelling exploration of God and Religion that is both intellectually stimulating and emotionally resonant. By linking divine love with human relationships, Malamud presents a vision of spirituality that is grounded in the messy realities of human existence while still aspiring to transcendent meaning. This treatment of the theme not only enriches the narrative but also contributes to broader philosophical and theological discussions about the nature of faith, love, and human purpose.

Study the information about Bernard Malamud's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.

STYLE

Bernard Malamud's "The Magic Barrel" exhibits a rich tapestry of stylistic features that contribute significantly to its narrative depth and thematic resonance. A detailed analysis of these elements reveals the author's masterful craftsmanship and the story's literary sophistication.

Point of View

Malamud employs a third-person limited narrative perspective, a choice that profoundly shapes the reader's engagement with the story. This narrative stance allows for a nuanced exploration of Leo Finkle's psychological landscape while maintaining a degree of objectivity. By tethering the narrative consciousness to Leo's perceptions, Malamud creates a delicate balance between intimacy and distance, enabling readers to empathize with Leo's internal struggles while simultaneously observing his actions and decisions from a slightly removed vantage point. This narrative technique facilitates a deep exploration of Leo's character development, particularly his evolving understanding of love, faith, and self-identity. The limited perspective also serves to heighten the story's sense of mystery and ambiguity, particularly in relation to other characters like Pinye Salzman and Stella, whose true natures and motivations remain partly obscured, mirroring Leo's own limited understanding of them.

Symbolism

The author's use of symbolism is both subtle and pervasive, enriching the narrative with layers of meaning. The progression from winter to spring serves as a potent metaphor for Leo's emotional and spiritual transformation. This seasonal symbolism operates on multiple levels, evoking notions of rebirth, renewal, and the cyclical nature of personal growth. The transition from the barrenness of winter to the fecundity of spring parallels Leo's journey from emotional sterility to the possibility of love and self-realization. Additionally, the symbolic use of light and darkness, particularly in the final scene where Leo approaches Stella under a street lamp, suggests themes of illumination, both spiritual and

emotional. This imagery reinforces the story's exploration of revelation and the interplay between the hidden and the exposed in human nature and relationships.

Idiom

Malamud's incorporation of Yiddish-influenced English, particularly in Pinche Salzman's dialogue, serves multiple narrative and thematic functions. This linguistic choice not only adds authenticity to the story's cultural milieu but also functions as a characterization device, providing insight into Salzman's background and worldview. The use of Yiddish idiom creates a linguistic bridge between the old world and the new, highlighting themes of cultural transition and the preservation of heritage in an evolving social landscape. Moreover, the contrast between Salzman's idiomatic speech and the more standard English used by other characters underscores the generational and cultural divides present in the story. This linguistic juxtaposition serves to emphasize the broader themes of tradition versus modernity and the challenges of maintaining cultural identity in a changing world.

The author's skillful manipulation of idiom extends beyond mere linguistic authenticity; it becomes a vehicle for exploring deeper themes of communication, understanding, and the complexities of human interaction. The occasional opacity of Salzman's expressions to both Leo and the reader mirrors the broader difficulties of interpersonal understanding and the potential for miscommunication in matters of the heart and spirit.

Furthermore, Malamud's use of Yiddish-influenced English can be seen as a meta-textual commentary on the role of language in shaping perception and reality. The idiomatic expressions often carry connotations and cultural resonances that transcend their literal meanings, inviting readers to engage with the text on multiple levels and to consider the ways in which language itself can shape and reflect cultural and personal identities.



COMPARE AND CONTRAST

1950s: Decades of immigration from Eastern and Western Europe have resulted in a significant Jewish population in the United States, with strong and vibrant Jewish communities flourishing in numerous American cities. Nevertheless, discrimination against Jewish individuals persists.

1990s: Due to intermarriage and assimilation, many within the Jewish community perceive Jewish culture as being at risk. While discrimination remains a reality in the United States, various organizations actively combat misinformation and prejudice against Jews.

1950s: The Jewish matchmaker, or "shadchen," plays a crucial role within the community. Although arranged marriages are declining in popularity among Jewish families, they remain a viable option for eligible young Jewish men and women.

1990s: Matchmaking is regarded as an outdated practice, primarily observed in Orthodox Jewish communities. In contrast, other networking opportunities have emerged, enabling Jewish men and women to meet potential marriage partners.



Study the historical context of the time Bernard Malamud created his literary works. Dwell upon the factors you consider to be the crucial to influence his style of writing.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Bernard Malamud's short story "The Magic Barrel" was first published in the prestigious Partisan Review in 1954, and later reprinted as the title story in the author's debut collection of short fiction in 1958. The period

between these two significant publication dates was marked by a series of pivotal events that shaped the social and political landscape of the United States.

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court delivered a landmark ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, unanimously rejecting the concept of racial segregation in public schools and declaring the practice of maintaining separate classrooms or institutions for black and white students as unconstitutional. This decision represented a watershed moment in the ongoing struggle for civil rights and racial equality in America. Concurrently, the controversial Senator Joseph McCarthy was censured by the Senate for his unjust accusations of hundreds of Americans being communists, underscoring the tensions and anxieties of the McCarthy era.

The following year, 1957, witnessed the launch of Sputnik, the first artificial satellite to successfully orbit the Earth, by the Soviet Union. This event sparked widespread concern among American policymakers and the public that the Soviets were gaining a strategic advantage in the burgeoning space race, potentially threatening the United States' technological and geopolitical supremacy.

Despite the rich tapestry of historical events unfolding around it, the text of "The Magic Barrel" is largely devoid of overt topical or historical references that might firmly anchor the story within a specific timeframe. However, one significant detail establishes the setting of Leo's encounter with the matchmaker, Pinye Salzman, as roughly coinciding with the story's publication in the mid-1950s.

The narrative indicates that Leo is nearing the completion of his six-year course of study at New York City's Yeshivah University, the oldest and most prestigious Jewish institution of higher learning in the United States. Established in 1886, the school was officially renamed "Yeshivah University" in 1945, when its charter was revised. Therefore, Leo's imminent graduation and consideration of marriage would likely place the events of the story early in the 1950s.

By seeking the services of a professional matchmaker, or *shadchen*, to find a bride, Leo is revealed as a young man who is more aligned with the customs and traditions of his immigrant grandparents than the prevailing

attitudes of American Jews in the 1950s. The shadchen, once a respected figure responsible for perpetuating the Jewish community through arranged marriages, had become the subject of satire and derision as modern notions of romantic love gained traction.

Through this narrative detail, Malamud effectively situates his protagonist, Leo, as a figure caught between the old-world traditions of his ancestral heritage and the rapidly evolving social norms of mid-twentieth-century America. This contextual framing underscores the tensions and complexities inherent in the immigrant experience, as individuals navigate the shifting sands of cultural identity and personal fulfillment.



Further Areas of Inquiry and Scholarly Exploration

📖 Analyze the historical patterns of Jewish immigration to New York City, focusing on periods of significant population influx. Provide a detailed examination of Jewish communities in New York City or another major American metropolitan area, elucidating their social structures, cultural institutions, and economic roles. Furthermore, interpret "The Magic Barrel" through the lens of immigrant heritage, exploring how the narrative can be construed as a commentary on the experiences and challenges faced by descendants of immigrants in American society.

📖 In the context of Judaic tradition, the Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, delineates the Ten Commandments as conveyed by Moses to the Israelites. Critically evaluate the characters in "The Magic Barrel" vis-à-vis their adherence to or deviation from these divine precepts. What insights does this analysis provide regarding the characters' moral compasses, cultural identities, and the complexities of maintaining religious traditions in a secular society?

📖 Examine the thematic interplay between love and self-awareness as presented in "The Magic Barrel." Specifically, analyze the character arc of

Leo Finkle, focusing on the pivotal realizations or personal growth he must undergo to develop the capacity for genuine love. How does the narrative portray the relationship between self-knowledge and the ability to form meaningful emotional connections?



TERRY BISSON



"The Toxic Donut," a short story by Terry Bisson, made its initial appearance in the June 1993 issue of *Science Fiction Age* magazine. Subsequently, it was incorporated into Bisson's anthology, *"Bears Discover Fire and Other Stories,"* published later that year.

Set in a speculative future, the narrative is structured as an extended monologue, wherein a television production assistant guides a guest through the rehearsal for an impending awards ceremony. The narrative diverges from conventional award show formats in a striking manner: rather than receiving an accolade, the distinguished guest is required to make the ultimate sacrifice by consuming humanity's accumulated toxic waste from the preceding year, which has been condensed into a single, ostensibly edible donut.

Consistent with Bisson's oeuvre, "The Toxic Donut" adeptly melds humor with astute social commentary. Through this unconventional depiction of a dystopian future, Bisson offers a pointed critique of environmental degradation on Earth. The story's publication was particularly timely, coinciding with the burgeoning environmental movement of the early 1990s, a period characterized by intensified efforts from various organizations and media outlets to heighten public awareness of ecological issues.

This narrative exemplifies Bisson's characteristic literary style, which often employs speculative elements to illuminate contemporary societal concerns. By presenting a future where environmental negligence has reached such extremes that it necessitates bizarre and morally questionable solutions, Bisson encourages readers to reflect on current environmental practices and their potential long-term consequences.

For those interested in accessing the full text, "The Toxic Donut" can be found in the anthology "Bears Discover Fire and Other Stories." Tor Books released a paperback reprint edition of this collection in 1995, making it widely available to the reading public.

This work not only stands as a significant contribution to the science fiction genre but also serves as a compelling artifact of its time, encapsulating the growing environmental consciousness of the early 1990s. Through its blend of dark humor and ecological critique, "The Toxic Donut" continues to resonate with readers, offering a thought-provoking exploration of humanity's relationship with its environment.

Study the biographical information about the author. Highlight the major facts which are sure to influence his choices of literary themes, characters, settings, moral implications, etc. Search for extra information about Terry Bisson that may interest you as an interpreter of his literary works.

BIOGRAPHY

Terry Bisson was born on February 12, 1942, in Hopkins County, Kentucky. He graduated from the University of Louisville with a bachelor's degree in 1964 and subsequently spent nine years as a comic writer for magazines. Following this period, he worked as an auto mechanic from 1972 to 1977 and then served as an editor and copywriter at Berkley Books from 1976 to 1985.

In 1980, Bisson published his debut novel, *Wordmaker*. Over the following decade, he authored three additional novels: *Talking Man* (1986), *Fire on the Mountain* (1988), and *Voyage to the Red Planet* (1990). While these early works received favorable reviews, it was Bisson's quirky short stories published in science fiction magazines that garnered him awards and widespread critical acclaim. His short story "Bears Discover Fire" (1991) won both the Hugo and Nebula awards, the highest honors in science fiction, along with several other accolades. In 1993, Bisson

compiled this story and others, including "The Toxic Donut," into the collection *Bears Discover Fire and Other Stories*.

A versatile writer, Bisson has explored science fiction across various media. He has adapted several of his own stories into stage or audio dramas and has novelized works by other authors, including *Johnny Mnemonic: A Novel* (1995), *Alien Resurrection* (1997), and *Galaxy Quest* (1999). One of his most significant challenges in science fiction writing arose in the mid-1990s when he was commissioned by Walter M. Miller, Jr. to complete the long-anticipated sequel to Miller's classic 1960 novel, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, due to Miller's illness. Working from Miller's notes and outline, Bisson composed the final sixty pages of the manuscript. The sequel, titled *St. Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman*, was published posthumously in 1997, without any acknowledgment of Bisson's contribution on the cover.

In addition to his adult science fiction works, Bisson has written or co-written several young adult novels and nonfiction books. His notable works include the biography *Nat Turner* (1987), the nonfiction title *Car Talk with Click and Clack, the Tappet Brothers* (1991) in collaboration with National Public Radio's mechanics Tom and Ray Magliozzi, the science fiction novel *Boba Fett: The Fight to Survive* (2002), and two science fiction novels co-authored with Stephanie Spinner: *Be First in the Universe* (2000) and *Expiration Date: Never* (2001). Bisson has also adapted various works into comics or graphic novels, including selections from science fiction and fantasy authors like Greg Bear and Anne McCaffrey, as well as classics by William Shakespeare and Jane Austen. His science fiction publications include his second collection of short stories, *In the Upper Room and Other Likely Stories* (2000), and his sixth novel, *The Pickup Artist* (2001). Bisson currently resides and works in New York City.

Read the story THE TOXIC DONUT and fulfill the tasks that follow.

PLOTLINE ANALYSIS

Chronological Timeline

Analyze the chronological structure of the story's events as presented in the summary. Identify and discuss the key narrative milestones that unfold over the course of the 30-minute awards show program.

Explain how the incremental revelation of information by the character Ron contributes to the pacing and development of the plot. Discuss specific examples of how Ron's explanations to Kim advance the storytelling.

Considering the overall chronological arc, identify and analyze the key turning points or plot twists that create narrative tension and suspense for the reader. How do these pivotal moments shape the trajectory of the story?

Suspense and its Types

Discuss the different types of suspense created in the story. Provide examples of:

- a) Dramatic suspense: Moments that generate tension and uncertainty about the characters' fate or the story's outcome.
- b) Verbal suspense: Instances where the dialogue between Ron and Kim builds anticipation or leaves the reader wondering about unspoken information.
- c) Situational suspense: Elements of the futuristic setting or the awards show premise that heighten the reader's sense of the unpredictable or the unknown.

Analyze how the author uses these different forms of suspense to engage the reader and propel the narrative forward. Discuss the narrative techniques or stylistic choices that contribute to the creation of suspense.

Evaluate the overall effectiveness of the suspense-building elements in the story. How do they shape the reader's experience and influence their understanding of the central conflict or themes?

Be sure to demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the story's development and the techniques used to create narrative tension and intrigue.

PLOT SUMMARY

The narrative opens in a futuristic setting, where two characters, Ron and Kim, are on the stage of an awards show. Ron, the administrative assistant responsible for the annual program, is conducting a rehearsal and explaining to Kim, the guest, how the live broadcast will unfold.

The story is structured entirely around Ron's instructions to Kim. He provides incremental information about the show, to which Kim responds with questions or statements, though the reader only encounters Ron's side of the dialogue, necessitating an inferential understanding of Kim's perspective.

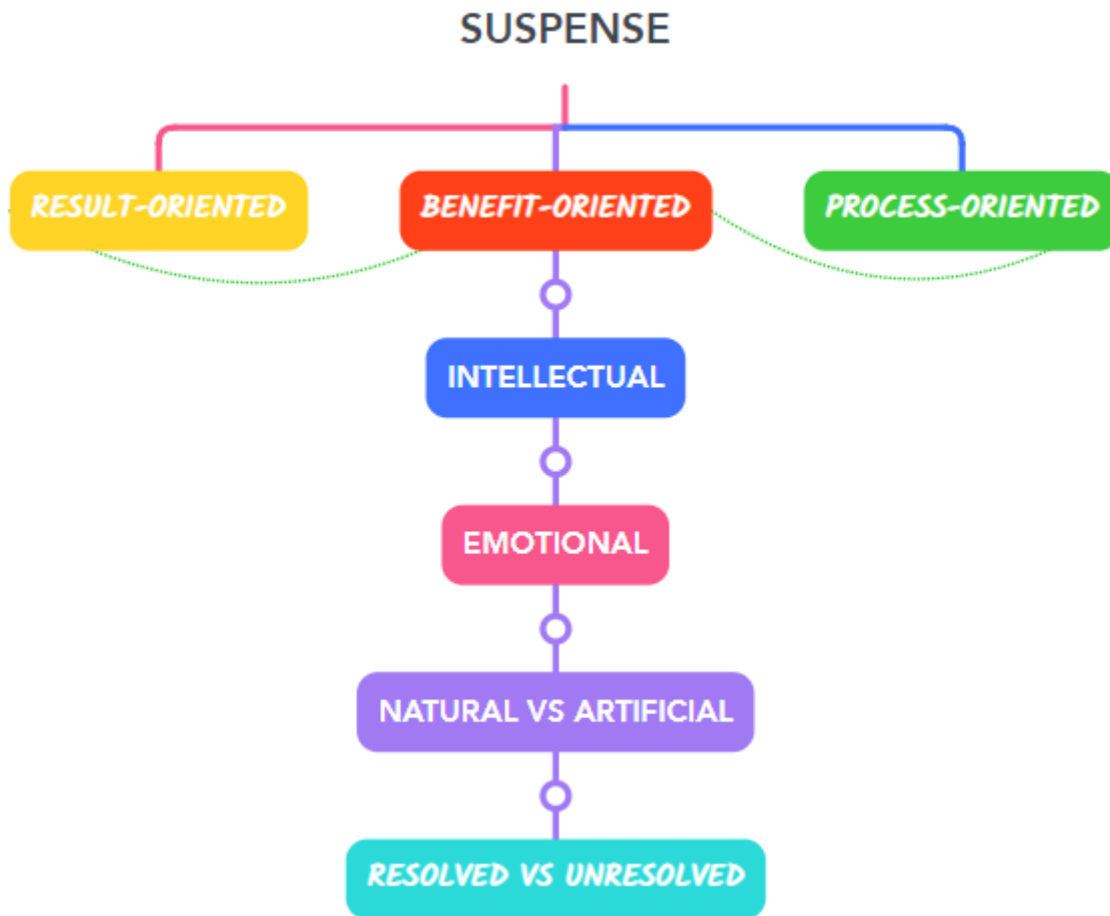
Ron introduces himself, congratulates Kim on her selection, and inquires about her family, noting the show's high viewership surpassing even the Academy Awards.

As Ron walks Kim through the half-hour program, he informs her that she will wait offstage, and that she is the first woman in two years to participate. Kim questions why male assistants are not escorting her onstage, which Ron dismisses as a jest.

Kim inquires about the guests' designation as "Consumers," and requests to meet the host, Mr. Crystal, but Ron evades her requests.

At the ten-minute mark, the world's regional Presidents will commend Kim's courage, and the host will explain the involuntary "Lottery" through which Kim was chosen against her will to represent humanity and nature. The Presidents will present Kim with a plaque to be given to her parents post-show.

In the final ten minutes, the President of the International Institute will bring out a toxic "Donut" containing the year's concentrated pollutants. After a video presentation, Kim will be instructed to eat the Donut, unaware until the end that her role is to sacrifice herself to safeguard environmental health.



Study the basic information about the main characters of the story.

CHARACTERS

In Terry Bisson's "The Toxic Donut," the characters of Kim and Ron serve as potent vehicles for exploring themes of environmental sacrifice, societal indifference, and the commodification of human life. Their portrayal and interaction offer a nuanced critique of contemporary attitudes towards global issues and individual responsibility.

Kim, the designated "Consumer," emerges as a complex figure despite her voicelessness in the narrative. Her character is constructed through the prism of Ron's responses, a narrative technique that brilliantly underscores her marginalization and powerlessness. This indirect characterization invites readers to actively engage in interpreting Kim's thoughts and emotions, amplifying the story's themes of disempowerment and societal negligence.

The ambiguity surrounding Kim's background, with hints of a colonial

past, serves to universalize her plight, suggesting a global system of exploitation that transcends national boundaries. Her involuntary participation in the lottery, facilitated by an anonymous ticket purchase, further emphasizes themes of individual agency being subsumed by larger societal mechanisms. Kim's gradual realization of her fate mirrors the reader's dawning comprehension, creating a powerful narrative arc that culminates in a moment of shared horror at the true nature of her "sacrifice."

Ron, as the Chief Administrative Assistant, embodies the bureaucratic indifference and moral detachment often associated with systemic injustice. His character is a study in the banality of evil, focused solely on the mechanics of the show rather than its horrific implications. Ron's dismissive attitude towards Kim's questions and his inability to provide substantive information about the process highlight the superficiality of the entire enterprise.

The juxtaposition of Ron's businesslike demeanor with the grotesque nature of the event he's orchestrating creates a chilling cognitive dissonance. His misinterpretation of Kim's genuine confusion and concern as humor reveals a profound disconnect between the administrators of this system and those it victimizes. This dynamic serves as a potent metaphor for societal attitudes towards environmental issues and human rights, where real suffering is often trivialized or ignored in favor of maintaining the status quo.

Bisson's choice to present only Ron's side of the dialogue is a masterful narrative technique that not only heightens the sense of Kim's powerlessness but also implicates the reader in the process of her objectification. By forcing the reader to reconstruct Kim's responses, the author creates an uncomfortable complicity, mirroring society's often passive role in perpetuating systemic injustices.

The characters' interaction throughout the rehearsal process serves as a microcosm of larger societal dynamics. Ron's prioritization of the show's schedule and image over Kim's well-being reflects a broader tendency to value spectacle and procedure over genuine human concern. His inability to provide details about the scientific aspects of the toxic donut suggests a willful ignorance of the consequences of our actions on both individual and global scales.

Study the dominating themes of the story. Which of them do you consider the most acute or close to your sphere of interests or priorities? Are these themes contemporary enough to extrapolate them to the life of today in this country? Draw the necessary parallels.

THEMES

Environmentalism

In Terry Bisson's "The Toxic Donut," the theme of environmentalism is explored through a dystopian lens, offering a provocative critique of contemporary environmental practices and societal attitudes towards ecological preservation. The narrative presents a future scenario that serves as a stark extrapolation of current environmental crises, inviting readers to critically examine the efficacy and ethics of present-day environmental policies and individual actions.

The story's premise of compressing a year's worth of global pollution into a single, consumable item serves as a powerful metaphor for the cumulative impact of human activity on the environment. This concept not only highlights the magnitude of environmental degradation but also underscores the interconnectedness of global ecosystems and the far-reaching consequences of collective human behavior. By presenting this solution as a yearly ritual, Bisson suggests a cyclical nature to environmental destruction and attempted remediation, echoing real-world patterns of crisis and temporary resolution.

The reference to past environmental catastrophes - "Dead rivers, dead birds, dioxins" - serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it grounds the narrative in recognizable contemporary issues, creating a bridge between the reader's present and the story's future. Secondly, it implies a historical continuity of environmental degradation, suggesting that despite apparent technological advancements, fundamental attitudes towards nature remain unchanged. This juxtaposition of past and future environmental states invites reflection on the trajectory of human-environment relationships and the potential long-term consequences of current practices.

The universality of environmental concern in the story's world, as evidenced by the existence of the "International Institute of Environmental

Sciences" and the assertion that "everybody" cares about the environment, presents a complex commentary on public engagement with ecological issues. On one hand, it suggests a future where environmental awareness has reached a global consensus, potentially reflecting an optimistic view of humanity's capacity for collective action. However, the superficiality of this concern, manifested in the ritualistic and ultimately destructive practice of the toxic donut consumption, suggests a critique of performative environmentalism and the tendency to seek simplistic, often harmful solutions to complex ecological problems.

Bisson's narrative subtly critiques the notion of technological fixes for environmental issues. The ability to compress all pollutants into a single, consumable item represents an extreme extrapolation of current tendencies to seek technological solutions to environmental problems without addressing their root causes. This aspect of the story invites readers to question the wisdom of relying solely on technological innovation to address ecological crises, suggesting that such approaches may lead to unforeseen and potentially catastrophic consequences.

The concept of a human sacrifice as the means of environmental redemption introduces a profound ethical dimension to the theme of environmentalism. This aspect of the narrative can be interpreted as a commentary on the unequal distribution of environmental burdens, reflecting real-world scenarios where marginalized communities often bear the brunt of environmental degradation. Furthermore, it raises questions about the moral implications of sacrificing individual well-being for perceived collective benefit, challenging readers to consider the ethical boundaries of environmental action.

The story's portrayal of a society that has essentially commodified environmental protection, reducing it to a spectacle of annual sacrifice, serves as a scathing critique of consumer culture and its relationship to environmentalism. By presenting a world where pollution continues unabated, only to be "solved" through a ritualistic act, Bisson highlights the dangers of approaching environmental issues through the lens of consumption and spectacle rather than genuine systemic change.

In conclusion, "The Toxic Donut" employs the theme of environmentalism as a vehicle for exploring broader questions about human nature, societal

values, and the ethics of progress. Through its dystopian premise, the story challenges readers to reconsider their understanding of environmental responsibility, the efficacy of current environmental practices, and the potential long-term consequences of short-sighted approaches to ecological preservation. By presenting a future where environmental concern is universal but ultimately hollow, Bisson invites a critical examination of the depth and sincerity of contemporary environmental commitments, urging readers to consider more profound and sustainable approaches to ecological stewardship.

Science and Technology

In Terry Bisson's "The Toxic Donut," the theme of science and technology is explored with nuanced complexity, offering a critical examination of the role of technological advancement in addressing environmental concerns and its impact on societal values. The narrative presents a future where scientific progress has reached a point of apparent environmental mastery, yet this achievement comes at a profound ethical cost, inviting readers to contemplate the implications of unchecked technological solutions to ecological problems.

The story's central conceit – the ability to compress a year's worth of global pollution into a single, consumable item through nanotechnology – serves as a potent metaphor for the double-edged nature of scientific advancement. This technological feat, presented as a triumph in the narrative's televised spectacle, embodies the utopian promise of science to solve humanity's most pressing problems. However, Bisson subverts this optimistic view by revealing the dystopian reality underlying this solution, where scientific progress is achieved at the expense of human life and ethical considerations.

The juxtaposition of the "Wonders of Science rap" with the grim reality of human sacrifice highlights the disconnect between scientific rhetoric and its practical, ethical implications. This contrast serves to critique the often celebratory discourse surrounding technological solutions, suggesting that such narratives can obscure the moral complexities and human costs associated with scientific "progress." By presenting science as a spectacle within the story's televised event, Bisson invites readers to consider how

scientific achievements are packaged and presented to the public, often glossing over their negative consequences.

The story's treatment of corporations and their role in pollution production adds another layer to its exploration of science and technology. The deliberate low profile maintained by these entities in the narrative's futuristic setting reflects a critique of corporate responsibility and transparency in technological and environmental matters. This aspect of the story resonates with contemporary concerns about corporate accountability in environmental degradation and the tendency to externalize the costs of technological progress onto society and individuals.

Bisson's narrative subtly interrogates the relationship between technological advancement and human values. The willingness of society to sacrifice an individual for the sake of environmental cleansing represents a stark prioritization of technological solutions over human life. This dynamics raises profound questions about the ethical boundaries of scientific progress and the potential for technology to erode fundamental human values and rights.

Moreover, the story's premise challenges the notion of technological fixes for complex social and environmental issues. By presenting a "solution" that merely concentrates and transfers pollution rather than eliminating it, Bisson critiques the tendency to seek quick, technological answers to systemic problems without addressing their root causes. This aspect of the narrative invites readers to consider the limitations and potential dangers of relying solely on scientific innovation to address multifaceted global challenges.

The theme of science and technology in "The Toxic Donut" also intersects with issues of power and control. The ability to manipulate matter at the nanoscale represents an unprecedented level of human control over the physical world, yet this power is wielded in a way that ultimately reinforces existing power structures and inequalities. This portrayal suggests a critical examination of who benefits from technological advancements and how scientific progress can be co-opted to maintain or exacerbate social injustices.

Furthermore, the story's futuristic setting allows for a speculative exploration of the long-term consequences of current technological trajectories. By presenting a world where environmental problems are "solved" through extreme measures, Bisson encourages readers to consider the potential unforeseen consequences of today's technological choices and the importance of foresight in scientific development.

In conclusion, "The Toxic Donut" employs the theme of science and technology as a lens through which to examine broader societal issues, including environmental ethics, corporate responsibility, and the relationship between scientific progress and human values. Bisson's narrative challenges readers to look beyond the surface-level benefits of technological advancements and consider their deeper implications for society and individual human lives. By presenting a future where scientific achievement comes at the cost of ethical degradation, the story prompts a critical reevaluation of the role of technology in addressing global challenges and the need for a more holistic, ethically grounded approach to scientific progress.

Entertainment

In Terry Bisson's "The Toxic Donut," the theme of entertainment serves as a potent vehicle for critiquing societal values and the commodification of human life in a media-driven culture. The story presents a dystopian future where the ultimate act of environmental sacrifice has been transformed into a spectacle for mass consumption, offering a scathing commentary on the intersection of entertainment, ethics, and societal priorities.

The narrative's central conceit—a televised human sacrifice presented as entertainment—serves as a stark extrapolation of contemporary trends in reality television and media consumption. By equating this grotesque event with popular award shows, Bisson invites readers to critically examine the ethical boundaries of entertainment and the potential for media to desensitize audiences to profound moral issues. The casual mention of viewership statistics, with "points" representing millions of viewers, underscores the story's critique of a society that quantifies human experiences and reduces them to metrics of engagement and popularity.

The prioritization of the show's production values and the host's schedule over the dignity and significance of Kim's sacrifice reflects a disturbing inversion of values. This aspect of the narrative serves as a pointed criticism of a culture that elevates celebrity and spectacle above human life and ethical considerations. The brevity and superficiality of the official recognition given to Kim's act — "a brief statement; nothing elaborate" — further emphasizes the hollowness of societal gratitude and the reduction of profound sacrifice to mere performative acknowledgment.

Bisson's portrayal of Kim's marginalization within the very spectacle centered on her sacrifice is particularly poignant. Her relegation to the sidelines for part of the show and the uncertainty surrounding her meeting with the host highlight the dehumanizing effects of transforming individual tragedy into mass entertainment. This treatment of Kim serves as a metaphor for the way media can objectify and distance audiences from the real human costs of societal practices and policies.

The story's exploration of entertainment as a theme also touches on issues of consent and agency in media participation. Kim's involuntary involvement in the spectacle raises questions about the ethics of representation and the power dynamics at play in the production of entertainment, particularly when it involves marginalized or vulnerable individuals.

Moreover, the fusion of environmental activism with entertainment in the story's premise offers a critique of the commodification of social and ecological concerns. By presenting environmental salvation as a televised event, Bisson suggests a troubling conflation of genuine activism with performative gestures designed for public consumption. This aspect of the narrative invites reflection on the authenticity of media-driven social movements and the potential for important causes to be trivialized or distorted when filtered through the lens of entertainment.

The story also implicitly comments on the role of media in shaping public perception and priorities. The widespread viewership of the sacrifice event suggests a society that has become collectively complicit in the normalization of extreme acts, raising questions about the media's power to influence moral standards and social values.

Furthermore, the theme of entertainment in "The Toxic Donut" intersects with broader issues of technological progress and environmental ethics. The story presents a future where advanced technology enables the concentration of pollution into a consumable form, yet this scientific "achievement" is primarily framed as a vehicle for entertainment rather than a genuine solution to ecological crises. This juxtaposition highlights the potential for technological advancements to be co-opted by entertainment industries, potentially distracting from or trivializing serious global challenges.

In conclusion, Bisson's treatment of entertainment as a theme in "The Toxic Donut" serves as a multifaceted critique of contemporary media culture and its impact on societal values. By presenting a future where human sacrifice is packaged as mass entertainment, the story challenges readers to examine their own consumption of media, the ethical implications of entertainment choices, and the broader societal consequences of prioritizing spectacle over substance. The narrative ultimately poses profound questions about the nature of entertainment in a technologically advanced society and its potential to either illuminate or obscure critical moral and environmental issues.

Study the information about Terry Bisson's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.

STYLE

Terry Bisson's "The Toxic Donut" employs a range of sophisticated stylistic techniques that serve to enhance its thematic depth and satirical impact. The author's adept use of satire, monologue, and foreshadowing creates a nuanced narrative that invites critical engagement and reflection from the reader.

Satire

Bisson's satirical approach in "The Toxic Donut" is both incisive and multifaceted. By presenting an absurdist scenario—the compression of global pollution into a consumable form—the author creates a cognitive dissonance that compels readers to confront the stark realities of environmental degradation and consumerism. This hyperbolic

representation serves as a powerful metaphor for the unsustainability of current consumption patterns and the externalization of environmental costs.

The designation of the sacrificial character as a "Consumer" is particularly potent, highlighting the irony inherent in a system where those who perpetuate environmental harm through consumption are ultimately tasked with its remediation. This linguistic choice underscores the cyclical nature of consumer-driven pollution and the societal complicity in environmental degradation.

Bisson's satire extends beyond environmental critique to encompass media spectacle, corporate responsibility, and the commodification of human life. The juxtaposition of a life-ending sacrifice with the trappings of a televised awards show serves as a scathing indictment of a society that prioritizes entertainment over ethical considerations.

Monologue

The use of a single-sided monologue as the narrative vehicle is a sophisticated stylistic choice that serves multiple functions. Primarily, it creates a sense of disorientation and alienation that mirrors the protagonist's experience. By omitting Kim's responses, Bisson forces the reader into an active role, reconstructing the dialogue and, by extension, empathizing with Kim's position of powerlessness and confusion.

This technique also serves to highlight the bureaucratic indifference embodied by Ron. His uninterrupted speech, punctuated by responses to unheard questions, emphasizes the one-sided nature of the interaction and the systemic disregard for individual agency in the face of institutional processes.

Moreover, the monologue format allows for a gradual revelation of information, both to Kim and to the reader, creating a parallel journey of discovery and horror. This structural choice enhances the story's tension and reinforces its themes of information control and manipulation.

Foreshadowing

Bisson's use of foreshadowing is subtle yet effective, creating an undercurrent of unease that permeates the narrative. The linguistic slips

and temporal shifts in Ron's speech—such as the inadvertent use of past tense when referring to Kim—serve as subliminal cues that prepare the reader for the story's grim conclusion.

The mention of posthumous recognition, such as the plaque for Kim's family, functions on multiple levels. It not only foreshadows Kim's fate but also critiques the hollow gestures of appreciation often offered in lieu of meaningful action or consideration.

These foreshadowing elements contribute to a growing sense of dread and inevitability, mirroring the inexorable progression of environmental degradation in the real world. The gradual realization of Kim's fate parallels the slow awakening to environmental crises, often recognized too late for effective intervention.

Thus, Bisson's stylistic choices in "The Toxic Donut" work in concert to create a narrative that is at once engaging and deeply unsettling. The satire provides a framework for critical examination of societal issues, the monologue format demands active reader engagement and empathy, and the foreshadowing elements create a tense, foreboding atmosphere. Together, these techniques produce a story that resonates beyond its immediate plot, inviting readers to reflect on the broader implications of consumer culture, environmental responsibility, and the ethical boundaries of entertainment and sacrifice in contemporary society.



Study the historical context of the time Terry Bisson created his literary works. Dwell upon the factors you consider to be the crucial to influence his style of writing.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the late 20th century, the environmental movement experienced a significant resurgence and amplification of public awareness and activism. Although the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency and the inaugural Earth Day celebration both occurred in 1970, and various environmental disasters and planning initiatives transpired

throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, it was not until the mid-1980s that environmental concerns truly came to the forefront of public discourse and policy agendas.

In 1985, two notable events helped catalyze this environmental awakening. First, the flagship vessel of the non-violent environmental advocacy organization Greenpeace, the Rainbow Warrior, was bombed and sunk by French government agents in Auckland Harbor, New Zealand. Greenpeace had been protesting French nuclear testing in the South Pacific, and the attack resulted in the death of a Dutch photographer, Fernando Pereira. That same year, British meteorologists confirmed their earlier suspicions of a hole in the Earth's ozone layer over Antarctica, which was determined to be caused by the widespread use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in commercial products such as aerosol spray cans.

The following year, 1986, witnessed two additional environmental disasters of significant magnitude. First, a nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, Ukraine, experienced a catastrophic meltdown, resulting in the release of toxic radiation into the surrounding area. Additionally, a chemical warehouse fire in Basel, Switzerland, led to the dumping of over one thousand tons of hazardous chemicals into the Rhine River, killing much of the river's wildlife and contaminating drinking water supplies.

These incidents, along with other environmental crises, helped to ignite public passion and give greater bargaining power to environmental activists. However, it was not until 1989 that the environmental movement truly captured the attention and concern of the general public. On March 24, 1989, the oil tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground in Alaska's Prince William Sound, spilling more than ten million gallons of oil into the pristine waters. This oil spill spread rapidly, resulting in the death of numerous wildlife species and causing years of ecological damage.

The Exxon Valdez disaster served as a catalyst, igniting a widespread public outcry and leading to extensive media coverage of various environmental issues, including pollution, deforestation, acid rain, the overuse of landfills and incinerators, overpopulation, and wildlife extinction. One of the most prominent concerns during this period was the greenhouse effect, also known as global warming, which is the gradual

warming of the Earth's atmosphere caused by the buildup of certain gases, particularly carbon dioxide, that trap the sun's heat and reflect it back onto the planet's surface.

Environmentalists warned that if the rate of deforestation in developing regions and the worldwide consumption of natural resources continued to rise, the Earth's temperature would also continue to increase. Global warming was a key topic of discussion at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, which brought together delegates from over 170 nations to address various environmental challenges. However, despite the international dialogue, some prominent leaders, such as former U.S. President George Bush, expressed skepticism regarding the scientific evidence justifying restrictions on natural resource use, and no binding treaties emerged from the conference.



Further Areas of Inquiry and Scholarly Exploration

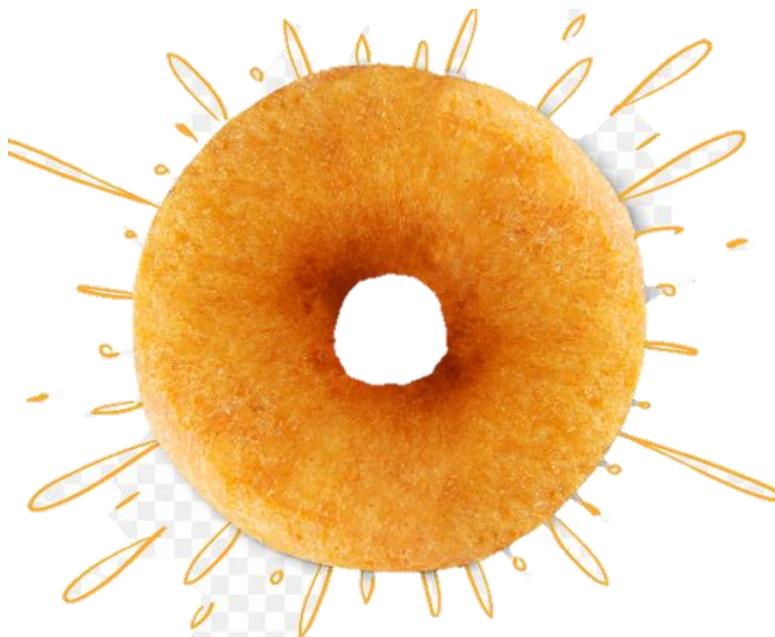
📖 Envision yourself as a television producer in the year 2050. Conduct a comprehensive analysis of projected forecasts from sociologists, economists, environmentalists, and other relevant experts to construct a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic and environmental landscape of this future era. Based on this research, conceptualize an innovative television program that encapsulates the zeitgeist of this future society. Ensure that your proposal is firmly grounded in and supported by your research findings.

📖 At the time of Bisson's writing, environmentalism was a prominent societal concern, spurring widespread civic engagement through resource conservation, item reuse, and recycling initiatives. Conduct a critical assessment of the current state of environmental activism and its efficacy. Analyze the extent to which these grassroots efforts have contributed to the remediation and protection of Earth's ecosystems. If such efforts have yielded limited impact, elucidate the factors contributing to their inefficacy.

📖 Investigate the historical and socio-economic context of Altgeld Gardens, a public housing project in southeast Chicago colloquially known as the "Toxic Donut" due to its proximity to numerous industrial and waste management facilities. Conduct a thorough examination of this region's development and environmental challenges. Additionally, explore the potential intertextual relationship between Bisson's story title and the area's nickname. Present a well-reasoned argument, supported by your research, regarding the possibility of mutual influence between the literary work and the local epithet.

📖 Select a contemporary environmental issue, distinct from toxic pollution, that presents significant global or regional concerns. Undertake extensive research to elucidate the historical progression and current status of this issue. Construct a detailed chronological timeline highlighting pivotal events in the issue's development, including but not limited to environmental disasters, landmark legal decisions, and significant public awareness campaigns.

📖 Conduct a comprehensive review of current legislation governing the disposal of toxic waste. Analyze the regulatory framework imposed on entities engaged in toxic material disposal, including specific restrictions and punitive measures for non-compliance. Present a critical evaluation of the efficacy of these regulations, arguing for either more stringent or more lenient restrictions. Ensure your position is well-supported by empirical evidence and cogent reasoning.

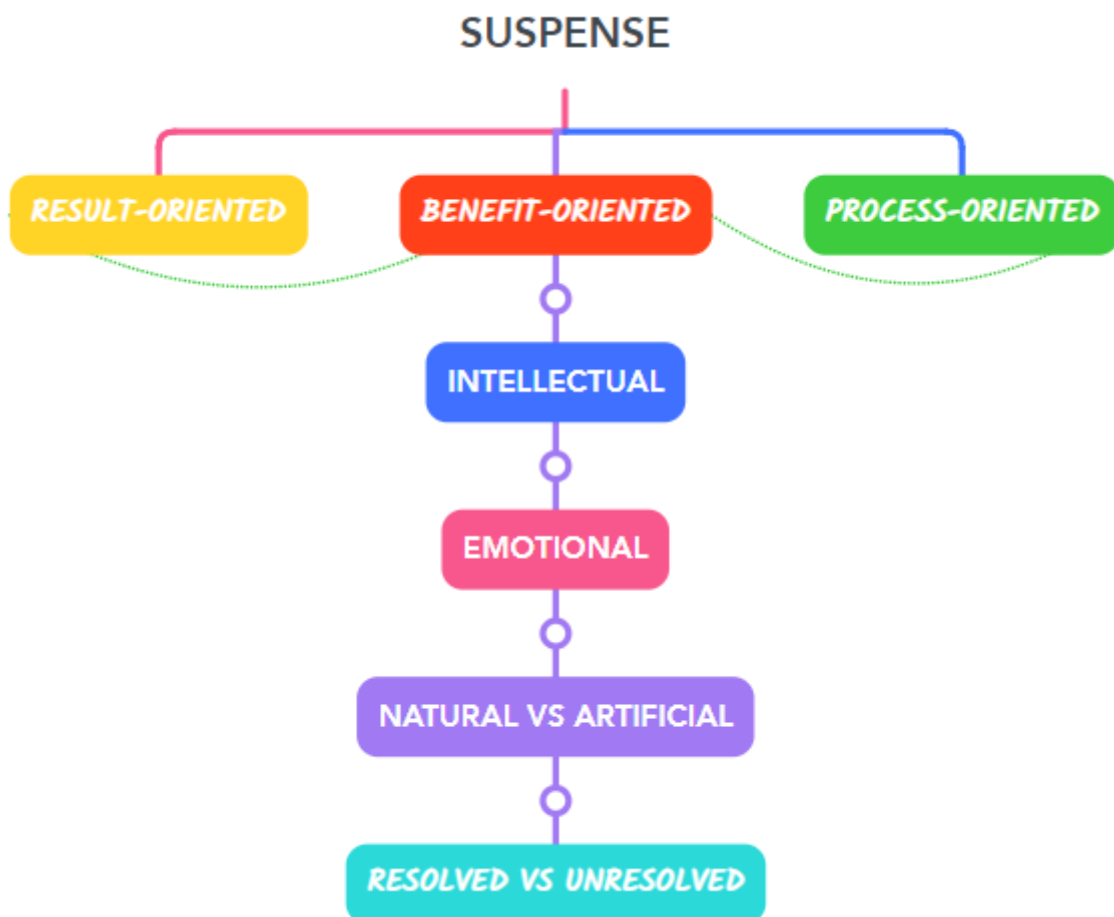


FOR INDEPENDENT LITERARY INQUIRY



Read the story *THEY'RE MADE OUT OF MEAT* by Terry Bisson and fulfill the tasks:

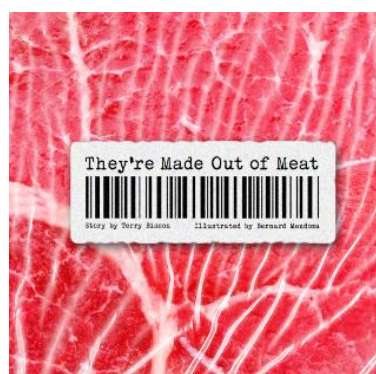
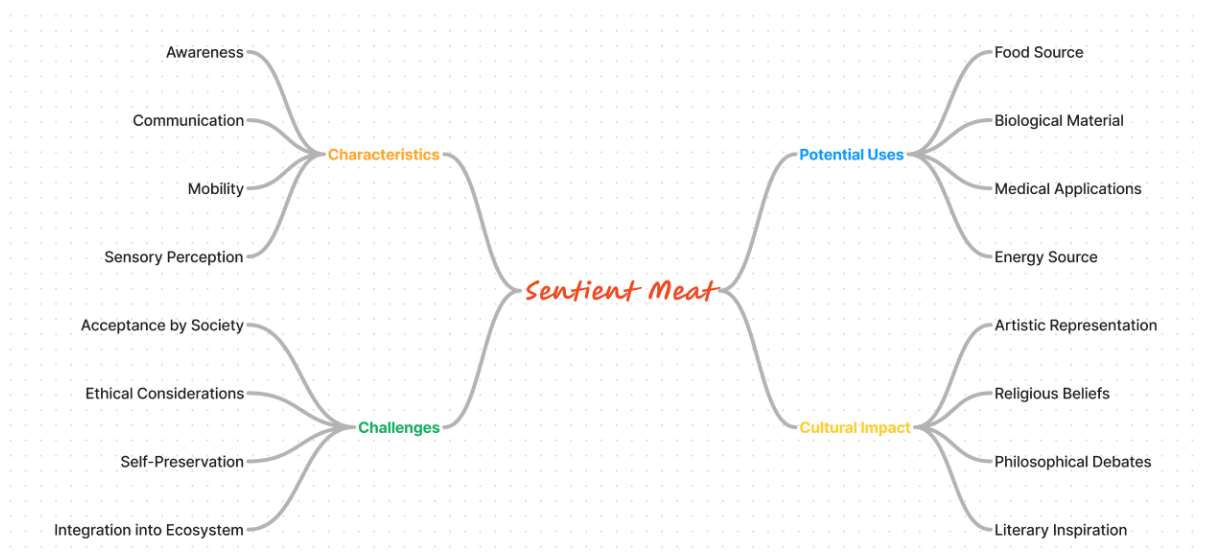
1. Study the biographical information about the author.
2. Fulfill the PLOTLINE ANALYSIS. Discuss the different types of suspense created in the story. Analyze how the author uses these different forms of suspense to engage the reader and propel the narrative forward.



3. Write a concise PLOT SUMMARY of the story.
4. Provide the basic information about the main characters of the story. Identify and classify the conflicts the plotline

develops round by. Dwell upon the factors that account for them.

5. Study the dominating themes of the story. Which of them do you consider the most acute or close to your sphere of interests or priorities? Are these themes contemporary enough to extrapolate them to the life of today in this country? Draw the necessary parallels.
6. Study the information about the author's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.
7. Study the historical context of the time the author created literary works. Dwell upon the factors you consider to be the crucial to influence the style of writing.
8. Dwell upon the concept of sentient meat revealed in the story and write a short essay "What makes us humans?"



Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in Language Teaching Perspectives: Responsible Decision-Making

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING means the ability to make positive, constructive decisions about how to behave, based on consideration of ethical standards (i.e., right and wrong) as well as relevant social norms and safety concerns (SEL for Students: Ethical Decision-Making and Social Responsibility, 2024).

Here the terms “ethical decision-making” and “responsibility” are used to emphasize the ethical dimensions of what it means to make decisions that are both personally and socially responsible. From small, everyday choices to larger and more consequential ones, educators face a myriad of decisions with ethical implications. It means dealing with the questions: “How do we decide to do the right thing?”, or even “What is the right thing?” in a complex situation.

Responsible decision-making skills include:

- Noticing and identifying problems
- Realistically evaluating the potential consequences of various actions
 - Understanding the different aspects (e.g., moral, social, emotional, practical) of challenging situations
 - Considering the well-being of both oneself and others; balancing individual interests with the greater good
 - Applying ethical standards to personal and social behavior
 - Valuing ethical/moral principles, such as justice, fairness, and the rights and welfare of all people
 - Solving problems in intentional and appropriate ways
 - Recognizing the role of emotions in decision-making and integrating them with other concerns
 - Reflecting on one’s own actions (SEL for Students: Ethical Decision-Making and Social Responsibility, 2024).

To develop responsible decision-making skills in its essence means to promote problem-solving thinking. There are many ways to incorporate problem-solving thinking and reflection into SEL program activities:

- Identify emotions behind actions
- Explore possible consequences
- Articulate differences and connections
- Brainstorm different approaches or solutions to a task
- Reflect on past experiences
- Model and articulate decision-making process
- Simulate or role play a task
- Evaluate actions - did they meet the goal?
- Teach Critical Thinking skills

The Responsible Decision-Making Model

At the center of teaching students how to make better choices is the responsible decision-making model. It shows five steps to making responsible decisions by providing this problem-solving, decision-making checklist:

Identify the problem.

Analyze the situation.

Brainstorm solutions and solve the problem.

Consider ethical responsibility.

Evaluate and reflect (Responsible Decision-Making, 2024).
<https://www.positiveaction.net/blog/responsible-decision-making>

Why are responsible decision-making skills important? In pairs or micro groups discuss the following in the perspective of the problems raised in this chapter's stories.

Developing critical thinking and responsible decision making help students be more successful and happy on their life track.

- When students learn through humanistic pedagogical methods such as cooperative learning and joint decision-making of classroom rules and conflict resolution practices, they are more successful academically, show greater engagement and enjoyment in learning, and have stronger interpersonal skills.
- Responsible decision-making involves critical thinking and self-discipline. It also means knowing how to extrapolate the effects of that decision on others. The activities aimed at building up critical thinking

skills help students to recognize and validate their emotions, as well as manage them appropriately, learn relationship skills, empathy, and how to resolve conflicts, reach goals, communicate effectively.

Study the effective SEL practice and suggest some other possible ones in relations to the issues considered in the chapter.

Student Self Check-In Journal

Use a values-informed reflective process to help students make ethical decisions with open-mindedness, integrity, and fairness.

When You Might Use This Practice

To help students identify areas of personal growth

To teach students how to make ethical decisions

When you know your students are going through a difficult situation or will have to make a major decision

Time Required: 15 minutes.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Reflect on a challenging situation or decision they are trying to make
- Identify changes that they can make
- Consider others' perspectives

Character Strengths

Integrity

Honesty

Humility

SEL Competencies

Self Awareness

Social Awareness

Responsible Decision-Making

Mindfulness Components

Open Awareness

Non-Judgment

The source: Student Self-Check-In Journal. (2024). Retrieved from: <https://ggie.berkeley.edu/practice/student-self-check-in-journal/>

CHAPTER 2. Narratives of the Self: Interpreting Identity Construction in the Short Form

Narrative Identity

The notion of "identity" has a long and complex history, with various perspectives emerging over time. This presentation will explore the hallmarks and development of ideas around identity, from the Enlightenment to the postmodern self.

Study the hallmarks of the ideas on the notion of "identity" and trace their development through the history.



The Enlightenment Self

1

Humanism and Secularization

The Enlightenment movement was based on faith in human reason, emerging from the Renaissance's humanism and a growing secularization. The individual was seen as a "self-sufficient subject of action endowed with instrumental rationality".

2

Limitations on Self-Fashioning

Prior to the Early Modern period, the dominant social model had meant that there were "stark limitations on who had the right or ability to participate in even highly limited forms of self-fashioning".

3

Challenge to Limitations

A challenge to these limitations on human agency was established during the Renaissance, and reached its zenith in the Enlightenment era of the eighteenth century.

The Romantic Self

Expressive Individualism

The Romantic movement of the nineteenth century was a reaction to the Enlightenment, refocusing questions of identity. It gave way to an "antiempirical, expressive individualism".

Nature and the Self

Within Romanticism, the subject was theorized as an expression of something innate, predicated on sensibility and feeling rather than cognition. The self was closely allied with "Nature".

Dominant Outlook

This expressive individualism has generated "what is perhaps the dominant outlook of Western technological society".

The Psychodynamic Self

1 Charting the Psyche

Freud's influential work in the early 20th century focused on charting a genealogy of individual minds and constructing a scientific method to describe the workings of the psyche.

2 Therapeutic Intervention

Freud was also concerned with therapeutic intervention on individual patients and the "arguably conservative accomplishment of 'normative' psychosocial behaviour".

3 Social Element

Freud's emphasis on socialization processes within the family and their impact on the psyche brought a social element into his account of identity.

The Social Self

Collective Identities

In the second half of the 20th century, sociological accounts of identity were characterized by a concern with collective identities, such as "adolescent", "black", or "working-class".

Measuring Behavior

These group labels were often used as social variables against which forms of social behavior or linguistic usage could be measured.

Challenging Homogeneity

It is only recently that the homogeneity implicit in this version of identity has been challenged, with singular labels acknowledged to intersect in multi-dimensional ways.

Popular Imagination

Commitment to these "labels" remains extremely influential in traditional sociology, psychology, economics, and the popular imagination.

Read the interpretation of a narrative identity in the contemporary studies and answer the questions that follow.

The Postmodern Self



Fluidity and Fragmentation

Late modern identity is characterized by concepts such as "fluidity", "migration", "diaspora", "crossing" and "decentring", reflecting the fragmentation of the modern subject.



Strategies for Authenticity

Theorists also note individuals' strategies for shoring up an authentic sense of self in an uncertain world, including the revival of "self-improvement" and psychoanalytic explorations of the self.



Globalization and Dislocation

The processes of globalization are seen to compound the "dislocation" of the self, with faster and closer connections across space and increased mediation of experience.

Narrative Identity

1

Storytelling and Sense-Making

The telling of stories is a prevalent part of social life, through which people recall, recount and reflect on their lives, making sense of themselves.

2

Edited Identities

Through storytelling, narrators can produce "edited" descriptions and evaluations of themselves and others, making certain identity aspects more salient.

3

Storied Selves

Narrative researchers ascribe a particular ontological character to people, as "storied selves", providing the basis for understanding their lives.

Dilemmas of Narrative Identity



Singular Life Story?

Can one's narrative identity be captured in a single, grand, synthesizing story? The phrase "your life story" presupposes a linear, integrated, and coherent narrative.



Multiple Perspectives

A reasonable response might be "Which life story would you like to hear?" - acknowledging the possibility of multiple narratives and selves.



Conflicting Aspects

Aspects of practical identity, such as professional and domestic life, can sometimes stand in conflict with one another.



Selective Recollection

Our reflections and recollections are inevitably incomplete and subject to selective pressures, due to the limitations of memory and the contextualizing nature of acts of reflection.

Narrative Emplotment

Narrative Emplotment	Converts contingency to causality through the chronological ordering of its elements, allowing narrative to articulate the temporality of human action and life.
Narrative Intelligibility	The story makes sense precisely because we understand the elements as necessarily following on from one another, exhibiting rule-governed succession.
Dialectic of Sedimentation and Innovation	In responding to "who am I?", we engage in a self-reading that subjects our sedimented traits and habits to an innovative point of view, leading to self-discovery.

Make conclusions about the subtleties of narrative identity and the ways of its representation in a literary text. The questions that follow will guide you.

What accounts for serious dilemmas to capture one's narrative identity in a single, grand, synthesizing story?

What does practical identity consist? Can these constituents of practical identity stand in contrast? Model YOUR practical identity.

Why are our reflections and recollections about ourselves inevitably incomplete and subject to selective pressures conscious and otherwise?

Decipher the notion of narrative emplotment. What is striking about it?

What does a dialectical process of “sedimentation and innovation” mean and when do we apply it?

What does the narrative view require?

ANN BEATTIE



"Janus" first appeared in the May 27, 1985, issue of *The New Yorker* and was subsequently included in the 1986 collection *Where You'll Find Me*. This story is frequently highlighted as one of Beattie's finest works.

The narrative centers on Andrea, a successful yet discontented real estate agent who develops an attachment to a cream-colored bowl, which she often places in the homes of her clients during showings to potential buyers. By the conclusion of the story, readers learn that the bowl was a gift from Andrea's lover.

In "Janus," Beattie examines the emptiness of contemporary existence. She is often regarded as a representative voice of her generation, reflecting the experiences of middle and upper-middle class men and women. Beattie is frequently associated with other minimalist authors, such as Bobbie Ann Mason and Raymond Carver.

Study the biographical information about the author. Highlight the major facts which are sure to influence her choices of literary themes, characters, settings, moral implications, etc. Search for extra information about Ann Beattie that may interest you as an interpreter of his literary works.

BIOGRAPHY

Ann Beattie was born in 1947 in Washington, D.C. She grew up in a middle-class suburb and graduated near the bottom of her class in 1965, attributing her lackluster academic performance to a disinterest in her studies. In an interview with Gene Lyons, she revealed that she believes she was clinically depressed during her high school years. Beattie attended American University, where she completed a degree in English in just three years. In 1970, she earned a Master of Arts in English from the University of Connecticut. Although she began pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Connecticut, she did not finish the program, opting to withdraw after a few of her stories had been published.

In 1973, Beattie published her first significant short story, "Victor Blue," in *Atlantic Monthly*. The following year, *The New Yorker* featured her story "A Platonic Relationship," marking the beginning of her regular contributions to the magazine. "Janus" was first published in the May 27, 1985, issue of *The New Yorker*, later appearing in the collection *Where You'll Find Me*, and is frequently recognized as one of Beattie's finest stories. Through her acclaimed novels and short fiction, she continues to depict the experiences of men and women who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s.

Read the story JANUS and fulfill the tasks that follow.

PLOTLINE ANALYSIS

Chronological Timeline

In a well-structured essay of 500 words, trace the chronological progression of the plot events in "Janus." Organize your analysis into the following sections:

- a) Exposition: discuss how the opening line and introduction of the protagonist, Andrea, set the stage for the narrative.
- b) Rising Action: analyze the key events that contribute to Andrea's growing fixation on the bowl, including her behavior when showing the bowl to prospective buyers and her increasing belief in the bowl's influence on her professional success.
- c) Climax: identify the revelatory moment when Beattie introduces Andrea's past relationship with a lover, and examine how this

information heightens the emotional stakes and complexity of the story.

- d) Falling Action and Resolution: evaluate the significance of the story's concluding image of Andrea contemplating the bowl's surface, and how this ties back to the opening lines and the exploration of Andrea's internal landscape.

Narrative Identity Analysis

In a separate essay of 500 words, examine the literary representation of narrative identity in "Janus." Drawing on critical discussions of narrative identity, consider the following:

- a) Define the concept of narrative identity and discuss its relevance to the characterization of Andrea.
- b) Identify and analyze the different types of narrative identity (personal, social, and cultural) that are expressed through Andrea's relationship with the bowl and her past lover.
- c) Explore how Beattie's use of limited third-person narration, internal monologue, and symbolic imagery contributes to the development and exploration of Andrea's narrative identity.
- d) Discuss how the bowl functions as a symbolic conduit for Andrea's internal conflicts and the construction of her narrative identity.

Conclude your analysis by evaluating the significance of the story's final image in relation to Andrea's evolving sense of self and the broader themes of the narrative.

PLOT SUMMARY

The short story "Janus" opens with the deceptively simple declaration, "The bowl was perfect." This sets the stage for the narrative's focus on the central character, Andrea, a successful real estate agent who is introduced in the second paragraph. The story is told exclusively from Andrea's subjective perspective, with minimal external dialogue or action.

As Andrea shows prospective buyers through homes, she deliberately places the cream-colored bowl with its shimmering, multicolored flecks in a prominent location. Andrea is captivated by the bowl's unique qualities, describing it as both "noticeable and subtle," with the scattered flashes of color appearing to suggest a subtle, almost microscopic motion.

So enamored is Andrea with the bowl that she often feigns ignorance when others inquire about its origins, preserving its mystique.

Andrea's fixation on the bowl becomes increasingly apparent, as she comes to believe it is the source of her professional success. This obsession reaches a point where she nearly panics when she forgets to bring the bowl to a showing, and she begins to relate to it as if it were a person, developing a deeper connection to the object than to her own husband.

The narrative takes a revelatory turn when Beattie introduces the information that Andrea had, at one point, been involved with a lover who ultimately demanded that she choose between him and her husband. Unable to make this decision, Andrea's lover departed, leaving her to grapple with the emotional aftermath.

The story concludes with Andrea contemplating the bowl's surface, which is likened to a "world cut in half, deep and smoothly empty," with a single "flash of blue" near the rim serving as a "vanishing point on the horizon." This final image evokes a sense of both the bowl's perfection and the underlying complexity of Andrea's internal landscape.

Throughout the narrative, Beattie employs a nuanced, introspective style that delves into Andrea's psychological state, capturing the character's evolving relationship with the bowl and the way it serves as a conduit for exploring deeper existential and emotional themes.

Study the basic information about the main characters of the story.

CHARACTERS

The characters in the short story "Janus" by Ann Beattie exhibit a nuanced and multifaceted complexity that underscores the broader thematic exploration of the human condition.

Andrea, the central protagonist, is a successful real estate agent whose outward professional accomplishments belie an inner emotional detachment and lack of passion. Her affection seems to be directed not towards her husband or her life, but rather towards an inanimate object – a cream-colored bowl. This bowl takes on an almost fetishistic significance, as Andrea credits her business success to its presence and becomes increasingly preoccupied with its wellbeing, even to the point of experiencing dreams about it. Beattie's vivid description of Andrea's contemplation of the bowl, "Alone in the living room at night, she often

looked at the bowl sitting on the table, still and safe, unilluminated," suggests a profound and intimate connection between the character and the object, one that overshadows her relationships with the human beings in her life.

Andrea's unnamed husband, a stockbroker, is portrayed as a quiet, reflective individual who values order and dislikes ambiguity. His appreciation for Andrea's "fine aesthetic sense" and her ability to "function in the real world" suggests a degree of mutual respect, but the narrative offers little insight into the depth or passion of their marital bond.

The introduction of **Andrea's lover** in the closing paragraphs of the story adds a further layer of complexity to the character dynamics. This unnamed figure, who has purchased the coveted bowl for Andrea, presents her with a stark choice – him or her husband. The fact that Andrea is unable to make this decision underscores the profound emotional attachment she has developed towards the bowl, which appears to supersede her feelings for both her lover and her husband.

Study the dominating themes of the story. Which of them do you consider the most acute or close to your sphere of interests or priorities? Are these themes contemporary enough to extrapolate them to the life of today in this country? Draw the necessary parallels.

THEMES

Aesthetics

Aesthetics, as a branch of philosophy, deals with the nature of beauty, art, and taste, as well as the creative process. Beattie, as a minimalist writer, has been criticized by some for her prose being perceived as flat and lacking in traditional aesthetic appeal. However, her supporters argue that the gaps and silences in her stories allow the reader to actively participate in the creation of the art.

The parallel between Beattie's fictional bowl, described in the opening lines of "Janus," and her own theory of the short story can be drawn. The bowl, despite its understated and unassuming appearance, is said to possess a "real presence" and a "paradox of a bowl" – subtle yet noticeable. Similarly, Beattie's stories are likened to this bowl, in that they are well-

crafted but not overtly flashy, and they linger with the reader long after the initial reading.

Beattie's layering of details in her stories, which may initially seem randomly placed but ultimately serve to propel the narrative forward. This attention to detail is seen as a key aspect of Beattie's aesthetic approach, as she encourages the reader to "pay attention to the small things" that build the larger canvas of the story.

Finally, Beattie's stories present a smooth, impenetrable surface, and when examined more closely, one can find "a flash, or a small epiphany, located just on the edge of the story." This suggests that Beattie's aesthetic vision is one that values subtlety, nuance, and the reader's active engagement in uncovering the deeper layers of meaning.

Love and Passion

While the narrative may not be a traditional love story, it nonetheless grapples with the complexities and nuances of human relationships and emotional connections.

The story delves into the protagonist, Andrea's, various relationships, including those with her husband, her lover, and even her pet dog. It notes that the dog is quickly removed from the narrative, suggesting a lack of deep emotional attachment. Similarly, Andrea's relationship with her husband seems to lack passion and a clear sense of connection, as evidenced by her own internal questioning about the nature of their bond.

The pivotal moment in the story is where Andrea ponders the possibility of having a "deeper connection" with the bowl, a seemingly inanimate object. This contemplation reveals Andrea's uncertainty and ambiguity about the nature of human relationships and her own capacity for love and passion. Andrea's relationship with her lover has also ended, further underscoring her apparent emotional distance from others.

Ultimately, the bowl, which is likened to the Roman god Janus, the guardian of beginnings and endings, may symbolize the beginning and ending of Andrea's ability to feel and express love. The story's resolution, with Andrea sitting alone with the bowl, represents a profound sense of isolation and the loss or diminishment of her capacity for meaningful emotional connection.

Study the information about Ann Beattie's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.

STYLE

Symbols and Imagery

The bowl serves as the primary image and symbol that anchors the narrative, suggesting that it is arguably more central to the story than the protagonist, Andrea, herself.

The story highlights Beattie's meticulous attention to the presentation of the bowl, noting the author's careful consideration of the bowl's various settings and the way it is depicted in different lighting conditions. This close attention to detail, underscores the significance of the bowl as a central motif within the story.

The bowl may serve as a metaphor for Andrea, with its smooth, perfect, and empty qualities mirroring the protagonist's own emotional and psychological state. Secondly, the bowl can be viewed as a symbol for the world in which Andrea and her generation find themselves, a world that is "cut in half, deep and smoothly empty," characterized by materialism and a lack of meaningful human connection.

Furthermore, the bowl may also function as a receptacle for Andrea's own longings and desires, a focal point for her emotional needs in the absence of close relationships. Finally, the bowl may serve as a reminder of Andrea's lost lover, who had commented that she was "too slow to know what she really loved." With the lover's departure, the bowl becomes the sole remaining object of Andrea's affection.

Narration

Beattie's use of a limited third-person perspective restricts the reader's access to information exclusively to what the protagonist, Andrea, is thinking or doing.

While Beattie's stories are typically told in the present tense, giving the reader a sense of immediacy, "Janus" is narrated in the past tense. This stylistic choice imbues the story with a distinct quality, as the events unfolded over several years rather than unfolding in the present moment.

Specifically, the reader is not informed until near the end of the narrative that the bowl was a gift from Andrea's former lover. By withholding this information, Beattie compels the reader to reconsider the significance of the bowl and its relationship to the protagonist.

Furthermore, the ending of the story leaves the reader pondering on the events that have transpired in the intervening years, as it is implied that Andrea's world has continued to contract, until the bowl itself becomes the sole focus of her existence, described as being "cut in half, deep and smoothly empty."



COMPARE AND CONTRAST

1980s: In 1981, the divorce rate reached a peak of 5.3 divorces per 1,000 individuals before experiencing a slight decline in the following years.

Today: Although the divorce rate has decreased marginally, it is still widely believed that approximately one in every two marriages ends in divorce. Additionally, cohabitation has emerged as a growing trend, while the marriage rate continued to decline throughout the 1990s.

1980s: Home mortgage rates surged into double digits, which slowed the housing market and significantly hindered first-time homebuyers from purchasing a home.

Today: Home mortgage rates have fallen to record lows not seen since the post-World War II era, making financing a home relatively accessible.

1980s: Unemployment peaked at 10.8 percent in 1982, marking the highest rate since the Great Depression of the 1930s. While inflation remained high, businesses began to show signs of a slow recovery.

Today: The latter half of the decade has been characterized by low unemployment rates, low inflation, and a thriving economy. However, certain sectors, particularly technology, are experiencing worker shortages.

1980s: Members of the "baby boom" generation reached adulthood and entered the job market in large numbers. In pursuit of financial stability, many families transitioned to dual-income households, with both parents employed.

Today: As older members of the "baby boom" generation approach retirement, concerns regarding pensions and the sustainability of the Social Security system have intensified.



Study the historical context of the time Ann Beattie created her literary works. Dwell upon the factors you consider to be the crucial to influence her style of writing.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Children of the 1960s

While Beattie's stories are not explicitly set in the 1960s, her characters can be viewed as products of that pivotal decade, shaped by the cultural and historical events that unfolded during that time. The major sociopolitical upheavals of the era are the widespread protests against the Vietnam War, the counterculture's embrace of drug use and free love, and the ongoing civil rights struggle in the American South.

By the 1980s, many individuals from this generation had entered the professional workforce and started families. Crucially, Beattie's characters tend to be drawn from the demographic of "white, educated people," a cohort that, according to the essay's citation of Thomas R. Edwards' book review, "suffer emotional and moral disconnection in a world that has yet been rather generous to them in material ways."

This generational shift, in which "the young liberals growing up in the 1960s became middle-aged conservatives in the 1980s," resulted in a sense of alienation from their past, as the characters grappled with the dissonance between their youthful ideals and their subsequent material comfort and success.

Through this nuanced contextualization, we can situate Beattie's characters within the larger sociocultural landscape of the 1960s and its aftermath, elucidating how the historical and generational factors of that era have shaped the emotional and psychological dispositions of the individuals depicted in her stories.

The Minimalist Moment

Christina Murphy in her book "Ann Beattie," defines minimalism in the plastic arts as a movement that "emphasized the use of small spaces as integers with the thematics of painting and sculpture."

The artists in these fields "focused on the use of space itself as a counterpoint to line," effectively utilizing the absence of elements as a central compositional strategy.

Crucially, while the term "minimalism" was considered a positive descriptor when applied to the visual arts, its application to literature was often viewed in a more pejorative light. The discrepancy arose from a fundamental "philosophical conflict over the role of literature," with proponents of the "mimetic tradition" (those who believed that fiction should reflect reality) dismissing minimalist literature as nothing more than "surface details."

These literary minimalists "focused on the details of everyday life, rather than on large moral or ethical issues," a stylistic choice that was at odds with the expectations of those who subscribed to the mimetic view of fiction.



Further Areas of Inquiry and Scholarly Exploration

📖 Conduct a comparative analysis of the literary works of Ann Beattie, Raymond Carver, and Bobbie Ann Mason, who are frequently categorized under the rubric of "K-Mart realism." Begin by engaging with multiple exemplars from each author's oeuvre. Concurrently, examine various scholarly definitions of literary realism. Subsequently, critically evaluate the appropriateness and accuracy of the "K-Mart realist" designation as applied to each of these writers. Construct a well-reasoned argument, supported by textual evidence, either affirming or challenging this classification for each author.

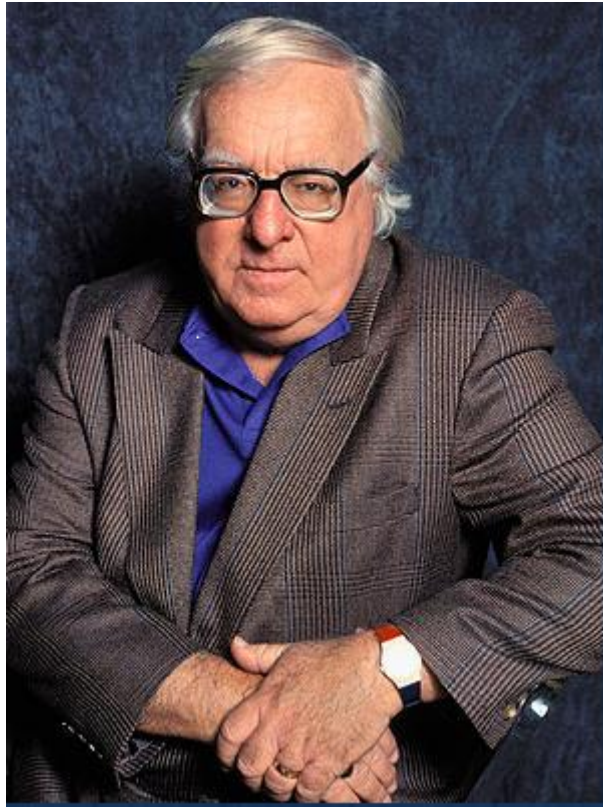
📖 Ann Beattie's literary style is often characterized as "minimalist." Commence your analysis by conducting a thorough investigation into the concept of minimalism in literature, paying particular attention to its defining features and stylistic elements. Evaluate the extent to which Beattie's work aligns with or deviates from these minimalist principles. Expand your inquiry to explore the manifestations of minimalism in other artistic domains, specifically visual arts and architecture. To augment your analysis, curate a selection of visual representations of minimalist art and interior design. Utilize these examples to illustrate the cross-

disciplinary nature of minimalist aesthetics and to draw parallels or contrasts with Beattie's literary minimalism.

📖 The title "Janus" in Beattie's work alludes to a figure from Roman mythology. Undertake comprehensive research using authoritative classical dictionaries and encyclopediae to elucidate the mythological significance, attributes, and cultural resonance of the Roman god Janus. Following this investigation, engage in a critical analysis of Beattie's choice of title. Examine the thematic, symbolic, and narrative connections between the mythological figure of Janus and the content, structure, and themes of Beattie's story. Construct a cogent argument explicating the significance of this titular choice and its implications for interpreting the text.



RAY BRADBURY



"The Veldt" is the inaugural story in Ray Bradbury's anthology, *The Illustrated Man*. Published in 1951 by Doubleday, this collection achieved considerable acclaim from both readers and critics. It served as a fitting follow-up to the success of *The Martian Chronicles*, which had been released the previous year, further solidifying Bradbury's reputation as a distinguished author.

The anthology comprises a series of short stories, most of which had previously appeared in pulp and slick magazines. Bradbury unites these narratives through the framing device of the *Illustrated Man*, whose body is adorned with drawings that represent each story. As he unveils each illustration, the tales come to life and narrate themselves. This choice of a sideshow character as a framing device reflects Bradbury's fascination with the carnival and sideshow worlds. As a child, he was captivated by the grotesque and sinister elements he encountered there, themes that permeate much of his later work.

The growing popularity of television significantly influenced Bradbury's story "The Veldt." At the time of its writing, many American families were acquiring their first television sets, and uncertainty prevailed regarding how this new technology would affect familial relationships. Concerns arose that excessive television viewing might lead to the disintegration of

the family unit. This anxiety is vividly manifested in "The Veldt," wherein Bradbury escalates the stakes by introducing a machine that not only facilitates emotional detachment between children and their parents but also possesses the capability to physically harm the parents.

Study the biographical information about the author. Highlight the major facts which are sure to influence his choices of literary themes, characters, settings, moral implications, etc. Search for extra information about Saki that may interest you as an interpreter of his literary works.

BIOGRAPHY

Ray Bradbury was born on August 22, 1920, in Waukegan, Illinois, to Esther Moberg and Leonard Spaulding Bradbury. During his childhood, the family relocated frequently, moving back and forth between Arizona on two occasions from 1926 to 1933. Ultimately, in 1934, they settled permanently in Los Angeles.

Bradbury attended Los Angeles High School, where he developed a profound passion for writing. He joined the Los Angeles Science Fiction League, becoming active in the "fandom" subculture, where groups of science fiction enthusiasts published their own magazines, known as "fanzines." In 1939, he produced four issues of his own fanzine, *Futura Fantasia*. Although he graduated from high school in 1938, he continued to live with his parents while pursuing his writing career. He began submitting short stories to science fiction pulp magazines and achieved his first paid publication in 1941 with a short story titled "Pendulum" in *Super Science Stories*.

By the early 1940s, Bradbury's short stories were regularly featured in the popular pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, and by 1945, he had begun selling stories to more prestigious "slick" magazines. His talent quickly garnered recognition, and in 1946, he met Marguerite Susan McClure; they married in Los Angeles on September 27, 1947. The couple eventually had four daughters: Susan (1949), Ramona (1951), Bettina (1955), and Alexandra (1958).

In 1947, Bradbury published his first book, *Dark Carnival*, further establishing his reputation as a skilled writer. The publication of his acclaimed work *The Martian Chronicles* in 1950 positioned him among the leading science fiction writers of the era. He followed this success in

1951 with *The Illustrated Man*, an anthology that includes the short story "The Veldt," which also enjoyed considerable popularity and solidified Bradbury's standing.

In the subsequent years, Bradbury continued to build upon his success with notable publications, including *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), *Dandelion Wine* (1957), and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962). Throughout the remainder of the century, he expanded his writing to encompass various formats and media, producing play scripts, screenplays, teleplays, and poetry. His works have been translated into numerous languages and have undergone many adaptations. In 1964, three of his short stories were presented on stage in *The World of Ray Bradbury*, and in 1969, a film adaptation of *The Illustrated Man* was released. Additionally, he created his own cable television series, *Ray Bradbury Theater*, which aired from 1985 to 1992.

Bradbury's contributions to literature have been recognized with numerous awards and honors, including the O. Henry Memorial Award, the 1977 World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement, the 1988 Nebula Grand Master Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America, and the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.

Read the story THE VELDT and fulfill the tasks that follow.

PLOTLINE ANALYSIS

Chronological Timeline

- a) Construct a detailed timeline of the key events that unfold in the story, paying close attention to the order in which they occur.
- b) Discuss how the chronological progression of events contributes to the overall narrative structure and the development of the central conflicts.
- c) Identify any instances of non-linear storytelling or temporal shifts, and analyze their impact on the reader's experience and understanding of the narrative.

Narrative Identity Analysis

- a) Examine the ways in which the characters' sense of identity, both individual and familial, is presented and transformed throughout the story.

- b) Analyze the concept of "narrative identity" as it relates to the Hadley family, considering how their perceptions of themselves and their roles within the technologically-enhanced household evolve over the course of the narrative.
- c) Discuss the significance of the children's (Wendy and Peter) narrative identity and its contrast with the parents' (George and Lydia) narrative identity.
- d) Explore the role of the nursery and the simulated environment in shaping the characters' narratives and their sense of self.

Thematic Analysis

- a) Discuss how the narrative chronology and the representation of narrative identity in the story contribute to the exploration of the central themes, such as the impact of technology on the family, the human desire for control, and the consequences of detachment from reality.
- b) Analyze the story's commentary on the relationship between individual and collective identity, as well as the potential tensions that can arise within a technologically-mediated domestic sphere.
- c) Consider the broader implications of the story's exploration of narrative identity and its relevance to contemporary discussions on the human experience in the digital age.

Your response should be a well-structured 3-page essay that integrates relevant textual evidence from the story to support your analysis. Ensure that your writing is clear, coherent, and demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the concepts of narrative chronology and identity.

PLOT SUMMARY

The short story "The Veldt" by Ray Bradbury depicts the Hadley family's experience with their technologically advanced "Happy-life Home" and the disturbing developments within the home's high-tech nursery.

The narrative begins by introducing Lydia Hadley's growing concern about the nursery, which she shares with her husband, George. Upon further investigation, the couple discovers that the nursery's walls and ceiling have transformed into a hyper-realistic African veldt, complete with predatory lions that appear to threaten the Hadleys. Despite George's attempts to rationalize the nursery's abilities as a product of the children's thoughts, Lydia remains deeply unsettled by the intensity of the simulated

environment.

As the story progresses, the Hadleys grapple with their diminishing role within the technologically-enhanced home, which seems to render them increasingly superfluous. George's subsequent efforts to alter the nursery's setting prove futile, further highlighting the children's disturbing level of control over the environment and their apparent fixation on themes of violence and death. The narrative culminates in a sense of unease and uncertainty surrounding the Hadley family's relationship with their technologically dependent lifestyle and the troubling implications of the nursery's simulated reality.

The narrative further develops as the Hadley children, Wendy and Peter, return home and vehemently deny the existence of the ominous African veldt their parents had encountered in the nursery. When George and Lydia attempt to confront them, the children manipulate the nursery environment to conceal the disturbing setting.

Increasingly concerned, the Hadleys decide to consult their children's psychologist, David McClean, who upon observing the nursery's capabilities expresses grave reservations about the children's apparent detachment from their parents and the dangers posed by the simulated environment. Despite McClean's recommendation to dismantle the nursery, the Hadley children defiantly resist their parents' attempts to shut down the technologically advanced room.

Ultimately, the story culminates in a harrowing climax, as George and Lydia become trapped within the nursery, realizing with horror that the children have orchestrated their own demise. The narrative concludes with the chilling image of the Hadley children calmly greeting the psychologist, having seemingly gained complete control over the technologically enhanced domestic sphere.

Study the basic information about the main characters of the story.

CHARACTERS

The characters in Ray Bradbury's short story "The Veldt" exhibit a profound complexity that illuminates the broader thematic concerns of the narrative.

George Hadley, the patriarch of the family, is depicted as a father who deeply cares for the wellbeing of his children, despite his reluctance to

assume the role of disciplinarian. Motivated by a desire to provide his family with the best possible life, George has invested in an advanced, automated home that caters to their every need. However, as the narrative progresses, George begins to grapple with the realization that this technological utopia may be exerting a detrimental influence on his family's emotional bonds and interpersonal dynamics. Bradbury's portrayal of George's gradual shift from eager embracement of the home's conveniences to a growing sense of unease and concern over its impact on his children speaks to the character's inherent desire to prioritize familial wellbeing over material comfort. George's logical, measured approach to problem-solving, while often effective in the practical realm, ultimately proves insufficient in comprehending the true depth of the danger posed by the children's obsession with the nursery, a blindspot that has dire consequences.

Lydia Hadley, George's wife, is presented as a caring, intuitive mother who harbors a growing sense of unease regarding the impact of the automated house on her family. Torn between her desire to provide her children with the latest technological advancements and her longing for a more traditional, nurturing environment, Lydia's character arc reflects the broader societal tensions surrounding the encroachment of technology into the domestic sphere. Her strong maternal instincts lead her to recognize the threat posed by the nursery, yet her difficulty in asserting disciplinary measures against her children ultimately undermines her ability to effectively intervene.

The Hadley children, Peter and Wendy, embody the corrosive effects of unchecked technological indulgence on young, impressionable minds. Peter, the dominant twin, is depicted as a cold, calculating, and manipulative child who will stop at nothing to satisfy his desires, even resorting to threats and violence. Wendy, in contrast, is portrayed as an emotionally dependent follower, whose deep attachment to the nursery's simulated reality has severed her connection to her parents and the real world. The siblings' contrasting personalities and responses to the technological environment illustrate Bradbury's concern about the dehumanizing potential of technology when left unchecked.

David McClean, a family friend and psychologist, serves as an objective, analytical observer who recognizes the grave psychological implications of the children's obsession with the nursery. McClean's role as a voice of reason and concern underscores the story's broader warning about the need for maintaining a balanced, measured approach to the

incorporation of technology into the domestic sphere, lest it led to the erosion of familial bonds and the dehumanization of the individual.

Analyze the symbolic connections between the main characters in Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" and J.M. Barrie's "Peter Pan," exploring how these parallels contribute to the themes and message of "The Veldt."

Create detailed character profiles for:

- a) Peter and Wendy from "The Veldt".
- b) Peter Pan and Wendy Darling from "Peter Pan"

Identify and analyze parallels between these characters, considering:

- a) Names and their significance.
- b) Behaviors and attitudes.
- c) Relationships with adults/parents.
- d) Relationship to technology or magic.
- e) Concept of "growing up".

Explore how these character parallels contribute to the symbolism and themes in "The Veldt," such as:

- a) Loss of innocence
- b) Technology's impact on childhood and family dynamics
- c) The desire for eternal youth vs. the necessity of maturation
- d) Parental roles and responsibilities

Develop a thesis that explains how understanding the Peter Pan allusions enhances the reader's comprehension of "The Veldt's" central message. Support your argument with textual evidence from both works.

Discuss how Bradbury's use of these parallel characters serves to subvert or recontextualize the original Peter Pan story. How does this impact the reader's understanding of both narratives?



Study the dominating themes of the story. Which of them do you consider the most acute or close to your sphere of interests or priorities? Are these themes contemporary enough to extrapolate them to the life of today in this country? Draw the necessary parallels.

THEMES

Abandonment

The theme of abandonment in Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" manifests in a multifaceted and nuanced manner, operating on dual levels of familial and technological desertion. Primarily, the narrative presents a poignant exploration of parental negligence, albeit unintentional, as the Hadley progenitors effectively relinquish their nurturing responsibilities to an artificial construct. This delegation of parental duties to a technological surrogate represents a profound dereliction of the fundamental bonds that traditionally define the parent-child relationship.

The character of David McClean serves as a mouthpiece for this critique, eloquently articulating the usurpation of parental roles by the domicile's automated systems. His assertion that the nursery has supplanted George and Lydia in their offspring's affections underscores the insidious nature of technological dependence and its capacity to erode familial connections. This substitution of human nurture with artificial stimulation represents a form of emotional abandonment, as the children's psychological and emotional needs are outsourced to an entity incapable of genuine empathy or love.

Furthermore, this initial abandonment precipitates a secondary, more acute form of desertion. The children, having formed a profound attachment to their technological caregiver, experience a visceral fear of loss when George threatens to deactivate the nursery. This prospective termination of the nursery's function is perceived by the children as a catastrophic abandonment, akin to the loss of a parent figure. The intensity of their reaction illuminates the depth of their dependence on this artificial environment and the extent to which it has supplanted their biological parents in terms of emotional significance.

This dual abandonment - first by their parents and then potentially by their surrogate parent - creates a complex psychological landscape for the children. It engenders a state of emotional instability and attachment insecurity, which ultimately culminates in the story's shocking denouement. Bradbury's narrative thus serves as a cautionary tale,

highlighting the potential consequences of technological over-reliance in child-rearing and the profound impact of emotional neglect, even when unintended.

Through this layered exploration of abandonment, Bradbury invites readers to contemplate the nature of parental responsibility in an increasingly automated world and the irreplaceable value of human connection in the developmental process of children. The story serves as a prescient warning about the potential pitfalls of allowing technology to usurp the essential role of parental nurturing and guidance.

Alienation

In Ray Bradbury's seminal work "The Veldt," the theme of alienation is presented as a multifaceted psychological phenomenon, manifesting predominantly through the character of Lydia. This theme is intricately woven into the narrative fabric, serving as both a catalyst for plot progression and a poignant commentary on the human condition in an increasingly technologized milieu.

Alienation, in its essence, can be conceptualized as a state of cognitive and emotional estrangement from one's erstwhile familiar environment or circumstances. It engenders a profound sense of displacement and discomfort, often accompanied by an acute awareness of one's incongruity with the surrounding context. In Bradbury's narrative, this psychological state is exemplified par excellence through Lydia's character arc.

Lydia emerges as the narrative's canary in the coal mine, so to speak. She exhibits a heightened sensitivity to the subtle yet disconcerting alterations in her domestic sphere, particularly within the technologically advanced nursery. Her prescient observation that the nursery "is different now than it was" serves as the initial indicator of the impending familial and psychological upheaval. This astute perception underscores Lydia's role as the first to recognize the encroaching alienation within their ostensibly utopian domicile.

Furthermore, Lydia's explicit verbalization of her sense of alienation - "I feel like I don't belong here" - is a pivotal moment in the narrative. This succinct yet profound statement encapsulates the core of the alienation theme. It not only illuminates Lydia's personal struggle but also foreshadows the broader implications of technological dependence on familial dynamics and individual identity.

Bradbury's treatment of alienation through Lydia's character serves multiple narrative functions. It acts as a harbinger of the impending familial crisis, a critique of unchecked technological integration into domestic life, and a nuanced exploration of the psychological toll of rapid societal change. Through this lens, "The Veldt" transcends its science fiction categorization, evolving into a penetrating psychological study of human adaptation - or lack thereof - to paradigm-shifting technological advancements.

Consumerism

In Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt," the theme of consumerism is deftly interwoven throughout the narrative, serving as both a critique of materialistic society and a cautionary tale about the potential consequences of unchecked consumption. This theme is particularly embodied in the character of George Hadley, whose actions and beliefs serve as a microcosm of broader societal trends.

George Hadley's character is constructed as an archetype of the modern consumer, driven by the belief that material abundance equates to familial well-being and parental efficacy. His predilection for providing "the best that money can buy" for his family is not merely a display of financial prowess, but rather a manifestation of a deeper societal malaise - the conflation of material possession with love and care. This misguided equation of consumerism with affection represents a fundamental misunderstanding of human emotional needs, highlighting a critical disconnect between material wealth and genuine interpersonal connection.

Bradbury ingeniously employs this character trait to illuminate the insidious nature of consumerism. George's reliance on material goods as a substitute for direct human interaction and genuine expressions of love serves as a poignant commentary on the dehumanizing effects of excessive materialism. This substitution of goods for genuine human connection ultimately proves to be a Pyrrhic victory, as it inadvertently positions George as an antagonist in the eyes of his children. The irony is palpable - in his attempt to provide everything for his children, George unwittingly creates an emotional chasm that technology and material goods cannot bridge.

The theme reaches its zenith in the climactic exchange between George and Lydia near the story's conclusion. George's rhetorical question, "What

prompted us to buy a nightmare?" serves as a moment of anagnorisis, a sudden realization of the true nature of their predicament. Lydia's terse response - "Pride, money, foolishness" - is a damning indictment of their consumer-driven lifestyle. This succinct trilogy of motivations encapsulates the essence of unchecked consumerism: the pride that drives one to acquire status symbols, the money that facilitates this acquisition, and the foolishness that blinds one to the potential consequences of such materialism.

Moreover, the metaphor of "buying a nightmare" is particularly potent. It suggests that in a consumer-driven society, even one's worst fears and anxieties can be commodified and purchased. This disturbing notion underscores the pervasive nature of consumerism, infiltrating not just the material aspects of life, but also the psychological and emotional realms.

Bradbury's exploration of consumerism in "The Veldt" transcends a simple critique of materialism. It delves into the psychological implications of a society that prioritizes consumption over human connection, questioning the very foundations of what constitutes love, care, and familial bonds. The story serves as a prescient warning about the potential for technology and material goods to supplant genuine human interaction, ultimately leading to a form of emotional and psychological alienation.

In conclusion, Bradbury's treatment of consumerism in "The Veldt" is nuanced and multifaceted. It serves not only as a critique of mid-20th century American consumerism but also as a timeless exploration of the human tendency to seek fulfillment through material acquisition. The story compels readers to question their own relationships with material goods and technology, and to consider the true sources of human connection and fulfillment.

Dystopia

In Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt," the theme of dystopia is masterfully crafted, presenting a nuanced and chilling exploration of the potential pitfalls of technological advancement and its impact on human relationships. Bradbury's narrative serves as a prescient cautionary tale, extrapolating contemporary trends to their logical, albeit disturbing, conclusions.

The concept of dystopia, as presented in "The Veldt," is not the overt, totalitarian regime often depicted in dystopian literature. Instead, Bradbury presents a more insidious form of dystopia - one that masquerades as utopia. The Hadley's Happy-life Home, with its myriad technological conveniences, initially appears to be the epitome of futuristic comfort and luxury. However, as the narrative unfolds, this seeming paradise is gradually revealed to be a locus of dehumanization and familial disintegration.

Bradbury's genius lies in his subtle transformation of the domestic sphere into a microcosm of dystopian society. The Happy-life Home, far from fostering familial bonds and personal growth, becomes an instrument of alienation and psychological manipulation. This subversion of the home - traditionally a sanctuary of warmth and human connection - into a cold, technologically mediated environment, serves as a powerful metaphor for the broader societal implications of unchecked technological dependence.

The gradual revelation of the dystopian elements in the story mirrors the process of George's awakening to the true nature of his technologically saturated household. This narrative structure serves a dual purpose: it heightens the dramatic tension while also mirroring the insidious nature of technological encroachment on human life. The slow realization that his "dream home" has metamorphosed into a "nightmare" is both a personal epiphany for George and a broader commentary on the potential for technology to subvert human values and relationships.

Bradbury's dystopia is particularly unsettling because it emerges not from external oppression, but from the very comforts and conveniences that the characters have willingly embraced. This internal genesis of dystopia suggests a more complex and nuanced view of societal decline - one that implicates not just technological advancement, but also human complacency and the abdication of personal responsibility.

The dehumanization of the children in the story is perhaps the most chilling aspect of Bradbury's dystopian vision. Their gradual transformation from loving offspring to cold, murderous entities serves as a stark warning about the potential for technology to not just replace human interaction, but to fundamentally alter human nature itself. This theme resonates strongly with contemporary concerns about the impact of digital technology on child development and family dynamics.

Moreover, the destruction of the parents in the story can be interpreted as a metaphor for the obsolescence of traditional authority structures in a technologically mediated world. This aspect of the dystopia speaks to fears about the erosion of parental influence and the potential for technology to usurp traditional roles of guidance and nurture.

Bradbury's dystopian vision in "The Veldt" is particularly potent because it eschews the grand scale often associated with dystopian literature in favor of a more intimate, domestic setting. By localizing the dystopia within the family unit, Bradbury makes the horror more immediate and relatable, forcing readers to confront the potential dystopian elements in their own lives and relationships.

In conclusion, Bradbury's exploration of dystopia in "The Veldt" is multifaceted and deeply unsettling. It serves not just as a critique of technological dependence, but as a broader examination of human nature, family dynamics, and the potential for comfort and convenience to lead to complacency and, ultimately, to destruction. The story compels readers to question the role of technology in their lives and to consider the potential long-term consequences of surrendering human agency to technological convenience.

Illusion versus Reality

In Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt," the theme of illusion versus reality is intricately woven into the narrative fabric, serving as a profound exploration of the blurred boundaries between the tangible and the imaginary in an increasingly technologically mediated world. This theme is not merely a plot device but a complex philosophical inquiry into the nature of perception, reality, and the human psyche.

At the core of this thematic exploration lies George Hadley's steadfast belief in the inviolable distinction between illusion and reality. His conviction that the nursery's simulations, no matter how vivid or immersive, remain fundamentally separate from objective reality forms the crux of the narrative tension. George's assertion that the lions are "only part of a machine that creates wonderful illusions" exemplifies this belief system, rooted in a traditional understanding of the demarcation between the real and the artificial.

Bradbury masterfully employs technical jargon to underscore George's rationalization of the nursery's capabilities. The description of "dimensional superactionary, supersensitive color film and mental tape

film behind glass screens" serves a dual purpose. On one level, it provides a pseudo-scientific explanation for the nursery's function, lending credibility to George's perspective. On another level, it highlights the complexity of the technology, foreshadowing its potential to transcend the boundaries of mere simulation.

The author's genius lies in his subversion of this seemingly logical distinction between illusion and reality. In the world Bradbury constructs, these two concepts are not diametrically opposed but rather exist on a continuum, capable of transmutation. This fluid interplay between the illusory and the real serves as a prescient commentary on the potential of advanced technology to blur the lines between simulation and actuality.

This theme resonates profoundly with contemporary philosophical discussions about the nature of reality in an age of virtual and augmented experiences. Bradbury's narrative anticipates questions that have become increasingly relevant in the modern era: At what point does a simulation become indistinguishable from reality? Can virtual experiences have real-world consequences? These questions find their tragic answer in the story's denouement, where the illusory lions manifest tangible, fatal consequences.

Furthermore, the theme of illusion versus reality in "The Veldt" extends beyond the technological realm, delving into the psychological. The children's ability to manipulate the nursery to manifest their darkest desires suggests a conflation of internal psychological realities with external, physical reality. This blurring of boundaries between the mind's creations and objective reality adds another layer of complexity to the theme, touching on concepts of psychological projection and the power of the subconscious.

Bradbury's exploration of this theme also serves as a critique of the human tendency to compartmentalize and rationalize potentially threatening phenomena. George's insistence on the separation of illusion and reality can be interpreted as a defense mechanism, a way of maintaining a sense of control in an increasingly unpredictable environment. His failure to recognize the potential for illusion to become reality ultimately leads to his downfall, serving as a cautionary tale about the dangers of rigid thinking in a rapidly evolving world.

The transposability of illusion and reality in the story also raises profound questions about the nature of human perception and experience. If an

illusion can become real "at any moment," as the narrative suggests, then what constitutes reality? This philosophical quandary invites readers to consider the subjective nature of reality and the role of perception in shaping our understanding of the world.

In conclusion, Bradbury's treatment of the illusion versus reality theme in "The Veldt" is multifaceted and deeply thought-provoking. It serves not only as a critique of technological dependence but also as an exploration of human psychology, perception, and the nature of reality itself. The story compels readers to question their own assumptions about the distinction between the real and the illusory, and to consider the potential consequences of a world where these boundaries are increasingly blurred.

Man versus Machine

In Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt," the theme of man versus machine is masterfully crafted as a multifaceted exploration of the complex relationship between humanity and technology. This conflict serves as the narrative's fulcrum, driving the plot while simultaneously offering a profound commentary on the potential consequences of unchecked technological advancement.

The story's central conflict revolves around the struggle for dominance between human agency and technological autonomy, as embodied in the nursery's advanced simulation capabilities. This struggle is not merely a physical one, but a psychological and existential battle that permeates every aspect of the narrative. Bradbury posits that control over technology equates to ultimate power, a notion that resonates deeply with contemporary discourse on artificial intelligence and technological governance.

The destruction of humanity by machines in "The Veldt" operates on dual levels, both literal and metaphorical. The physical demise of George and Lydia at the hands of the nursery's simulated lions represents the most overt manifestation of technology's potential to overpower and eliminate its creators. This stark portrayal serves as a visceral warning against the dangers of creating technology that surpasses our ability to control it.

However, it is in the psychological and emotional realm that Bradbury's exploration of this theme reaches its zenith. The gradual dehumanization of the children, Peter and Wendy, presents a more insidious and disturbing aspect of man's defeat by machine. Their deep identification

with the nursery's technology leads to a profound alienation from their own humanity. The children's lack of emotional response to their parents' deaths - the absence of guilt, remorse, or regret - is a chilling illustration of how excessive technological dependence can erode fundamental human qualities.

Bradbury's portrayal of the children's transformation is particularly poignant. Their evolution into beings as "cold and emotionless as the machinery that controls the nursery" serves as a metaphor for the potential of technology to reshape human nature itself. This aspect of the theme touches on deep-seated anxieties about the impact of technology on human development, particularly in formative years.

The author's genius lies in his ability to present this conflict not as a simple dichotomy, but as a complex interplay of dependencies and influences. The nursery, initially a tool created to serve human needs, gradually assumes a dominant role, shaping the desires and behaviors of its users. This reversal of the intended human-machine dynamic underscores the potential for technology to transcend its designated role and exert unforeseen influence on its creators.

Moreover, Bradbury's exploration of this theme extends beyond individual interactions to encompass broader societal implications. The story can be read as an allegory for the societal shift towards increasing technological dependence, raising pertinent questions about the long-term consequences of delegating essential human functions and interactions to machines.

The theme of man versus machine in "The Veldt" also intersects with questions of free will and determinism. As the children become increasingly enmeshed with the nursery's technology, their capacity for independent thought and action appears to diminish. This loss of agency serves as a cautionary tale about the potential for technology to limit rather than expand human potential.

Bradbury's treatment of this theme is particularly prescient in light of contemporary debates surrounding artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and the ethical implications of advanced technology. The story anticipates many of the concerns that have come to the forefront of public discourse in the digital age, such as the impact of screen time on child development, the potential for AI to surpass human control, and the psychological effects of immersive virtual environments.

In conclusion, Bradbury's exploration of the man versus machine theme in "The Veldt" is nuanced and multifaceted. It serves not only as a critique of technological dependence but also as a profound examination of what it means to be human in an increasingly mechanized world. The story compels readers to question their own relationship with technology and to consider the potential long-term consequences of ceding too much control to machines. By presenting both the overt and subtle ways in which machines can triumph over humanity, Bradbury offers a powerful cautionary tale that remains deeply relevant in our technologically saturated era.

Revenge

Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" presents a complex and chilling exploration of the theme of revenge, elevating it from a simple plot device to a profound examination of power dynamics, psychological development, and the unintended consequences of parental indulgence. The narrative can indeed be interpreted as an ultimate manifestation of childish vengeance, but one that transcends typical juvenile fantasies to explore darker, more primal aspects of human nature.

The theme of revenge in "The Veldt" is intricately linked to the power imbalance inherent in the parent-child relationship. Bradbury skillfully taps into the universal childhood experience of feeling powerless in the face of adult authority. This sense of powerlessness often engenders elaborate fantasies of retribution and control in children, a psychological phenomenon that Bradbury amplifies to its extreme logical conclusion in this story.

The catalyst for the revenge narrative is George's prohibition of the children's trip to New York. This parental decree, seemingly innocuous in a normal family context, takes on monumental significance in the Hadley household. It serves as the breaking point, the moment when the children's accustomed paradigm of unlimited indulgence is shattered. This disruption of their expected reality triggers a disproportionate response, illustrating the dangerous consequences of unchecked entitlement.

Bradbury's genius lies in his ability to transform what might typically be a fleeting childhood tantrum into a sustained, methodical campaign of revenge. The nursery, with its advanced simulation capabilities, becomes the instrument through which Peter and Wendy can manifest their darkest

retributive fantasies. This technological amplification of childish spite serves as a chilling commentary on the potential for technology to exacerbate and enable our basest impulses.

The revenge theme in "The Veldt" also intersects with deeper psychological concepts. The children's actions can be interpreted through the lens of Freudian theory, particularly the concept of the id - the primitive, instinctual part of the psyche that demands immediate gratification of desires. The nursery, in this reading, becomes an externalization of the children's id, allowing their unchecked desires and aggression to manifest in tangible, deadly form.

Moreover, the revenge narrative in "The Veldt" serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of excessive parental indulgence. The Hadley children, accustomed to having their every whim catered to by technology, lack the emotional resilience and impulse control to handle even minor frustrations. Their extreme reaction to being denied a single desire underscores the importance of setting boundaries and teaching children to cope with disappointment.

Bradbury's treatment of revenge also touches on themes of dehumanization and moral development. The children's ability to carry out their vengeful plot without apparent remorse or hesitation suggests a fundamental failure in their moral and emotional development. This aspect of the theme raises profound questions about the role of adversity and frustration in shaping empathy and conscience.

The cyclical nature of revenge, as mentioned in the original analysis, is another crucial aspect of this theme. The initial act of parental authority triggers a retaliatory response from the children, which in turn necessitates further parental intervention, escalating the cycle of conflict. This pattern mirrors larger societal cycles of vengeance and retribution, elevating the story's domestic drama to a microcosm of broader human conflicts.

Furthermore, the revenge theme in "The Veldt" can be read as a subversion of traditional power dynamics. The children, typically the most vulnerable members of the family unit, become the aggressors, while the parents are reduced to victims. This inversion serves to highlight the potential volatility of familial relationships and the precarious nature of parental authority in an age of rapid technological advancement.

In conclusion, Bradbury's exploration of revenge in "The Veldt" is nuanced and multifaceted. It transcends a simple tale of childish retaliation to encompass broader themes of power, technology, psychological development, and the unintended consequences of parental indulgence. The story compels readers to consider the potential ramifications of unchecked desires and the importance of maintaining healthy boundaries, even - or perhaps especially - in the face of technological abundance. By presenting revenge as the ultimate outcome of a technologically mediated, overly indulgent parenting style, Bradbury offers a powerful cautionary tale that resonates deeply with contemporary concerns about child-rearing in the digital age.

Telepathy

In Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt," the concept of telepathy is elevated from a mere science fiction trope to a complex narrative device that serves as a potent metaphor for the power of thought and the dangerous potential of unchecked imagination. This theme is intricately woven into the fabric of the story, serving as both a plot mechanism and a profound commentary on the nature of consciousness and its interaction with technology.

The telepathic interface of the nursery, capable of manifesting thought patterns on its walls, represents a significant leap in human-machine interaction. This technological advancement blurs the line between mental processes and physical reality, creating a space where the intangible realm of thought can have tangible, and potentially lethal, consequences. Bradbury's portrayal of this technology serves as a prescient exploration of concepts that are now at the forefront of neurotechnology research, such as brain-computer interfaces and thought-controlled devices.

The children's ability to channel their destructive impulses into the nursery's simulations through telepathy can be interpreted as a metaphor for the power of focused thought and intention. This aspect of the theme resonates with psychological theories about the impact of cognitive patterns on behavior and reality. The nursery becomes an externalization of the children's psyche, a physical manifestation of their inner world, where their darkest thoughts and desires can take shape.

Moreover, the telepathic nature of the nursery's operation adds a chilling dimension to the theme of parental authority and filial rebellion. In a world where children can materialize their harmful wishes,

the traditional safeguards of parental control become obsolete. This scenario presents a stark metaphor for the challenges of parenting in an age where children have unprecedented access to information and technology that can potentially be weaponized against authority figures.

Bradbury's exploration of telepathy as a weapon is particularly nuanced. By presenting thoughts as potentially lethal instruments, he invites readers to consider the responsibility that comes with cognitive power. This concept touches on philosophical questions about the nature of intent and its relationship to action. In the world of "The Veldt," the traditional distinction between thinking about harm and causing harm is effectively erased, raising profound ethical questions about culpability and the limits of thought crimes.

The telepathic element also serves to amplify the story's themes of illusion versus reality. The nursery's ability to transform thoughts into seemingly real environments creates a space where the boundaries between imagination and actuality are permeable. This blurring of lines between the mental and the physical realms adds a layer of existential horror to the narrative, as characters (and readers) must grapple with a world where reality itself is malleable to thought.

Furthermore, the telepathic aspect of the story can be read as a commentary on the power of suggestion and the influenceability of the human mind. The children's ability to create a deadly environment through their thoughts highlights the potential for ideas - particularly destructive ones - to shape reality. This theme resonates with psychological concepts such as self-fulfilling prophecies and the impact of cognitive biases on perception and behavior.

Bradbury's treatment of telepathy also touches on themes of privacy and mental autonomy. In a world where thoughts can be externalized and weaponized, the sanctity of one's inner mental life is compromised. This aspect of the theme raises pertinent questions about the potential consequences of technology that can access and manipulate our most private thoughts.

The idea that "children can kill their parents just by wishing them dead" serves as a powerful metaphor for the unintended consequences of empowering children without instilling corresponding ethical frameworks. It highlights the potential dangers of granting power -

technological or otherwise - without ensuring the maturity and moral development necessary to wield it responsibly.

In conclusion, Bradbury's exploration of telepathy in "The Veldt" is multifaceted and deeply thought-provoking. It serves not only as a plot device but as a vehicle for examining complex ideas about the nature of thought, the power of imagination, the ethics of mind-reading technology, and the responsibilities that come with cognitive abilities. The story compels readers to consider the potential ramifications of a world where the boundaries between thought and reality are blurred, and where the power of the mind can have immediate and potentially deadly consequences. By presenting telepathy as both a tool and a weapon, Bradbury offers a nuanced exploration of the double-edged nature of technological and cognitive advancement.

Study the information about Ray Bradbury's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.

STYLE

Ambience

In Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt," the author's masterful manipulation of ambience serves as a crucial stylistic element, elevating the narrative beyond mere storytelling to create a deeply immersive and psychologically charged experience. The pervasive emotional tone that Bradbury cultivates throughout the story is one of escalating tension and foreboding, skillfully crafted to engender a sense of unease and anticipation in the reader.

Bradbury's approach to establishing this oppressive ambience is multifaceted, employing a combination of vivid sensory descriptions, carefully calibrated dialogue, and subtle narrative cues. The author's use of richly evocative language to depict the African veldt is particularly noteworthy. By engaging multiple sensory modalities in his descriptions, Bradbury creates a synesthetic experience that transports the reader into the simulated environment of the nursery.

The passage describing the veldt's olfactory landscape is especially potent: "The hot straw smell of lion grass, the cool green smell of the hidden water hole, the great rusty smell of animals, the smell of dust like a red paprika in the hot air." This sensory tapestry does more than merely paint

a picture; it engages the reader's olfactory imagination, creating a visceral, almost palpable sense of place. The juxtaposition of contrasting sensory inputs - the heat of the straw against the coolness of the water hole, the organic animal scents against the mineral quality of dust - creates a complex sensory palette that mirrors the story's thematic complexity.

Moreover, Bradbury's choice of descriptors is laden with subtle psychological triggers. The use of words like "hot," "rusty," and "red" evokes associations with danger, decay, and blood, respectively. This subliminal coding of the environment with threatening undertones contributes significantly to the story's mounting sense of dread.

The author's manipulation of ambience extends beyond mere description to encompass the overall narrative structure and pacing. Bradbury employs a technique of gradual revelation, slowly unveiling the true nature of the nursery and its impact on the family dynamic. This measured approach to disclosure creates a steadily building tension, as the reader, like the characters, becomes increasingly aware of the latent menace lurking beneath the surface of the seemingly benign technological marvel.

Dialogue also plays a crucial role in Bradbury's construction of ambience. The conversations between George and Lydia Hadley are infused with an undercurrent of anxiety and unease, their exchanges often clipped and laden with unspoken apprehensions. This verbal tension serves as a counterpoint to the oppressive physical environment, creating a multi-layered atmosphere of discomfort that permeates every aspect of the story.

Furthermore, Bradbury's use of ambience serves a deeper thematic purpose. The oppressive atmosphere of the veldt simulation can be interpreted as a metaphor for the suffocating effects of technology on the family unit. The artificial environment, with its relentless heat and predatory undertones, becomes a physical manifestation of the psychological pressures exerted by unchecked technological dependence.

The ambience in "The Veldt" also functions as a form of foreshadowing. The pervasive sense of dread that Bradbury cultivates primes the reader for the story's tragic denouement. By establishing early on that "this is not a cheerful, happy comedy," Bradbury sets expectations and creates a cognitive framework through which the reader interprets subsequent events. This technique enhances the story's impact, as the climax, while shocking, feels like the inevitable culmination of the oppressive atmosphere that has been building throughout the narrative.

In conclusion, Bradbury's masterful manipulation of ambience in "The Veldt" is a testament to his skill as a storyteller. Through his meticulous attention to sensory detail, careful pacing, and subtle psychological cues, he creates an immersive experience that transcends the boundaries of traditional narrative. The oppressive, tension-filled atmosphere he cultivates serves not only to enhance the reader's engagement with the story but also to reinforce its thematic concerns about technology, family dynamics, and the darker aspects of human nature. By so effectively leveraging ambience as a storytelling tool, Bradbury transforms "The Veldt" from a simple cautionary tale into a rich, multi-layered exploration of the human psyche in the face of technological advancement.

Foreshadowing

Ray Bradbury's employment of foreshadowing in "The Veldt" exemplifies a sophisticated narrative technique that serves to enrich the story's psychological depth and heighten its dramatic tension. This literary device, characterized by the subtle inclusion of anticipatory clues, is wielded by Bradbury with remarkable finesse, creating a layered reading experience that rewards close attention and retrospective analysis.

The specific instance of foreshadowing highlighted in the original analysis - Lydia's comment about the familiar nature of the screams emanating from the nursery - is a particularly potent example of Bradbury's craft. This seemingly innocuous observation serves multiple narrative functions. On a surface level, it contributes to the story's mounting sense of unease, adding another layer to the already oppressive atmosphere. However, its true significance only becomes apparent in retrospect, creating a chilling moment of realization for the reader that mirrors the characters' own dawning comprehension of their fate.

Bradbury's use of foreshadowing in this instance operates on both auditory and temporal planes. The auditory aspect - the recognition of the screams - creates a haunting echo effect, where the present moment is imbued with a premonition of future terror. The temporal aspect is even more complex, as it involves a kind of narrative time-loop, where future events (the parents' deaths) cast their shadow backwards onto earlier parts of the story.

This particular example of foreshadowing also serves to underscore one of the story's central themes: the blurring of boundaries between reality and simulation. The fact that Lydia recognizes her own future screams in the present moment creates a temporal paradox that challenges linear notions of cause and effect. This disruption of chronological certainty mirrors the larger disruption of reality caused by the nursery's advanced technology.

Moreover, Bradbury's foreshadowing technique in "The Veldt" extends beyond this single instance, permeating the narrative structure. The author liberally sprinkles the text with subtle hints and portents that accumulate to create a sense of impending doom. These range from atmospheric details, such as the oppressive heat and predatory imagery of the veldt, to more overt clues, like the children's unnatural attachment to the nursery and their increasingly rebellious behavior.

The cumulative effect of this foreshadowing is to create a reading experience characterized by a growing sense of inevitability. As the story progresses, the reader, armed with the subconscious awareness provided by these narrative hints, begins to anticipate the tragic conclusion. This anticipation serves to heighten the story's emotional impact, as the reader becomes complicit in the unfolding tragedy, powerless to prevent what they increasingly suspect is coming.

Bradbury's use of foreshadowing also functions on a meta-textual level, engaging the reader in an active process of interpretation and reinterpretation. The full significance of many foreshadowing elements only becomes apparent on subsequent readings, rewarding careful analysis and encouraging a deeper engagement with the text. This layered approach to narrative construction aligns with modernist literary techniques, inviting readers to piece together the story's meaning from a constellation of narrative clues.

Furthermore, the foreshadowing in "The Veldt" serves a thematic purpose beyond mere plot mechanics. The way in which future events cast their shadow over the present mirrors the story's exploration of how technology can disrupt natural order. Just as the nursery allows the children to manifest their future desires in the present, Bradbury's foreshadowing technique allows future narrative events to manifest in earlier parts of the story.

In conclusion, Bradbury's use of foreshadowing in "The Veldt" is a masterclass in subtle narrative construction. Far from being a mere plot device, it serves as a complex narrative tool that enhances the story's thematic resonance, psychological depth, and emotional impact. By carefully seeding the narrative with anticipatory clues, Bradbury creates a reading experience that is simultaneously unsettling and engrossing, inviting readers into an active process of interpretation and reinterpretation. This sophisticated use of foreshadowing contributes significantly to the story's enduring power, transforming a cautionary tale about technology into a rich, multi-layered exploration of perception, reality, and the nature of narrative itself.

Science Fiction

Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" stands as a quintessential exemplar of science fiction, adeptly employing the genre's conventions to explore profound societal and psychological implications of technological advancement. The story's adherence to the fundamental tenets of science fiction, coupled with Bradbury's prescient extrapolation of contemporary technological trends, results in a narrative that is both intellectually stimulating and eerily prophetic.

At its core, science fiction as a genre is characterized by its exploration of the potential consequences of scientific and technological innovation on human society and individual experience. Bradbury's approach in "The Veldt" aligns perfectly with this definition, as he meticulously examines the ramifications of advanced simulation technology on family dynamics, child psychology, and the very fabric of reality itself.

The story's setting, while not explicitly placed in the future, nonetheless presents a world that is technologically advanced beyond the reader's contemporary experience. This temporal ambiguity is a common technique in science fiction, allowing the author to create a sense of cognitive estrangement - a key concept in science fiction theory developed by Darko Suvin. This estrangement enables readers to view their own society through a defamiliarized lens, facilitating critical examination of current trends and potential futures.

Bradbury's adherence to the principle of scientific plausibility is particularly noteworthy. The concept of the nursery, with its ability to manifest realistic simulations based on thought patterns, is presented as a logical extension of television technology, which was rapidly evolving

at the time of the story's publication. By grounding his speculative technology in a recognizable precursor, Bradbury creates a bridge between the familiar and the fantastic, enhancing the story's credibility and impact.

The author's extrapolation of television technology into an immersive, interactive environment presages many of the concerns and developments that would come to dominate discussions of media and technology in subsequent decades. The nursery can be seen as a prescient vision of virtual reality, augmented reality, and the increasing integration of digital technology into everyday life. Bradbury's insight into the potential for such technology to blur the lines between simulation and reality demonstrates a remarkable foresight that continues to resonate in our current era of deepfakes, social media filters, and immersive gaming experiences.

Moreover, Bradbury's exploration of the psychological impact of this technology on its users, particularly children, anticipates many of the concerns raised by contemporary psychologists and sociologists regarding the effects of digital media on cognitive development and social interaction. The children's addiction to the nursery and their resulting emotional detachment from their parents serve as a chilling metaphor for modern concerns about screen time and digital dependency.

The story's central conceit - the potential for simulated elements to cross over into reality - represents a sophisticated engagement with philosophical questions about the nature of reality and perception. This concept, which has become a staple of science fiction narratives, is handled by Bradbury with a nuance that elevates it beyond mere plot device to a profound meditation on the power of imagination and the malleability of reality.

Bradbury's approach to science fiction in "The Veldt" also demonstrates the genre's capacity for social commentary. By focusing on the impact of technology on a nuclear family, Bradbury creates a microcosm through which to examine broader societal issues. The story's exploration of themes such as parental authority, technological dependence, and the consequences of unchecked consumerism resonates with contemporary debates about the role of technology in education, parenting, and social development.

Furthermore, Bradbury's narrative technique in "The Veldt" exemplifies the literary potential of science fiction. The author's lyrical prose and vivid imagery elevate the story beyond mere speculative exercise, creating a work that is as notable for its stylistic merits as for its conceptual innovations. This fusion of literary craft with speculative concepts challenges the often-perceived dichotomy between "genre" and "literary" fiction, showcasing science fiction's capacity for artistic and intellectual depth.

In conclusion, Ray Bradbury's approach to science fiction in "The Veldt" represents a masterful application of the genre's conventions and possibilities. By grounding his narrative in plausible extrapolations of existing technology, Bradbury creates a story that is simultaneously fantastical and eerily familiar. His exploration of the psychological and societal implications of advanced simulation technology not only adheres to the principles of science fiction but also demonstrates the genre's capacity for profound social commentary and philosophical inquiry. "The Veldt" stands as a testament to science fiction's power to illuminate the present by imagining the future, offering insights that continue to resonate in our increasingly technology-mediated world.

Simile

A simile is a comparison of two objects using the term "like" or "as." Bradbury uses similes throughout "The Veldt" to heighten his descriptive passages. When Wendy and Peter return home Bradbury describes them as having "cheeks like peppermint candy, eyes like bright blue agate marbles." The similes here serve to emphasize the fact that these are two cute, energetic children who might be found in any typical middle-American family. Bradbury also uses similes to heighten the tension of the short story. For example, after George Hadley turns off the house, he writes, "It felt like a mechanical cemetery." This description provides a clear mental image for the reader and also underscores the themes of technology and death.

Personification

The technique of personification involves attributing human characteristics to things that are not human. Bradbury uses this technique to great effect throughout "The Veldt." He personifies the nursery and the house itself by attributing emotions to these inanimate objects, "'I don't imagine the room will like being turned off,' said the father. 'Nothing likes to die—even a room. I wonder if it hates me for wanting to switch it off?'"

By turning the house into a living, breathing entity through personification, Bradbury heightens the tension and the threat. Now the parents are not only fighting their children, they are also pitted against a technological monster that is working to destroy them.

Point of View

Ray Bradbury's employment of point of view in "The Veldt" exemplifies a nuanced and sophisticated narrative technique that significantly contributes to the story's thematic depth and psychological resonance. The author's use of a third-person limited perspective, primarily aligned with George Hadley, serves multiple narrative functions and enhances the story's overall impact.

The third-person narrative voice in "The Veldt" operates as a form of limited omniscience, providing a degree of narrative distance while simultaneously allowing for intimate access to George Hadley's thoughts and perceptions. This narrative strategy enables Bradbury to present the events of the story with a semblance of objectivity while still maintaining a close psychological focus on the protagonist. The result is a narrative that balances external observation with internal insight, creating a rich, multifaceted portrayal of the story's central conflict.

Bradbury's decision to align the narrative perspective closely with George Hadley is particularly significant in terms of the story's thematic exploration. As the patriarch of the family and the primary decision-maker regarding the nursery, George serves as the focal point for the story's examination of parental authority, technological dependence, and the consequences of abdicating responsibility. By filtering the narrative through George's perspective, Bradbury allows readers to experience firsthand the gradual erosion of parental control and the mounting sense of unease that characterizes the story's progression.

This narrative alignment also serves to heighten the story's suspense and psychological tension. As readers, we are privy to George's growing awareness of the nursery's malevolent influence, his internal struggle between rationality and paternal instinct, and his dawning realization of the grave mistake he has made in allowing the technology to supplant his parental role. This intimate access to George's psyche intensifies the reader's emotional investment in the unfolding tragedy, creating a palpable sense of dread and inevitability.

Moreover, the limited nature of this third-person perspective contributes to the story's overall atmosphere of uncertainty and paranoia. By constraining the narrative viewpoint primarily to George's experiences and observations, Bradbury creates a sense of informational limitation that mirrors the characters' own incomplete understanding of their situation. This narrative strategy aligns the reader's perspective with that of the protagonist, fostering a shared sense of confusion and growing alarm as the true nature of the nursery's influence is gradually revealed.

The author's adherence to George's perspective throughout the majority of the narrative makes the brief departure from this viewpoint at the story's conclusion all the more striking. This shift in perspective, occurring after George and Lydia's demise, serves multiple narrative functions. Firstly, it provides a sense of narrative closure, allowing the reader to witness the immediate aftermath of the story's climactic event. Secondly, it underscores the finality of the parents' fate, emphasizing the irreversibility of their tragic error. Lastly, this perspective shift serves as a chilling reminder of the nursery's (and by extension, the children's) triumph, as the narrative continues even after the protagonist's demise.

This final perspective shift also functions on a meta-narrative level, mirroring the story's themes of technological usurpation. Just as the nursery ultimately supplants parental authority in the story, the narrative voice detaches from George's perspective at the moment of his death, emphasizing the complete and irrevocable nature of this usurpation.

Furthermore, Bradbury's use of third-person narration allows for moments of subtle irony and dramatic irony that enhance the story's thematic resonance. The narrator's ability to report on George's thoughts and actions while maintaining a degree of distance enables the author to highlight the discrepancies between George's perceptions and the reality of his situation, underscoring themes of self-deception and willful ignorance.

In conclusion, Bradbury's masterful manipulation of point of view in "The Veldt" demonstrates the profound impact that narrative perspective can have on a story's thematic exploration and emotional resonance. By employing a third-person limited perspective primarily aligned with George Hadley, Bradbury creates a narrative that is simultaneously intimate and observational, allowing for deep psychological insight while maintaining a degree of narrative distance. This approach not only

enhances the story's suspense and emotional impact but also serves to reinforce its central themes of parental authority, technological dependence, and the consequences of abdicating responsibility. The brief but significant departure from this perspective at the story's conclusion further underscores these themes, creating a narrative structure that mirrors the very usurpation it describes. Through this sophisticated use of point of view, Bradbury transforms "The Veldt" from a simple cautionary tale into a complex, multi-layered exploration of perspective, reality, and the nature of authority in an increasingly technological world.



COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Early 1950s: The minimum wage stands at \$0.75 per hour.

Today: The minimum wage has increased to \$15.15 per hour.

Early 1950s: Pulp fiction magazines are widely read, yet their popularity is waning due to competition from television, comic books, and paperback novels.

Today: Few pulp fiction magazines remain in circulation. Most books are now printed on higher-quality paper, and some are available exclusively in electronic format.

Early 1950s: Approximately 23.5 percent of American households own a television set, all of which are black and white.

Today: Ninety-eight percent of American households possess a television, with 76 percent owning more than one. Almost all televisions are color sets, and high-definition and plasma models are now available.

Early 1950s: Businessman Frank MacNamara and his associate Ralph Schneider introduce the Diners Club card, the first credit card in history, which allows members to charge food and beverages at twenty-eight participating restaurants in New York City.

Today: Travelers can carry a single credit card accepted in numerous countries worldwide, and there exists a vast array of credit card options.

Early 1950s: The application of psychoanalytic techniques in treating children is a novel practice, gaining interest following the 1946 publication of Anna Freud's *The Psychoanalytic Treatment of Children*. It takes several years before these practices are widely adopted.

Today: Child psychology has become a well-established discipline, with programs available at major universities nationwide. Some psychoanalytic techniques continue to be utilized in the field.

Early 1950s: American children engage with toys such as the Slinky and the board game Candyland.

Today: Children increasingly devote their time to playing computer games.



Study the historical context of the time Ray Bradbury created his literary works. Dwell upon the factors you consider to be the crucial to influence his style of writing.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nuclear Proliferation and the Cold War

The historical context of Ray Bradbury's short story "The Veldt" is deeply intertwined with the geopolitical dynamics of the post-World War II era, particularly the advent of nuclear proliferation and the onset of the Cold War.

The end of the Second World War in 1945 marked a pivotal moment in global affairs, as the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the two dominant superpowers, each espousing vastly different ideological and economic systems. The United States championed free market capitalism, while the Soviet Union embraced a communist model predicated on state ownership of resources and centralized control over the means of production.

Underlying this profound ideological divide was a growing sense of suspicion and mistrust between the two nations. The United States' use of nuclear weapons against Japan had significantly altered the global balance of power, leaving the Soviets deeply concerned about the potential

hegemonic aspirations of their American counterparts. In response, the Soviet Union embarked on an accelerated nuclear weapons program, successfully testing its first atomic bomb in 1949 – a development that caught the United States by surprise and heightened the sense of geopolitical rivalry between the two superpowers.

The ensuing "Cold War" was characterized by a state of heightened tension and competition, but without direct military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. This period was marked by an intensification of the nuclear arms race, the emergence of proxy wars in various regions of the world, and a pervasive atmosphere of ideological and technological rivalry.

The narrative of "The Veldt" can be viewed as a metaphorical representation of this historical context, with the technologically-advanced, automated nursery serving as a symbol for the increasingly mechanized and dehumanizing aspects of modern society. The story's exploration of the erosion of human agency and the growing dominance of technology can be seen as a commentary on the broader social and political implications of the Cold War and the nuclear age.

By situating the tale within this broader historical framework, one can gain a deeper understanding of the story's thematic concerns and the underlying tensions that shape the characters' experiences. Bradbury's work serves as a powerful commentary on the social and psychological consequences of the technological and geopolitical transformations that defined the post-war era.

The Red Scare

The historical backdrop of Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" cannot be fully appreciated without a deep understanding of the pervasive "Red Scare" that gripped the United States during the Cold War era. This profound climate of ideological suspicion and paranoia shaped the social and political landscape in which the story's narrative unfolds.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United States found itself engaged in a protracted geopolitical struggle with the Soviet Union, as the two superpowers vied for global influence and supremacy. Fueled by the fear of communist infiltration and the perceived threat of Soviet expansionism, a widespread sense of unease and distrust permeated American society. This phenomenon, known as the "Red Scare," manifested in the establishment of the House Un-American Activities Committee

(HUAC), a congressional body tasked with investigating suspected communist sympathies and allegiances within the country.

The HUAC hearings, led by the notorious Senator Joseph McCarthy, became a platform for the aggressive interrogation and persecution of artists, intellectuals, and government officials who were accused of harboring communist leanings. These proceedings resulted in the ruination of many careers, as individuals were forced to renounce their associations or face the dire consequences of being labeled as "un-American."

Compounding the sense of paranoia was the high-profile case of Alger Hiss, a State Department employee who was accused of passing classified information to the Soviet Union. Hiss's trial and subsequent conviction for perjury further fueled the public's fear of communist infiltration, even within the halls of government.

The Red Scare's pervasive influence on American society can be seen as a critical subtext in Bradbury's "The Veldt," where the automated, technologically-driven nursery can be interpreted as a metaphor for the mechanization and dehumanization of contemporary life. The story's exploration of the erosion of individual agency and the growing dominance of technology can be viewed as a reflection of the broader societal anxiety and loss of control experienced during the Cold War era.

By situating the narrative within this historical context, one can gain a deeper understanding of the story's thematic concerns and its commentary on the psychological and social consequences of the Red Scare. Bradbury's work serves as a powerful artistic response to the climate of fear, suspicion, and ideological division that defined the post-war years in the United States.

The Korean War

The historical backdrop of Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" is intrinsically linked to the geopolitical dynamics that unfolded during the Korean War, a critical flashpoint in the broader context of the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Following the conclusion of World War II, the Korean Peninsula became a battleground for the competing ideological and strategic interests of the two emerging superpowers. The post-war division of the country, with the Soviets controlling the northern region and the United States overseeing the southern territory, set the stage for the outbreak of hostilities on June 24, 1950, when North Korea, backed by the communist bloc, launched a full-scale invasion of South Korea.

President Harry Truman's swift decision to deploy American troops in support of the South Korean forces marked the beginning of a protracted and bitterly contested conflict. As the war progressed, the Chinese government, driven by its own geopolitical concerns and ideological alignment, intervened on behalf of the North Korean regime, further intensifying the conflict and transforming it into a proxy war between the United States and its allies and the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union and China.

The war's aftermath was characterized by an uneasy truce, with the conflict ultimately ending in a stalemate, with the battle lines stabilizing along the 38th parallel, the original point of contention. The armistice agreement, signed in July 1953, effectively recognized the status quo, with the Korean Peninsula remaining divided into two distinct political and economic systems.

The reverberations of the Korean War can be seen as a critical backdrop to the narrative of "The Veldt," where the story's exploration of the dehumanizing effects of technology and the erosion of individual agency can be interpreted as a metaphorical commentary on the broader societal anxieties and power dynamics that defined the Cold War era.

By situating the story within this historical context, one can gain a deeper appreciation for the thematic layers and symbolic resonance of Bradbury's work. The Korean War, as a pivotal event in the global ideological and geopolitical struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, casts a long shadow over the narrative, informing the underlying tensions and the characters' experiences.

Through this contextual lens, "The Veldt" emerges as a powerful artistic reflection on the societal and psychological impacts of the Cold War, highlighting the ways in which the pursuit of technological progress and the intensification of ideological rivalries can lead to the diminishment of human agency and the erosion of fundamental values.

The Move to the Suburbs

The historical context of Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" cannot be fully appreciated without an examination of the profound societal shifts that occurred in the United States during the post-World War II era, particularly the burgeoning suburban development and the associated changes in lifestyle and social dynamics.

In the aftermath of the global conflict, the United States experienced a significant economic boom, marked by increased prosperity and the expansion of the middle class. This newfound affluence, coupled with the advent of the automobile and the corresponding improvements in transportation infrastructure, facilitated the rapid growth of suburban communities across the nation.

The emergence of these suburban enclaves represented a departure from the traditional urban-centric living arrangements that had previously defined much of American society. Families now had the means to own their own homes in peaceful, manicured neighborhoods, while maintaining the ability to commute to their places of employment in the city centers.

This shift in spatial organization and living patterns had profound implications for the social and cultural fabric of American life. The suburban experience fostered a sense of insularity and separation from the broader community, as individuals and families increasingly retreated into their private, technologically-enhanced domestic spaces, insulated from the perceived chaos and complexity of urban environments.

The narrative of "The Veldt" can be viewed as Bradbury's artistic exploration of the societal and psychological consequences of this suburban movement and the concomitant embrace of technological advancements. The story's depiction of the Hadley family's reliance on the advanced, AI-powered nursery can be interpreted as a metaphor for the broader societal trends toward self-containment, technological dependence, and the potential erosion of communal bonds.

By situating the narrative within the historical context of the suburban revolution, one can gain a deeper understanding of the thematic resonance and the underlying sociocultural critique embedded within Bradbury's work. The story's exploration of the dehumanizing effects of technology and the severing of familial and community ties can be seen as a reflection of the broader societal shifts and anxieties that accompanied the rapid suburbanization of the post-war United States.

Through this contextual lens, "The Veldt" emerges as a prescient commentary on the potential pitfalls of technological progress and the need to maintain a balance between individual and communal well-being in the face of rapid social and spatial transformations.

Pulp Magazines

The historical backdrop of Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" cannot be fully contextualized without an examination of the rise and pervasive influence of pulp fiction magazines, which played a pivotal role in shaping the literary and cultural landscape of the early to mid-20th century.

Pulp magazines, distinguished by their distinctive use of cheap, wood-pulp paper, were a ubiquitous feature of the publishing industry during this era, catering to a wide and diverse readership. These publications were characterized by their affordability and accessibility, making them particularly appealing to the younger generations of readers.

The pulp fiction magazines were organized and curated by genre, providing a platform for the serialization and dissemination of a wide range of literary works, from westerns and sports narratives to horror, romance, and science fiction. This proliferation of genre-specific publications created a thriving ecosystem for aspiring writers, offering them crucial opportunities to hone their craft and gain exposure within their respective literary fields.

The sensationalistic and often melodramatic nature of pulp fiction, with its eye-catching titles and covers, played a significant role in shaping the public's perception and consumption of these genres. The science fiction and fantasy pulps, in particular, such as *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories*, gained a devoted following, cultivating a growing interest in speculative fiction and the exploration of imaginative, futuristic concepts.

It is within this context that Ray Bradbury's own literary career flourished, as he was among the many writers whose early works found publication in these influential pulp magazines. The immense popularity and cultural significance of the pulps during this period directly shaped the creative landscape that informed Bradbury's artistic sensibilities and the thematic concerns that found expression in "The Veldt."

By situating the story within the broader context of the pulp fiction tradition, one can gain a deeper understanding of the narrative's stylistic elements, its engagement with genre conventions, and its underlying commentary on the societal and technological transformations of the era. The story's exploration of the interplay between humanity and technology, the erosion of familial bonds, and the blurring of the boundaries between the real and the imagined can be viewed as a nuanced response to the pulp fiction's tendency towards sensationalism and the amplification of fantastical elements.

Ultimately, the historical backdrop of the pulp fiction magazines provides a crucial lens through which to analyze the multifaceted layers of Bradbury's "The Veldt," illuminating the ways in which the story both draws from and subverts the tropes and conventions of the genre that gave rise to its inception.

Television

The emergence and rapid proliferation of television as a dominant medium in American popular culture during the late 1940s and early 1950s is a crucial historical context that informs the thematic underpinnings of Ray Bradbury's seminal work, "The Veldt."

The post-war period witnessed a transformative shift in the social and cultural landscape of the United States, as the television set quickly became a ubiquitous fixture within the domestic sphere. This technological innovation not only revolutionized the modes of entertainment and information dissemination but also profoundly impacted the ways in which individuals and families engaged with and perceived the world around them.

The televisual medium's ability to bring distant sights and events into the intimate confines of the home, as exemplified by the pioneering broadcast of the simultaneous live images of the Golden Gate and Brooklyn Bridges in 1951, marked a significant departure from the previous limitations of spatial and temporal awareness. Suddenly, viewers were granted an unprecedented window into the vast panorama of global happenings, transcending the boundaries of their immediate physical environments.

This burgeoning televisual culture, coupled with the rapid rise in television ownership, with approximately one-quarter of American households possessing a set by 1951, catalyzed a fundamental shift in the patterns of leisure, socialization, and familial dynamics. The emergence of iconic television programs such as "I Love Lucy" during this period further cemented the medium's status as a dominant force in shaping national popular culture and collective consciousness.

Within this historical context, Bradbury's "The Veldt" can be viewed as a prescient exploration of the complex interplay between technology, domesticity, and the erosion of interpersonal connections. The story's depiction of the Hadley family's reliance on the advanced, AI-powered nursery can be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the ways

in which television and other emerging technologies were poised to reshape the very fabric of familial and societal relationships.

By situating the narrative within the broader cultural landscape of the television age, one can gain a deeper understanding of the story's thematic preoccupations with the dehumanizing potential of technological progress, the fragmentation of communal bonds, and the blurring of the boundaries between the real and the virtual. Bradbury's work can be seen as a cautionary tale, highlighting the perils of unchecked technological integration into the domestic sphere and the potential consequences for the preservation of human agency and authentic interpersonal connections.

Ultimately, the historical backdrop of the television's ascendance in American culture provides a critical lens through which to engage with the multilayered complexities of Bradbury's "The Veldt," illuminating the ways in which the story presciently grappled with the societal implications of the technological revolution that was unfolding during the mid-20th century.



Further Areas of Inquiry and Scholarly Exploration

📖 "The Veldt" explores the potential for technology to be exploited for malevolent purposes. Conduct a comparative analysis of other literary works and cinematic productions that explore similar thematic territory. Conversely, identify narratives that portray technology as a force for positive change. If you were to construct a narrative within this thematic framework, what stance would you adopt regarding the moral valence of technology, and what factors would inform this decision?

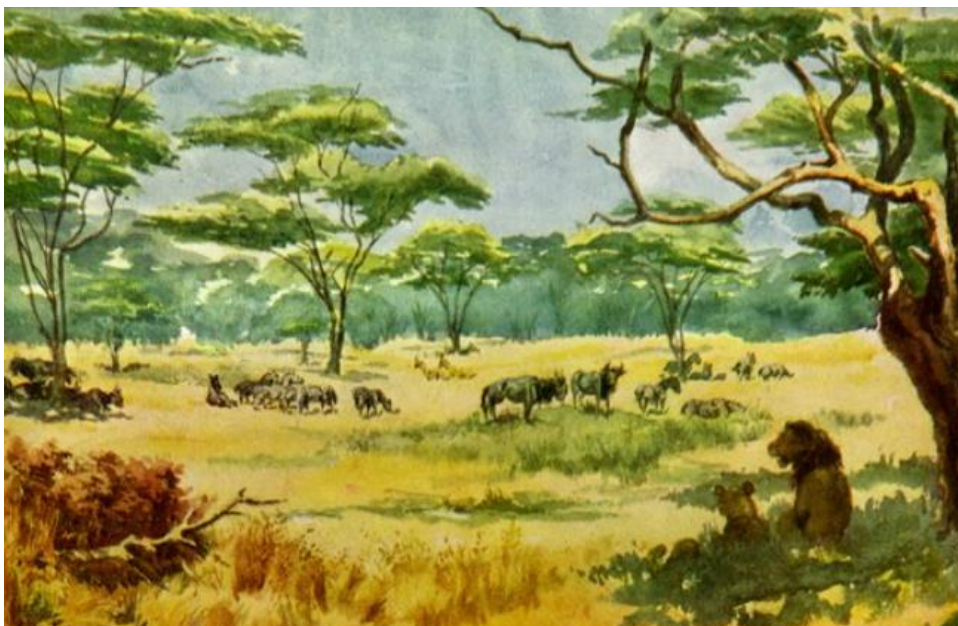
📖 The early 1950s in the United States were characterized by a pervasive apprehension towards Communism, a phenomenon colloquially termed the "Red Scare." Undertake a comprehensive examination of the Communist political ideology, elucidating its core principles and theoretical underpinnings. Analyze the geopolitical and socio-economic factors that rendered Communism particularly threatening to the United States during the mid-twentieth century.

📖 Consider the potential narrative divergence if George had opted for immediate psychoanalytic intervention for Wendy and Peter upon recognizing the nursery's threat. Construct a hypothetical scenario exploring how this alternative course of action might have altered the story's trajectory. Craft a speculative dialogue between Wendy, Peter, and a psychoanalyst, ensuring that it reflects the characters' established personalities and the story's thematic concerns.

📖 Conceptualize your own iteration of a "Happy-life Home," detailing the automated conveniences you would incorporate. Give particular consideration to potential safety mechanisms that could mitigate unforeseen complications. Provide a detailed description of these safety features, explaining their function and implementation.

📖 Conduct a thorough investigation into the ecological characteristics of an African veldt. Catalogue the flora and fauna endemic to this biome. Critically evaluate the accuracy of Bradbury's depiction in "The Veldt" against your research findings, noting areas of concordance and discrepancy.

📖 Bradbury employs meticulous description and simile to create a vivid sensory representation of the African veldt. Select an alternative environmental setting (e.g., a tropical rainforest or Arctic tundra) and research its distinctive features. Develop a lexicon of descriptive terms and phrases that effectively convey the essence of this environment. Craft a series of similes that enhance the reader's sensory engagement with the chosen setting. Synthesize these elements into a descriptive passage that evokes a rich, multisensory experience of the environment.

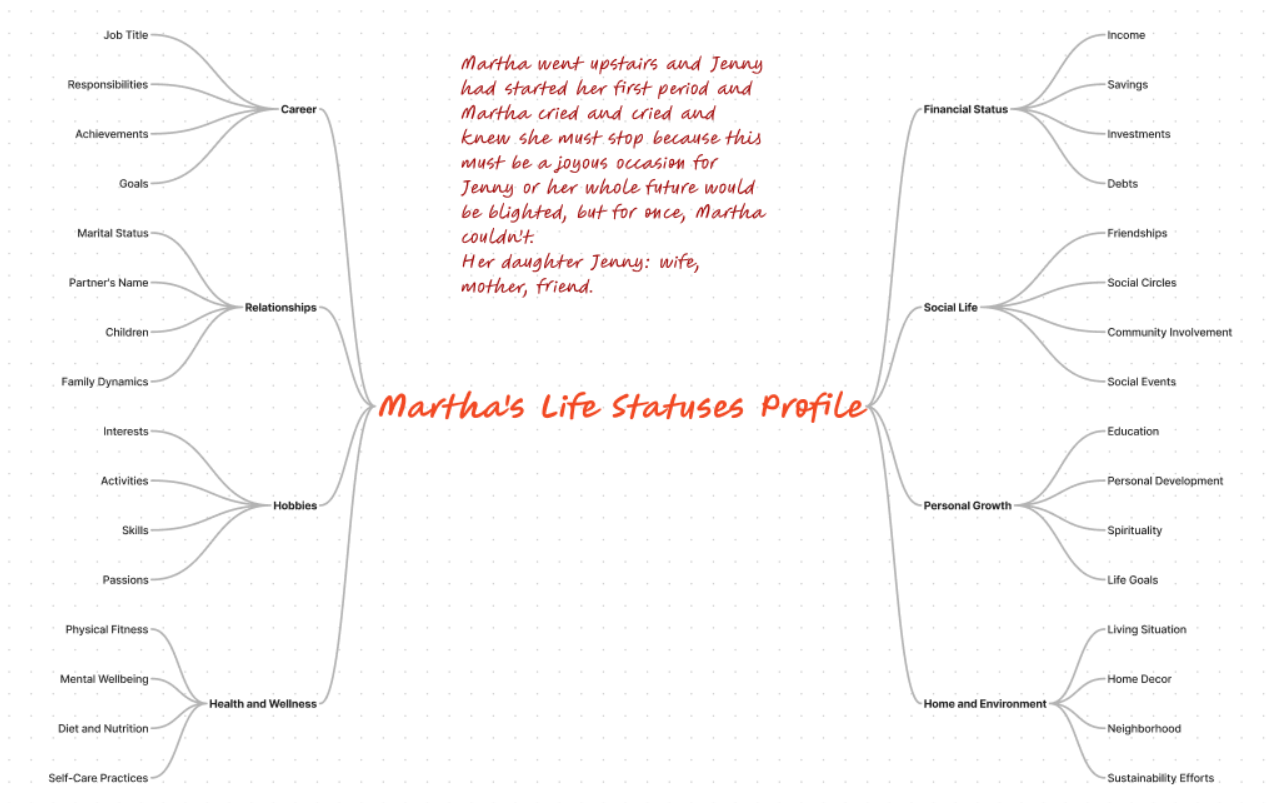


FOR INDEPENDENT LITERARY INQUIRY



Read the story WEEKEND by Fay Weldon and fulfill the tasks:

1. Study the biographical information about the author.
2. Fulfill the PLOTLINE ANALYSIS.
3. Write a concise PLOT SUMMARY of the story.
4. Provide the basic information about the main characters of the story. Identify and classify the conflicts the plotline develops round by. Dwell upon the factors that account for them.
5. Examine the ways in which the characters' sense of identity, both individual and familial, is presented and transformed throughout the story.
6. Study the dominating themes of the story. Which of them do you consider the most acute or close to your sphere of interests or priorities? Are these themes contemporary enough to extrapolate them to the life of today in this country? Draw the necessary parallels.
7. Study the information about the author's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.
8. Study the historical context of the time the author created literary works. Dwell upon the factors you consider to be the crucial to influence the style of writing.
9. Dwell upon the status and multiple gender roles of a woman revealed in the story and write a short essay "My Life Statuses Profile"



Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in Language Teaching Perspectives: Social Awareness

SOCIAL AWARENESS involves the ability to understand and empathize with others and their points of view, particularly with people from different backgrounds than one's own (SEL for Students: Social Awareness and Relationship Skills, 2024).

Social awareness skills include the following.

- Identifying social cues (verbal, physical) to determine how others feel
- Taking others' perspectives
- Showing concern for the feelings of others
- Demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Recognizing strengths in others
- Understanding and expressing gratitude
- Recognizing situational demands and opportunities
- Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones
- Caring about and being motivated to contribute to the well-being of one's family, friends, school, community, the environment, and the greater good (SEL for Students: Social Awareness and Relationship Skills, 2024).

Why are social-awareness skills important? In pairs or micro groups discuss the following in the perspective of the problems raised in this chapter's stories.

Students benefit from empathy, both academically and relationally.

- Students who are empathetic are more cooperative in class, have better relationships with their teachers, and are more engaged in school.
- Increased empathy can also decrease bullying and aggression among kids and make them kinder and more inclusive toward classmates.
- Students with more empathy also tend to have higher GPAs and, eventually, greater success in college.

Study the effective SEL practice and suggest some other possible ones in relations to the issues considered in the chapter.

Developing the Courage to Speak Up

Students use a “Courage to Speak Up” heuristic (a reflection tool) to raise their awareness of how they respond to prejudice – and to help them to develop the capacity to address moments of prejudice in an academic setting.

Level: High School, College, Adult

Duration: 15 minutes

When You Might Use This Practice

On the first day of class to build community and a safe classroom climate

To prepare students to speak up against prejudice and stereotypes

To develop an appropriate response to biased remarks

To address derogatory statement(s) in school

Learning Objectives

Students will:

Reflect and respond in writing to a heuristic about the moral courage to speak up

Consider ways in which they themselves and others may experience bias

Develop awareness of speaking up against bias, prejudice, and stereotypes

Contemplate ways in which to best respond in a situation that requires moral courage

Character Strengths

Courage

Forgiveness

Empathy

Kindness and Compassion

Humility

SEL Competencies

Social Awareness and Relationship Skills

Self-Awareness

Ethical Decision Making and Social Responsibility

Mindfulness Components

Non-judgment

Open Awareness

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CHAPTER 3. Imagined Alternatives: Interpreting Possible Worlds in the Short Story



Possible Worlds in Literary Theory

The literary use of possible worlds reflects a specific phase in the history of cross-disciplinary exchange around the problem of fiction. Possible worlds and related concepts borrowed from philosophical logic have helped legitimize referential problems and the relations between fiction and reality in literary theory. This framework provides a philosophical explanatory model for the nature of fiction, which had long been excluded from philosophical discussion. Possible worlds also show that fiction is not an isolated exceptional phenomenon, but part of a larger context of discourses that do not refer to actual states of affairs. Finally, possible worlds have allowed literary theory to retain formal methods of description while breaching the hermetics of literariness.

Delve on the structure of a possible world and draw it a form of a scheme or a mind map exemplifying each of the issues.



The Structure of Possible Worlds

1

Entities and Relations

A possible world contains a set of entities (objects, persons) organized and interrelated in specific ways through situations, events and space-time. Worlds are autonomous domains distinguished by their unique sets of entities and relations.

2

Fictional Worlds

Fictional worlds are likewise composed of sets of entities (characters, objects, places) and networks of relations that organize them. Fictional worlds present a self-sufficient system of structures and relations, with a distinct ontological position.

3

Modal Structure

Fictional worlds include a core of facts around which orbit sets of states of affairs of diminishing fictional actuality. This modal structure manifests the parallelism of fictional ontologies, indicating that fictional facts do not relate to what could have occurred in actuality, but rather what did and could have occurred in the fictional world.

Analyze the concepts of possibility and actuality in the context of studying of the possible worlds. How do they add to understanding of possible worlds exploiting in fictional stories?

Possibility and Actuality in Possible Worlds

Philosophical Perspective

Philosophers view possible worlds not as independent "worlds", but as abstract sets or states of affairs that are being actualized according to principles of probability. Possibility is described relative to an actual state of affairs, whatever the interpretation of that actuality.

Literary Perspective

Literary theorists have grappled with the problem of impossible fictional worlds, especially in postmodernist fiction. Contradictions and violations of logical principles have become central poetic devices, showing that inconsistencies do not necessarily collapse the coherence of a fictional world.

Reconciling Perspectives

The different interpretations of possibility in logic and literary theory result in varying conceptions of trans-world identity. This raises questions about the minimal criteria for maintaining the individuality of an object or person across worlds.

World-Constructing vs World-Reconstructing Conventions

1 World-Constructing Conventions

Fictional propositions assume a distinct fictional position, representing states of affairs that make no direct claim about the actual world. Inferences are restricted by the shared fictional property of a set of propositions. Fictional worlds can include contradictions and indeterminate, incomplete objects.

2 World-Reconstructing Conventions

Fictional worlds are parallel to the actual world, not ramifications of it. Authorship imposes constraints on the structure and coherence of the fictional universe. Inconsistencies and impossibilities do not collapse the coherence of a fictional world, and incompleteness is seen as an inherent property.

3 Logical Implications

The world-constructing and world-reconstructing conventions reflect different logical approaches to understanding fiction. They highlight the unique ontological status and structural requirements of fictional worlds compared to actual worlds.



Study the conception of trans-world identity and search for the minimal criteria for maintaining the individuality of an object or person across worlds.

Fictional Entities and Trans-World Identity



Essence and Identity

The notion of trans-world identity raises questions about whether an entity can preserve its essential identity despite changes in its properties, location or name across different worlds.



Fictional Counterparts

The problem of trans-world identity is complicated for fictional entities, as their relationship to extrafictional counterparts is not always clear-cut.



Ontological Distinctions

Theories of counterpart relations must grapple with whether fictional entities are ontologically distinct from their extrafictional counterparts, or can be considered extensions of them.

Correlate world-constructing conventions vs world reconstructing conventions. Trace logical implications and summarize them in your own words.

Possible Worlds and Fictional Narratives

1

Fictional Propositions

Fictional propositions represent states of affairs within the fictional world, making no direct claims about the actual world.

2

Logical Restrictions

Inferences drawn from a set of fictional propositions are restricted by the shared fictional property that defines that particular fictional world.

3

Inconsistencies Allowed

Fictional worlds can include contradictory states of affairs, as fictional propositions do not necessarily obey requirements of logical consistency.

4

Indeterminate Objects

Fictional objects denoted by fictional propositions are inherently indeterminate and incomplete, with some of their properties left unspecified.

Reconstructing Fictional Worlds

Parallel Worlds

Fictional worlds are not interpreted as possible worlds branching from the actual world, but as autonomous, parallel worlds with their own distinct ontological status.

Authorial Control

The presence of an author as a source of control and coherence imposes constraints on the valid propositions that can be made about a fictional world.

Coherence and Consistency

The process of reconstructing a fictional world aims for maximal coherence and organization, even if the world contains logical inconsistencies or impossibilities.

Incompleteness Accepted

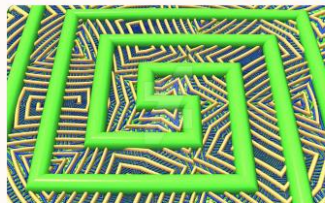
Incompleteness is recognized as an inherent property of fictional entities, not a lack to be remedied, and can even be considered a literary merit.

Accessibility and Fictional Worlds



Literal Accessibility

Accessibility in fictional contexts is translated into conventions about the literal accessibility of the fictional world, such as the role of the author as a source of control.



Logical Accessibility

Accessibility is also understood in the logical sense, with the fictional world's accessibility determined by the constraints and requirements imposed by the world-constructing conventions.



Bridging Perspectives

The different interpretations of accessibility highlight the complex relationship between the logical structure of fictional worlds and the intentional, authorial control that shapes them.

Make conclusions about the sophisticated nature of possible worlds in literary texts.

The Richness of Possible Worlds

Philosophical Legitimization	Possible worlds have helped legitimize referential problems and the relations between fiction and reality in literary theory, providing a philosophical framework for understanding the nature of fiction.
Bridging Disciplines	The use of possible worlds reflects a cross-disciplinary exchange, allowing literary theory to retain formal methods of description while breaching the hermetics of literariness.
Exploring Fictionality	Possible worlds have enabled literary theorists to grapple with the unique ontological status, logical structure, and conventions of fictional worlds, shedding light on the richness of fictionality.

CONRAD AIKEN



"Silent Snow, Secret Snow" (1934) is not only Conrad Aiken's most anthologized work but also one of the most widely read American short stories of the twentieth century. The narrative explores the protagonist, a young boy named Paul Hasleman, as he descends into madness. Critics frequently analyze this story in the context of Aiken's own childhood, seeking autobiographical elements within the text. While some interpretations employ a psychoanalytic framework, it has been observed that such readings can render the events of the narrative overly clinical, thereby undermining its emotional resonance. A comprehensive interpretation of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" must engage with psychological themes—such as child-parent conflict—while also addressing the poignant realism of a twelve-year-old boy's existence shattered by madness.

Study the biographical information about the author. Highlight the major facts which are sure to influence his choices of literary themes, characters, settings, moral implications, etc. Search for extra information about Conrad Aiken that may interest you as an interpreter of his literary works.

BIOGRAPHY

In 1889, Conrad Aiken was born to parents of Scottish descent in Savannah, Georgia. In 1901, when he was eleven years old, Aiken's father tragically killed his wife before taking his own life. Subsequently, Aiken lived with an aunt in New Bedford, Massachusetts, until he enrolled at Harvard University in 1907. There, he studied under George Santayana, a distinguished philosopher and poet whose philosophy emphasized the significance of human sensory perception and reason. This aesthetic response to the world is also reflected in Aiken's own poetry and fiction.

Aiken wrote prolifically across various genres, with a particular preference for poetry and short stories. He authored several novels, including *The Blue Voyage* (1927), *Great Circle* (1933), *King Coffin* (1935), and *A Heart of the Gods for Mexico* (1939). His poetry encompasses a range of forms, from brief lyrics to extended compositions he referred to as "symphonies," as well as more straightforward narrative verse. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his *Selected Poems* (1929) and the National Book Award for his *Collected Poems* (1953).

As a poet, Aiken aligned himself with the modernist movement, although his work diverged from that of contemporaries such as Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens. In his prose writing, Aiken often adopted a more conventional style, though modernist techniques, including stream-of-consciousness, can be found within his oeuvre.

Read the story SILENT SNOW, SECRET SNOW and fulfill the tasks that follow.

PLOTLINE ANALYSIS

Chronological Timeline

Construct a detailed timeline that captures the key events in the story's chronological progression. Be sure to include the following:

- a) Paul's internal awareness and detachment during the geography lesson.
- b) His walk home from school and growing sense of alienation.
- c) The confrontation with his parents and their concern for his wellbeing.

- d) Paul's retreat to his bedroom and his total withdrawal from the external world.

Analyze how the author's manipulation of chronology and pacing contributes to the overall narrative structure and the reader's understanding of Paul's psychological journey.

Possible Worlds Representation

Discuss the concept of "possible worlds" as it is explored in the story. Identify the different layers of reality or subjective experiences that Paul navigates throughout the narrative.

Analyze how the author uses sensory details, imagery, and Paul's shifting perceptions to create a sense of an alternative, inner realm or "possible world" that gradually consumes Paul's consciousness.

Examine the significance of the "secret snow" as a metaphor for this alternate reality, and how it represents a retreat from the mundane, external world.

Discuss the implications of Paul's final withdrawal into this "possible world" and the ambiguity surrounding the story's resolution.

Critical Analysis

Evaluate the effectiveness of the author's techniques in depicting the chronological development of the plotline and the exploration of possible worlds.

Discuss how the story's thematic exploration of perception, reality, and the human mind resonates with you and its potential relevance to the human condition.

Provide your own interpretation of the story's underlying message or significance, supported by evidence from the text.

Your response should be a well-structured, academic essay of approximately 1000 words. Utilize relevant literary terminology, provide textual evidence to support your analysis, and engage in a critical dialogue with the story.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story's opening section establishes Paul's distracted state during a geography lesson, as he reflects on a recent sensory experience involving the muffled sound of the postman's footsteps, which he associates with the presence of an elusive, private snowfall. This internal awareness sets him apart from his classmates and the mundane details of the classroom environment.

The subsequent sections delve deeper into Paul's subjective experience, as he struggles to reconcile his shifting perception of the world around him. His walk home from school is marked by a growing sense of alienation, as he scrutinizes the ordinary details of his environment, which now appear unfamiliar and strange. This culminates in a confrontation with his parents, who seek medical intervention when they become concerned about Paul's detachment and distraction.

The narrative's climax occurs as Paul retreats to his bedroom, where he is overwhelmed by the all-encompassing presence of the "secret snow." His rejection of his mother's attempts to engage with him signals his total withdrawal from the external world, as he succumbs to the allure of the mysterious, enveloping snowfall that has consumed his consciousness.

Throughout the story, the author skillfully depicts Paul's gradual descent into an inner realm of sensory and psychological isolation, crafting a rich, evocative portrait of a young mind grappling with the complexities of its own perceptual experience.

Study the basic information about the main characters of the story.

CHARACTERS

Deirdre is presented as a peripheral, underdeveloped character who functions primarily as a symbol of Paul Hasleman's fading connection to the external world. As his classmate, Deirdre sits at the desk in front of him, serving as a physical representation of Paul's social environment. Her "girlish" gesture of turning around to smile admiringly at Paul when he answers a question correctly highlights his diminishing engagement with his academic pursuits and the normative social interactions of adolescence. Deirdre's physical attributes, such as the freckles on her neck

and her "delicate hands," evoke a stereotypical "first love" figure, underscoring Paul's transition from boyhood to the cusp of teenage years and the concomitant stirrings of romantic interest. However, Deirdre remains a largely flat, archetypal character, her function being to accentuate Paul's increasingly insular and dissociative mental state.

The doctor plays a pivotal role in diagnosing and attempting to address Paul's deteriorating condition. Initially, the doctor conducts a physical examination, suggesting a materialist, medical approach to Paul's symptoms. However, the doctor soon recognizes the psychological dimension of Paul's malaise, announcing that the problem might be "something else." This shift in perspective initiates the doctor's psychological examination, highlighting the increasingly complex and abstract nature of Paul's affliction. The doctor's role as a professional interlocutor serves to externalize Paul's internal struggle, drawing the reader's attention to the societal and familial ramifications of the boy's mental fragmentation.

Mrs. Hasleman, Paul's mother, is portrayed as a deeply concerned, loving parent who gradually comes to understand the gravity of her son's mental illness. Her initial worry about "eyestrain" and her purchase of a new lamp to remedy the perceived physical issue demonstrate a desire to find a simple, tangible solution to Paul's problems. However, as the story progresses, Mrs. Hasleman's growing alarm and her eventual silent horror at the severity of Paul's condition underscore the profound emotional toll that his psychic disintegration takes on the family. The description of her "expression which wasn't mirthful" and her "mouth open[ing] in an expression of horror" evince a potent mixture of maternal anguish, fear, and helplessness in the face of her son's inexorable mental decline.

Paul's father, Norman Hasleman, is depicted as a more reticent, disciplinarian figure whose concerns for his son's wellbeing are conveyed in a more reserved manner. Paul's perception of his father's "punishment voice" during the doctor's examination suggests an authoritarian, emotionally distant parenting style, which may have contributed to the boy's growing isolation and detachment from the family unit. However, the text acknowledges that Paul's characterization of his father's tone as "resonant and cruel" may be a manifestation of his own deteriorating grasp on reality, rather than an accurate representation of

Norman's temperament. This ambiguity underscores the narrative's commitment to exploring the subjective, unreliable nature of Paul's perceptions as his mental illness progresses.

Paul Hasleman, is the central focus of the narrative's exploration of mental fragmentation and dissociation. Presented as a twelve-year-old boy on the cusp of adolescence, Paul is initially depicted as a relatively ordinary child, excelling in academic subjects like geometry and geography. However, as the story unfolds, Paul's increasing alienation from the external world and his retreat into an interior, hallucinatory realm of "silent snow" and "secret snow" become the dominant narrative thrust. The text's emphasis on Paul's growing paranoia, loneliness, and partial understanding of the pain he is causing his family members highlights the tragic nature of his psychological dissolution, which the reader experiences through the lens of his subjective, unreliable perspective.

Study the dominating themes of the story. Which of them do you consider the most acute or close to your sphere of interests or priorities? Are these themes contemporary enough to extrapolate them to the life of today in this country? Draw the necessary parallels.

THEMES

Sanity and Insanity

The dichotomous concepts of sanity and insanity serve as a central thematic framework in Aiken's haunting narrative. Sanity is characterized by the protagonist's ability to seamlessly function within the quotidian realm and engage in reciprocal social interactions. This is evidenced by Deirdre's eagerness to participate in Mrs. Buell's geography lesson, demonstrating her firm grounding in the tangible, shared world. The globe motif symbolizes this consensus reality in which individuals become increasingly socialized and interconnected as they mature. In stark contrast, Paul's burgeoning desire to retreat into the insulating, isolating realm of the "silent snow" signifies his progressive detachment from conventional modes of being and signifies the encroaching abnormality of his mental state.

Truth and Falsehood

Concomitantly, the story explores the tension between truth and falsehood. Sanity is inextricably linked to one's capacity to discern and align with empirical verities. Paul's concerned parents and the examining physician seek to uncover the veracity of his altered condition, while Mrs. Buell imparts factual knowledge about the world to her students. Deirdre's fond smile toward Paul further embodies this earnest, unvarnished expression of feeling. Conversely, Paul's sustained efforts to conceal his fascination with the "secret snow" represent an embrace of deception and the renunciation of reality - hallmarks of the insane mind.

Love and Hatred

Furthermore, the narrative charts the disintegration of loving bonds and the concomitant rise of alienation. Love, manifested in the voluntary assumption of responsibility and cherishing of another, initially binds Paul to his parents. However, his descent into madness erases these filial sentiments, culminating in his ultimate rejection of his mother. This inversion of love into hatred - a state characterized by suspicion, self-absorption, and the dissolution of communal ties - constitutes a profound disturbance of the psyche.

Community and Alienation

Correspondingly, the story's symbolic spaces, such as the schoolroom and the family home, give expression to the communal values and shared existence from which Paul becomes increasingly alienated as the "silent snow" encroaches upon his consciousness.

Study the information about Conrad Aiken's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.

STYLE

Lyricism

Conrad Aiken's acclaimed short story "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" is imbued with a profound lyricism that stems from the author's innate poetic sensibility and technical mastery. By narrating the tale from the intimate, first-person perspective of the young protagonist Paul, Aiken

ensures that the reader is immersed in a stream-of-consciousness prose style that directly engages the senses and emotions.

Aiken's extensive background as a celebrated poet is evidenced in the lyrical quality that suffuses the narrative. The author's acute awareness of the material properties of language manifests in the pervasive use of alliteration, particularly the repeated sibilant "s" sounds that echo throughout the titular phrase, evoking the hush and susurrations of falling snow. This sonic patterning imbues the prose with a mesmerizing, incantatory quality that mirrors the enveloping, hypnotic nature of Paul's descent into mental estrangement.

Furthermore, Aiken demonstrates a remarkable facility for capturing the natural cadences and vernacular idiom of a twelve-year-old boy. Though the narration is couched in the third person, it remains steadfastly faithful to Paul's distinctive linguistic register, replete with the halting rhythms, colloquial phrasings, and idiosyncratic perspectives that characterize a child's apprehension of the world. This seamless integration of lyrical artifice and authentic psychological realism heightens the reader's immersion in Paul's fragile psyche, amplifying the poignant emotional resonance of the story.

Aiken's mastery of poetic technique in the service of prose fiction results in a work of haunting, dreamlike beauty. The lyrical quality of the language - its sensuous imagery, euphonic patterning, and natural cadences - simultaneously enchants and disturbs, mirroring the protagonist's gradual estrangement from consensus reality. Through this virtuosic blending of poetry and prose, Aiken elevates the narrative to the realm of the universal, inviting the reader to contemplate the precarious thresholds of consciousness, perception, and being.

Grammar

In Conrad Aiken's captivating short story "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," the author's depiction of the protagonist's descent into mental estrangement manifests not only in the lyrical qualities of the prose, but also at the most fundamental grammatical level. From the opening lines of the narrative, Aiken skillfully employs the use of pronouns to signal the gradual unraveling of Paul's grasp on consensus reality.

When the young protagonist first contemplates the encroaching presence of the snow, which heralds the onset of his mental dissociation, he refers to it using the impersonal pronoun "it." As the passage states, "Just why it should have happened, or why it should have happened just when it did, he could not, of course, possibly have said" (emphasis added). This linguistic distancing, wherein the snow is objectified as an external "it," underscores the initial stages of Paul's detachment from the tangible world around him.

The personification of the snow through the use of the pronoun "it" further reinforces the sense that Paul is beginning to imbue the wintry phenomenon with an almost supernatural agency, transforming it from a mere meteorological occurrence into a sentient, almost antagonistic force encroaching upon his consciousness. This linguistic slippage between the subjective and the objective, the human and the inhuman, foreshadows the complete unraveling of Paul's grasp on reality as the story progresses.

Aiken's skillful manipulation of pronouns at the grammatical level thus serves as a subtle yet powerful indicator of the protagonist's burgeoning insanity. By situating the reader within Paul's fragmented, transitional mental state through these linguistic shifts, the author heightens the reader's empathetic engagement with the character's plight, inviting a deeper exploration of the precarious boundaries between sanity and madness.

Symbolism

The symbolic use of snow in Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" serves as a powerful metaphor for the sense of disorientation and powerlessness experienced by individuals during the tumultuous period of the Great Depression.

Throughout the narrative, the gradual encroachment and accumulation of snow within the protagonist's consciousness mirrors the overwhelming sense of despair and withdrawal that permeated the collective psyche of the era. As Paul, the story's central character, becomes increasingly immersed in his private, snow-laden world, the reader witnesses a parallel erosion of his connection to the external reality of the Great Depression.

The snow, with its enveloping, isolating, and ultimately transformative qualities, functions as a symbolic representation of the psychological and emotional responses individuals developed to cope with the harsh realities of economic collapse, social upheaval, and political instability. Just as the snow steadily encroaches upon Paul's perceptions and sensations, the Great Depression had steadily eroded the social, financial, and political foundations that had previously provided a sense of stability and security for many.

The story's vivid descriptions of the snow's gradual, yet relentless, encroachment mirror the disorienting and disempowering experiences faced by countless individuals during this period. The snow's ability to obscure and distort Paul's understanding of his surroundings reflects the ways in which the Great Depression had disrupted the familiar contours of everyday life, leaving many feeling adrift and disconnected from the broader societal context.

Moreover, the snow's transformative power, as it slowly alters Paul's consciousness and perception of reality, can be seen as a metaphor for the profound psychological and emotional impact of the Great Depression. Just as Paul retreats into his private, snow-filled world, seeking refuge from the harsh realities of the external world, many individuals during this period found solace in the creation of insular, escapist realms to cope with the overwhelming sense of powerlessness and uncertainty that defined their lived experiences.

By employing the symbolic resonance of the snow, Aiken masterfully captures the deep-seated anxieties, disorientations, and coping mechanisms that arose in response to the societal upheaval of the Great Depression. The snow's gradual encroachment and transformative power serve as a metaphorical reflection of the ways in which the economic and social turmoil of the era had profoundly shaped the individual psyche, driving some, like Paul, to retreat into introspective, self-contained worlds in order to find a sense of solace and control amidst the chaos.

Point of View

Conrad Aiken's masterful employment of a first-person narrative perspective serves as a vital conduit for illuminating the protagonist's deteriorating psychological state. By immersing the reader directly within

the subjective consciousness of the young Paul, Aiken crafts a profoundly empathetic portrait of the boy's gradual descent into mental estrangement.

When Paul fixates on the detritus in a muddy gutter, Aiken's precise, unadorned description of the scattered objects – "a scrap of torn and dirty newspaper," "a little delta of filth," "lost twigs... dead matches, a rusty horse-chestnut burr, a small concentration of eggshell, a streak of yellow sawdust ... a brown pebble, and a broken feather" – mirrors the randomness and fragmentation of the protagonist's own inner disturbance. Notably, Aiken refrains from overt commentary, allowing the very texture and juxtaposition of these seemingly innocuous items to function as potent metaphors for Paul's deteriorating psychological and emotional state.

The eczema advertisement, for instance, foreshadows the irritating, inescapable nature of Paul's mental affliction, while the broken feather poignantly symbolizes his diminished capacity for unfettered flight or freedom of expression. Even the shattered eggshell evokes the fractured wholeness of Paul's disintegrating sense of self. Through this skillful layering of symbolic associations, Aiken invites the reader to extrapolate the deeper significance of these mundane details, immersing us ever more deeply in the protagonist's subjective experience.

Furthermore, Aiken's masterful use of the whiteness of the snow as a unifying motif serves to convey the ultimate annihilation of Paul's consciousness. This pervasive whiteness, combined with the cascade of sibilating "s" sounds that permeate the story's climactic passages, conjures a sense of overwhelming sensory deprivation and linguistic fragmentation, mirroring the boy's descent into the abyss of madness.

By steadfastly adhering to Paul's first-person perspective, Aiken grants the reader unparalleled access to the character's evolving psychological landscape. This intimate narrative vantage point not only heightens the empathetic resonance of the story but also allows Aiken to weave a tapestry of symbolic associations that illuminate the profound depths of the protagonist's inner turmoil. Through this virtuosic fusion of objective detail and subjective interpretation, the author masterfully guides the reader through the harrowing terrain of Paul's disintegrating psyche.

Modernist literary techniques

In Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," the narrative seamlessly blends elements of the social consciousness movement and the modernist literary tradition, each of which exerts a distinct yet complementary influence on the development and reception of the story.

On the one hand, the social consciousness aspect of the work is manifested in its thematic focus on the individual's psychological and emotional responses to the broader societal upheavals of the Great Depression. The protagonist, Paul, represents the broader struggle of ordinary individuals to cope with the harsh realities of economic hardship, social dislocation, and the erosion of a sense of security and stability. Aiken's sensitive portrayal of Paul's gradual retreat into a private, snow-filled world serves as a metaphorical expression of the human need for refuge and escape in the face of overwhelming external pressures.

By grounding the narrative in the lived experiences of a relatable, working-class character, Aiken aligns his work with the social consciousness movement, lending a sense of empathy and immediacy to the story's exploration of the human toll of the Great Depression. The reader is invited to empathize with Paul's plight, to recognize the universality of his emotional journey, and to find resonance in the story's depiction of the individual's struggle to reconcile the dissonance between inner and outer worlds.

However, Aiken's use of modernist literary techniques introduces a level of formal complexity and psychological depth that transcends the more straightforward social realism of the social consciousness tradition. The story's fragmented, disjointed narrative structure, characterized by sudden shifts in perspective, time, and location, serves to disorient the reader, mirroring the protagonist's own sense of dislocation and psychological fragmentation.

Additionally, Aiken's strategic employment of symbolism, particularly the recurring motif of the "silent snow" and "secret snow," functions as a modernist device, inviting the reader to delve into the deeper, more elusive layers of meaning that lie beneath the surface of the narrative. These symbolic elements resist simplistic interpretation, challenging the reader to actively engage with the text and to grapple with the complexities of the human psyche.

In this way, the modernist elements of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" work in tandem with its social consciousness underpinnings, creating a multi-faceted and richly textured narrative that transcends the boundaries of a single literary tradition. The story's ability to simultaneously evoke empathy for the individual's plight and to provoke deeper, more abstract contemplations on the nature of consciousness, identity, and the human condition is a testament to Aiken's mastery of both the social realist and modernist approaches.

Ultimately, the interplay between the social consciousness and modernist elements in "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" serves to elevate the narrative, transforming it into a work that resonates on multiple levels - as a poignant reflection on the individual's struggle to find meaning and solace in a world in flux, and as a profound exploration of the human mind's capacity for both retreat and resilience in the face of overwhelming adversity.



COMPARE AND CONTRAST

1930s: The American economy is reeling from the effects of the Great Depression. The Wall Street crash of 1929 triggered a global economic crisis, resulting in dire consequences including record unemployment, high inflation, and the collapse of financial institutions such as banks. Many families lost their savings and assets, forcing them to rely on charitable assistance. In response, the American government instituted a series of social programs aimed at alleviating suffering, revitalizing the economy, and helping individuals regain stability.

1990s: The economy is enjoying an unprecedented period of prosperity and growth. Unemployment rates are very low, as is inflation. After experiencing a significant deficit in the 1980s, the U.S. budget has achieved a surplus for the first time in many years.

1930s: Fascism is gaining traction in Europe, as financial and social instability enables leaders such as Benito Mussolini in Italy to rise to power.

1990s: The same nations that embraced fascism in the 1930s have since transformed into republics. For instance, Germany has recovered from the repercussions of two World Wars, reemerging as a significant global power both economically and politically. Europe has united to form the European Community, adopting a single currency and consolidating economic resources.



Study the historical context of the time Conrad Aiken created his literary works. Dwell upon the factors you consider to be the crucial to influence his style of writing.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Great Depression

The publication of Conrad Aiken's haunting short story, "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," in 1934 cannot be fully contextualized without a careful examination of the historical backdrop of the Great Depression, a period of profound economic and social upheaval that had cast a long shadow over the American landscape during this era.

The year 1934 marked the second year of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first term as President of the United States, a time when the nation was grappling with the devastating effects of the Great Depression. This protracted economic crisis had shaken the very foundations of American life, leaving countless individuals unemployed and impoverished, and disrupting the social order that had previously defined the country.

The Great Depression was not confined to the United States; rather, it was a global phenomenon that reverberated across various nations, including Britain, France, Italy, and Germany. These countries, too, were plagued by soaring inflation and staggering unemployment rates, which fueled a sense of uncertainty and despair among their respective populations.

It was within this climate of economic and social turmoil that the rise of authoritarian regimes began to take hold. In Italy, a fascist government, promising to restore national order and stabilize the economy, had already achieved power in 1922 under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. Similarly, in Germany, the Nazis had gained control and established a fascist government in 1934, further exacerbating the political and ideological tensions that were gripping the European continent.

Even in England, the specter of totalitarianism loomed large, as Oswald Mosley formed the Union of Fascists, the so-called "Black Shirts," during this tumultuous period. This proliferation of authoritarian movements across the global landscape underscores the profound sense of fragility and uncertainty that permeated the social and political fabric of the era.

It is within this complex and unsettling historical context that Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" emerges, serving as a poignant exploration of the individual's grappling with the overwhelming realities of a world in upheaval. The story's protagonist, Paul, retreats into a private, imaginary world of snow, seeking solace and refuge from the harsh realities of the Great Depression that threaten to engulf him.

By situating the narrative within the broader historical backdrop of economic collapse, political instability, and the rise of totalitarianism, one can discern the ways in which Aiken's work reflects the deep-seated anxieties and existential crises that gripped the collective consciousness of the time. The story's evocative portrayal of Paul's gradual withdrawal from the external world and his immersion in a realm of solitary, ethereal snow can be interpreted as a metaphorical response to the overwhelming sense of disorientation and powerlessness that characterized the lived experiences of many individuals during the Great Depression.

Ultimately, the historical context of the Great Depression and the concurrent political upheavals that defined the early 1930s provide a crucial lens through which to engage with the profound psychological and emotional complexities that underpin Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," illuminating the story's resonance as a poignant reflection on the human condition in the face of overwhelming societal upheaval.

National Mood

The contextual backdrop of Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" extends beyond the immediate economic and political upheaval of the Great Depression, encompassing a nuanced interplay between technological advancements, societal shifts, and the evolving national mood within the United States during this pivotal era.

While the Great Depression had undoubtedly cast a dark shadow over the American landscape, disrupting the lives of countless individuals, it is important to recognize that the country was also experiencing a period of continued progress and technological innovation. Despite the widespread economic hardship, a variety of new household conveniences, such as refrigerators and electric ovens, began to emerge and become more accessible to the general populace, signaling a shifting landscape of material culture and consumer habits.

Moreover, the burgeoning field of air travel had begun to challenge the dominance of traditional rail transportation, reflecting the accelerating pace of technological change and the growing sense of mobility and interconnectedness within American society. Concurrently, the radio, which had established itself as the first great mass medium, had become a powerful tool for national unification and communication, exemplified by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats" – intimate, radio-broadcast addresses that brought the country closer together during these turbulent times.

This juxtaposition between the economic and social disruption of the Great Depression and the concurrent advancements in industry, technology, and mass communication reflects the multifaceted and complex nature of the national mood during this period. While the devastating impacts of the economic crisis had undoubtedly left an indelible mark on the collective psyche, the emergence of new conveniences, modes of transportation, and mass media platforms suggest a growing sense of optimism, progress, and connectivity that coexisted alongside the pervasive feelings of disorientation and powerlessness.

Within this nuanced historical context, Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" can be seen as a poignant exploration of the individual's struggle to

reconcile the dissonance between these competing societal narratives. The story's protagonist, Paul, retreats into a private, snow-filled world, seeking refuge from the harsh realities of the external world – a metaphorical response to the overwhelming sense of upheaval and disorientation that had come to define the lived experiences of many during the Great Depression.

Yet, the story's subtle references to the technological and social advancements of the era, such as the introduction of household appliances and the widespread reach of radio, suggest a broader societal tension between the desire for progress and the need for stability, security, and a sense of belonging in the face of profound change.

Ultimately, the historical backdrop of the Great Depression, coupled with the evolving national mood marked by both technological advancement and persistent social and economic challenges, provides a nuanced framework through which to engage with the psychological and emotional complexities that underpin Aiken's haunting narrative, illuminating the story's profound resonance as a reflection on the human condition during a time of profound societal upheaval.

Literary and Artistic Trends

Alongside the broader economic and social upheaval of the Great Depression, the literary and artistic landscape of the United States during this era was marked by the emergence of two distinct, yet equally influential, movements: the social consciousness movement and the modernist movement.

On one hand, the social consciousness movement, exemplified by the works of writers like John Steinbeck, sought to shed light on the lived experiences of ordinary individuals grappling with the harsh realities of financial hardship and economic turmoil. These narratives, grounded in the concrete struggles of the common people, served as a powerful counterpoint to the prevalent portrayals of the upper echelons of society, offering a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of the human toll of the Great Depression.

In stark contrast, the modernist movement, represented by the poetry of Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens, as well as the novels of John Dos Passos,

embraced a radical departure from the literary conventions of the 19th century. Rejecting the notion of a coherent, linear narrative, modernist writers and artists deliberately fragmented their work, disorienting the reader or viewer through the dislodged and discontinuous nature of the storytelling or artistic expression. This deliberate disruption of traditional forms and conventions was seen by modernist advocates as a means of accurately reflecting the profound sense of alienation and detachment that had come to characterize the human experience in the modern era.

This modernist sensibility extended beyond the literary realm, manifesting in the non-representational schools of painting and sculpture, as well as in the emergence of atonal music. Across these diverse artistic mediums, modernist practitioners sought to challenge the established norms of representation and expression, embracing abstraction, fragmentation, and a deliberate rejection of realism in favor of a more introspective and psychologically-charged exploration of the human condition.

Within this rich and multifaceted artistic landscape, Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" can be understood as a work that deftly straddles the divide between the social consciousness movement and the modernist aesthetic. While the story's thematic focus on the individual's psychological and emotional responses to the upheavals of the Great Depression aligns it with the social consciousness tradition, Aiken's experimental, fragmented narrative structure and deliberate use of disorienting symbolism firmly place the work within the modernist canon.

By weaving together these two distinct yet interrelated literary and artistic trends, Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" stands as a testament to the profound complexities of the human experience during this transformative period in American history, reflecting the collective struggle to find meaning and a sense of belonging amidst the dislocation and alienation that had come to define the modern condition.



Further Areas of Inquiry and Scholarly Exploration

📖 Conduct a comprehensive investigation into the fundamental principles of Freudian psychological theory, with particular emphasis on the concepts of the Oedipus complex and the "Primal Scene." Analyze the relationship between these psychoanalytic constructs and the clinical conceptualization of madness. Critically evaluate the extent to which these Freudian concepts elucidate the psychological deterioration of Paul Hasleman in the narrative. Provide a nuanced interpretation of Paul's experiences through the lens of Freudian theory, while also considering potential limitations or critiques of this psychoanalytic framework.

📖 Examine the multifaceted implications of Paul Hasleman's psychological deterioration, focusing specifically on the interpersonal and developmental consequences. Analyze the potential impediments to Paul's formation of human connections across various domains (e.g., familial, social, academic). Explore both the immediate and long-term ramifications of his condition, considering how it might affect his cognitive, emotional, and social development. Discuss the broader societal implications of such psychological disturbances in young individuals.

📖 Conrad Aiken's literary oeuvre, particularly his poetry and to some extent his prose, is often associated with the modernist movement. Conduct a thorough textual analysis of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" to identify and explicate the elements that align with modernist literary techniques and themes. Consider aspects such as narrative structure, psychological depth, symbolism, and linguistic experimentation. Conversely, examine any features of the text that might suggest adherence to more traditional literary conventions. Construct a well-reasoned argument regarding the story's position within the spectrum of modernist and traditional literature, supporting your claims with specific textual evidence and relevant literary theory.

📖 Critically examine the theme of alienation as it manifests in "Silent Snow, Secret Snow." Analyze the relationship between alienation and

insanity as portrayed in the narrative, considering whether these phenomena are inextricably linked or potentially independent. Explore the philosophical and psychological implications of alienation from reality, both within the context of the story and in broader human experience. Consider whether it is conceptually possible to envision a psychologically sound individual who experiences a profound sense of alienation from consensual reality. Support your analysis with relevant psychological theories, philosophical perspectives, and textual evidence from the story.



MARGARET ATWOOD



Margaret Atwood (1939 -) was born in Ottawa and spent her formative years in northern Quebec and Ontario, eventually settling in Toronto. She is the author of more than twenty-five works, encompassing novels, short stories, poetry, literary criticism, social history, and children's literature. Atwood has received numerous accolades, including the Governor General's Award, the Trillium Book Award, the City of Toronto Book Award, and the Canadian Authors Association Award. Her novel *Alias Grace* was honored with the Giller Prize in Canada and the Premio Mondello in Italy. Additionally, she has been the recipient of several prestigious honors, such as The Sunday Times Award for Literary Excellence in the United Kingdom, the National Arts Club Medal of Honor for Literature in the United States, and the title of Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France. Atwood resides in Toronto with fellow novelist Graeme Gibson.

Study the biographical information about the author. Highlight the major facts which are sure to influence her choices of literary themes, characters, settings, moral implications, etc. Search for extra information about Margaret Atwood that may interest you as an interpreter of her literary works.

BIOGRAPHY

Margaret Atwood is the daughter of a forest entomologist and spent part of her early years in the wilderness of Northern Quebec. At the age of seven, she relocated to Toronto. She studied at the University of Toronto and subsequently earned her Master's degree at Radcliffe College, Massachusetts, in 1962. Recognized as Canada's most eminent novelist and poet, Atwood also writes short stories, critical studies, screenplays, radio scripts, and children's literature; her works have been translated into over thirty languages.

Her reviews and critical articles have appeared in various prestigious magazines, and she has edited numerous collections, including *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* (1983) and, in collaboration with Robert Weaver, *The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (1986). Since 1972, Atwood has been a full-time writer, initially teaching English before holding various academic positions and writer residencies. She served as President of the Writers Union of Canada from 1981 to 1982 and as President of PEN Canada from 1984 to 1986.

Atwood's first publication was a poetry collection titled *The Circle Game* (1964), which received the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry (Canada). Subsequent poetry collections include *Interlunar* (1988), *Morning in the Burned House* (1995), and *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry, 1965-1995* (1998). Her short fiction includes *Dancing Girls and Other Stories* (1982), *Wilderness Tips* (1991), and *Good Bones* (1992).

She is perhaps best known for her novels, in which she crafts strong, often enigmatic female characters and excels in narrating open-ended stories that dissect contemporary urban life and sexual politics. Her debut novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969), explores a woman's inability to eat as she feels consumed. This was followed by *Surfacing* (1973), which investigates a woman's search for her missing father; *Lady Oracle* (1977); *Life Before Man* (1980); *Bodily Harm* (1982), the story of Rennie Wilford, a young journalist recuperating on a Caribbean island; and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), a futuristic novel depicting a woman's struggle to escape her prescribed role.

Subsequent novels include *Cat's Eye* (1989), addressing bullying among young girls; *The Robber Bride* (1993); *Alias Grace* (1996), which recounts

the story of a woman convicted of two murders, of which she claims no memory; *The Blind Assassin* (2000), a multi-layered family memoir; and *Oryx and Crake* (2003), a portrayal of a scientific dystopia that was shortlisted for the 2003 Man Booker Prize for Fiction and the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction. *Alias Grace*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Cat's Eye* were all shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction, while *The Blind Assassin* won the prize in 2000.

Several of Atwood's works have been adapted for stage and screen. A television series based on *Alias Grace* aired in 2017, and a television film adaptation of *The Robber Bride* was released in 2007. *The Edible Woman* has been staged, while *The Handmaid's Tale* has undergone various adaptations, including a film directed by Volker Schlöndorff in 1990, an opera by Poul Ruders—whose British premiere was performed by the English National Opera in London in April 2003—and a television series that debuted in 2017.

Margaret Atwood is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and has received the Order of Ontario and the Norwegian Order of Literary Merit, in addition to being awarded sixteen honorary degrees. She has lived in various locations, including Canada, England, Scotland, and France, and currently resides in Toronto.

Recent publications include *Stone Mattress* (2014), a collection of short stories; *MaddAddam* (2013), which concludes the dystopian trilogy that began with *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and continued with *The Year of the Flood* (2009); *The Heart Goes Last* (2015); and *Hag-Seed* (2016). *The Testaments* (2019) revisits the fictional universe of *The Handmaid's Tale* and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. In 2011, she published *In Other Worlds: Science Fiction and The Human Imagination*, a collection of essays exploring science fiction.

Read the story *DEATH BY LANDSCAPE* and fulfill the tasks that follow.

PLOTLINE ANALYSIS

Chronological Timeline

Carefully read the provided summary of "Death by Landscape" and identify the key events that occur in the narrative's chronology.

Construct a timeline that visually represents the chronological progression of the story, clearly delineating the different temporal settings (i.e., Lois's childhood at Camp Manitou, the present-day in Lois's Toronto apartment).

Possible Worlds Representation

Analyze the possible worlds that are evoked and juxtaposed within the narrative. Consider the following questions:

- a) How does the story alternate between Lois's present-day perspective and her memories of the past?
- b) What are the implications of Lois's reflections on the "what if" scenarios surrounding Lucy's disappearance?
- c) How do the landscape paintings in Lois's apartment serve as a physical manifestation of the possible worlds explored in the story?

Compose a 1000-word essay that addresses the following:

- a) Provide a detailed analysis of the chronological development of the plot, using your timeline as a reference.
- b) Discuss the representation of possible worlds in the narrative, drawing on specific textual evidence to support your interpretations.
- c) Explore how the possible worlds presented in the story shape Lois's understanding of her past and her present-day experience.
- d) Conclude by reflecting on the broader thematic implications of the story's exploration of possible worlds and their impact on the reader's understanding of the narrative.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Margaret Atwood's "Death by Landscape," the narrative centers on Lois, a woman reflecting on a traumatic event from her childhood at a summer camp. The story opens with Lois in her Toronto apartment, surrounded by a collection of landscape paintings, after the death of her husband and the departure of her sons.

As Lois contemplates her present solitude, she recalls her experiences at Camp Manitou in the Canadian wilderness when she was fourteen years old. Initially resistant to the camp environment, Lois eventually

befriended a fellow camper named Lucy, who hailed from a privileged background in Chicago. The two girls maintained a close correspondence throughout the year and eagerly anticipated their annual reunions at camp.

The summer when Lois and Lucy were fourteen, they participated in a weeklong canoe trip with their camp group. During a hike to Lookout Point, Lucy disappeared without a trace, sparking a fruitless search. Lois was subsequently interrogated by the head counselor, leaving her with a lingering sense of guilt and the belief that she was somehow responsible for Lucy's inexplicable disappearance.

In the present day, Lois remains haunted by the memory of Lucy's vanishing, feeling that she has never fully reconciled the event. The landscape paintings that surround her serve as a tangible reminder of the wild, unforgiving wilderness where her friend was lost, forever altering the course of Lois's life.

Study the basic information about the main characters of the story.

CHARACTERS

In Margaret Atwood's haunting short story "Death by Landscape," the author deftly constructs a cast of characters whose complex relationships and unresolved traumas serve as the thematic bedrock of the narrative.

Lois, the central protagonist. Depicted as a young girl attending a formative summer camp, Lois forges a close and impassioned friendship with the charismatic Lucy, a fellow camper whose American roots are tempered by her Canadian maternal lineage. Atwood's portrayal of Lois is that of a sensitive, observant individual, one whose life is irrevocably altered by the mysterious and unexplained disappearance of Lucy during a fateful canoe excursion.

Lucy, in turn, emerges as a captivating and multifaceted figure. Imbued with a sense of daring self-assurance that contrasts markedly with Lois' more introspective nature, Lucy's abrupt and unexplained vanishing serves as the pivotal inciting incident that propels the narrative forward, casting a persistent and unsettling shadow over the remainder of Lois' life.

Cappie, the camp's head counselor, who, in the immediate aftermath of Lucy's disappearance, interrogates Lois, suspecting the girl may have played a role in her friend's vanishing. This encounter not only heightens the narrative tension but also underscores the fragility of human relationships and the tendency of authority figures to seek convenient scapegoats in the face of unresolved tragedy.

Ultimately, Atwood's intricate character development elevates "Death by Landscape" beyond the confines of a mere mystery or suspense tale, transforming it into a profound meditation on the fragility of the human condition and the ways in which our most profound experiences of loss and isolation can come to shape the very fabric of our existence.

Study the dominating themes of the story. Which of them do you consider the most acute or close to your sphere of interests or priorities? Are these themes contemporary enough to extrapolate them to the life of today in this country? Draw the necessary parallels.

THEMES

The unknown

In Margaret Atwood's haunting short story "Death by Landscape," the theme of the unknown emerges as a pervasive and deeply unsettling presence, serving as a central locus around which the narrative's most profound tensions and unresolved mysteries coalesce.

At the heart of this thematic exploration lies the mysterious disappearance of the character Lucy, Lois' close friend and fellow camper. As Atwood so poignantly observes, the impact of Lucy's vanishing is profoundly amplified by the sheer inscrutability of the event - "a dead person is a body; a body occupies space, it exists somewhere. You can see it; you put it in a box and bury it in the ground, and then it's in a box in the ground. But Lucy is not in a box or in the ground. Because she is nowhere definite, she could be anywhere."

This lack of concrete resolution, this inability to locate and fully comprehend the fate that has befallen Lucy, serves to imbue the narrative with a profound sense of unease and existential dread. Lois, the story's

central protagonist, is left to grapple with the unspeakable anguish of not knowing, of being forced to confront the vast, unknowable void that has swallowed her friend.

Atwood's masterful use of descriptive language further amplifies the thematic resonance of the unknown, as the author evokes the vast, untamed expanse of the Canadian wilderness in which Lucy's disappearance takes place. This untamed, unknowable landscape serves as a powerful metaphor for the fundamental mysteries that lie at the heart of the human experience, a realm of pure, uncharted potential that renders the individual utterly insignificant and powerless in the face of its sheer enormity.

Indeed, it is this very sense of the unknown, of the deeply unsettling realization that the world contains vast, inscrutable spaces beyond our control or comprehension, that gives Atwood's story its haunting, indelible power. Lucy's vanishing into the wilderness, her transformation from a vibrant, tangible human being into a ghostly, unknowable absence, serves as a profound meditation on the fragility of existence and the fundamental uncertainty that lies at the core of the human condition.

Ultimately, Atwood's masterful exploration of the theme of the unknown in "Death by Landscape" transcends the bounds of mere narrative device, instead serving as a potent allegory for the inherent limitations of human knowledge and the ultimate unknowability of the universe that surrounds us. Through this prism, the story emerges as a deeply unsettling, yet profoundly resonant, exploration of the existential mysteries that continue to captivate and haunt the human imagination.

Memory and guilt

In Margaret Atwood's poignant short story "Death by Landscape," the intertwined themes of memory and guilt emerge as potent forces that shape the life and psyche of the central protagonist, Lois. Despite the fact that Lois bears no direct responsibility for the mysterious disappearance of her dear friend Lucy, the narrative masterfully illustrates how the lingering trauma of that fateful event comes to profoundly inform Lois' subsequent existence, indelibly shaping her perception of the world and her relationship to her own memories.

From the outset, Atwood establishes the pervasive sense of suspicion and speculation that surrounds Lois in the aftermath of Lucy's vanishing, as the other girls in their shared cabin gaze upon her with accusatory eyes, their unspoken questions haunting Lois for the remainder of her life. This profound sense of unwarranted guilt, this burden of responsibility for a tragedy entirely beyond her control, serves as a persistent specter that hovers over Lois, coloring her every interaction and relationship.

Atwood's masterful exploration of Lois' psychological state further illuminates the debilitating impact of this unresolved trauma, as the protagonist muses that she was never fully present in her own life, her consciousness perpetually divided between the world as it is and the world as it might have been had Lucy never disappeared. This inability to fully inhabit the present, this compulsive need to cling to the vestiges of a past that can never be reclaimed, speaks to the enduring power of memory to both sustain and torment the human psyche.

The author's vivid descriptions of Lois' avoidance of wild, untamed spaces, her acute awareness of Lucy's ethereal presence in the very landscapes that witnessed her vanishing, further underscore the protagonist's profound entanglement with the past. These landscapes, imbued with the ghostly weight of Lucy's absence, become a repository for Lois' memories, a tangible manifestation of the grief and uncertainty that have come to define her existence.

Ultimately, Atwood's nuanced treatment of the themes of memory and guilt in "Death by Landscape" transcends the confines of a mere character study, instead serving as a profound meditation on the ways in which the unresolved traumas of the past can come to shape and define an individual's lived experience. Lois' lifelong struggle to reconcile the reality of Lucy's disappearance with the persistent specter of her memory stands as a poignant testament to the complex interplay between personal history and the human capacity for resilience in the face of unspeakable loss.

Coming of age

In Margaret Atwood's short story "Death by Landscape," the theme of coming of age emerges as a powerful undercurrent that permeates the narrative, serving as a poignant counterpoint to the more overt themes of memory and guilt that haunt the protagonist, Lois. Atwood's masterful depiction of the summer camp experience, with its attendant rites of

passage and moments of youthful rebellion, offers a rich tapestry upon which the author explores the complexities of adolescent development and the transformative journey from childhood to adulthood.

The author's vivid recounting of the pivotal moment when Lucy, Lois' dear friend, experiences her first menstrual cycle while at camp, underscores the significance of such formative events in the lives of young women. The clandestine ritual the two girls engage in, burning Lucy's used sanitary napkin in a small, secretive fire, speaks to the profound sense of agency and autonomy that the camp environment fosters, allowing the young protagonists to explore their burgeoning sexuality and physicality in a space largely free from the constraints of adult supervision.

Moreover, Atwood's careful attention to the distinction between the "Bluejays" and "Ravens" cabins, denoting the progression from younger to older campers, further reinforces the notion of camp as a crucible of personal growth and transformation. The ill-fated canoe trip, which the narrative depicts as an initiation rite reserved only for the most mature of the campers, serves as a poignant metaphor for the challenges and risks inherent in the journey of adolescence.

In this context, the disappearance of Lucy on the canoe trip takes on an even more profound significance, as it represents not merely a traumatic loss, but also the abrupt and untimely severing of the coming-of-age process. Lois, forever haunted by the specter of her friend's vanishing, is in a sense denied the opportunity to fully realize her own maturation, her own transition into adulthood, as the traumatic event casts a long shadow over the remainder of her life.

Atwood's masterful exploration of the coming-of-age theme in "Death by Landscape" transcends the specifics of the camp setting, speaking to the universal human experience of navigating the tumultuous waters of adolescence. The author's incisive portrayal of Lois and Lucy's youthful explorations, their tentative steps towards self-discovery, and the profound impact of Lucy's disappearance on Lois' subsequent development, serves as a poignant commentary on the fragility and resilience of the human spirit in the face of life's unexpected challenges.

Study the information about the author's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.

STYLE

Symbolism

The symbolic significance of Lois' apartment and her collection of landscape paintings serve as a profound meditation on the complex relationship between the human experience and the natural world. As the narrative unfolds, these two key elements emerge as powerful metaphors that illuminate the protagonist's personal journey and the broader thematic concerns that underpin the story.

Lois' apartment, situated in one of Toronto's "newer waterfront developments," is depicted as a bastion of civilization, a space that stands in stark contrast to the untamed wilderness that looms large in her memories and consciousness. The apartment, with its security system and manicured "plant life in pots in the solarium," represents Lois' desire for control, order, and separation from the unpredictable forces of nature. The author's vivid descriptions of Lois' relief at being free from the "ivy pushing its muscular little suckers into the brickwork" and the "squirrels gnawing their way into the attic" further emphasize the protagonist's need to erect a barrier between herself and the natural realm.

Yet, paradoxically, Lois' apartment is also imbued with a sense of longing and connection to the very landscapes she seeks to avoid. The large windows overlooking the lake suggest a persistent, if uneasy, link between the domestic sphere and the untamed wilderness beyond. This connection is further reinforced by Lois' collection of landscape paintings that adorn the walls of her home, serving as a visual manifestation of the landscape that continues to haunt her.

Atwood's masterful use of these symbolic elements speaks to the inherent tensions and contradictions that underlie the human experience. Lois' apartment, with its trappings of modern convenience and security, becomes a metaphor for the ways in which we often seek to insulate ourselves from the unpredictable and sometimes unsettling realities of the natural world. Yet, the very presence of the landscape paintings within this controlled environment suggests that the human psyche cannot be so easily separated from the natural realm, that these two realms are inextricably linked.

Furthermore, the symbolic resonance of Lois' apartment and her landscape paintings extends beyond the individual protagonist, speaking to broader societal anxieties about the erosion of our connection to the natural world. As Lois' apartment represents the increasing urbanization and technological advancement of modern life, the paintings serve as a poignant reminder of the enduring power and beauty of the natural landscape, even as it recedes from our daily experience.

Ultimately, Atwood's masterful use of these symbolic elements in "Death by Landscape" underscores the profound ways in which the human condition is shaped by our relationship to the natural world. Through the lens of Lois' personal journey, the author invites readers to confront their own complex and often contradictory attitudes towards the wilderness, challenging us to consider the ways in which we, like Lois, both seek to escape and remain inextricably bound to the untamed forces that lie beyond the confines of our constructed environments.

Landscape paintings

The landscape paintings that adorn Lois' apartment emerge as a powerful and multifaceted symbolic device, serving as a potent embodiment of the protagonist's complex relationship with the natural world and the lingering trauma of her friend's disappearance.

Atwood's careful description of Lois' art collection paints a vivid picture of the protagonist's deep, yet paradoxical, connection to these works. The narrator notes that Lois "bought them because she wanted them," suggesting a sense of personal agency and a desire to surround herself with these landscapes. However, the text also reveals that Lois "could not have said at the time what it was" that she wanted from these paintings, imbuing them with an aura of mystery and the unknown.

Significantly, the author notes that Lois "does not find them peaceful in the least," and that "looking at them fills her with a wordless unease." This tension-laden response underscores the symbolic weight of the paintings, which seem to transcend their mere aesthetic qualities and instead evoke a profound emotional and psychological response within the protagonist.

The author's observation that "despite the fact that there are no people in them or even animals, it's as if there is something, or someone, looking

back out" is particularly striking. This ambiguous yet chilling description suggests that the landscapes themselves possess an almost sentient quality, as if they are imbued with the spectral presence of Lois' missing friend, Lucy.

Indeed, the text explicitly states that "in the absence of people in the images, Lois sees Lucy," further cementing the paintings as vessels for Lois' enduring grief and the indelible mark that Lucy's disappearance has left on her psyche. The landscapes, devoid of human figures, become stand-ins for the void left by Lucy's absence, a visual manifestation of the irreparable loss that Lois has endured.

Atwood's masterful deployment of the landscape paintings as a central symbol in "Death by Landscape" speaks to the author's profound understanding of the ways in which the human experience is inextricably linked to the natural world. The paintings, with their ability to evoke both a sense of yearning and unease within Lois, serve as a metaphor for the complex and often contradictory relationship between the individual and the environment.

Moreover, the symbolic weight of the paintings transcends the personal and speaks to the broader societal anxieties surrounding our rapidly changing relationship with the natural landscape. As Lois surrounds herself with these evocative works, she becomes a stand-in for a culture that is increasingly disconnected from the very systems that sustain it, a culture grappling with the haunting specter of environmental degradation and the loss of the wild.



Further Areas of Inquiry and Scholarly Exploration

📖 Investigate the psychological impact of unresolved guilt on one's character. Discuss whether the memories are reliable or distorted over time and the implications of this for the emotional well-being. Connect Lois's memories to broader themes of collective guilt or societal memory.

How does the story comment on the lasting effects of traumatic events on an individual's psyche and societal consciousness?

📖 Discuss the symbolism of the paintings one chooses to decorate the apartment and how they represent different stages of life or facets of personality. Consider the connection between art and identity.

📖 Examine the cultural symbolism of the wilderness in the story. Discuss how cultural perspectives on nature and landscapes impact the characters' experiences and perceptions.

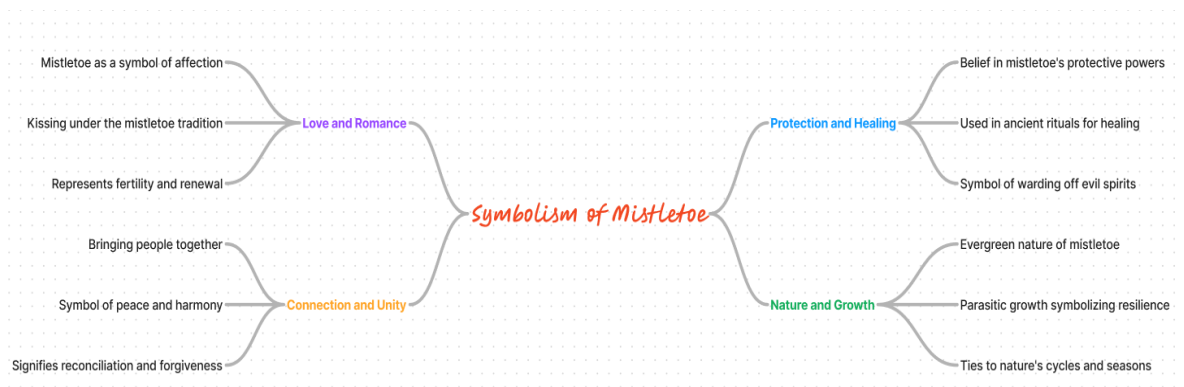


FOR INDEPENDENT LITERARY INQUIRY



Read the story THE MISTLETOE BRIDE by Jeanette Winterson and fulfill the tasks:

1. Study the biographical information about the author.
2. Fulfill the PLOTLINE ANALYSIS.
3. Write a concise PLOT SUMMARY of the story.
4. Provide the basic information about the main characters of the story. Identify and classify the conflicts the plotline develops round by. Dwell upon the factors that account for them.
5. Discuss the representation of possible worlds in the narrative, drawing on specific textual evidence to support your interpretations. Explore how the possible worlds presented in the story shape Lois's understanding of her past and her present-day experience. Study the information about the author's style of writing. List the specific features of it you consider to be the most prominent.
6. Study the historical context of the time the author created literary works. Dwell upon the factors you consider to be the crucial to influence the style of writing.
7. Dwell upon the concept of marriage revealed in the story and write a short essay "Marriage – in my metaphorical interpretation"



Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in Language Teaching Perspectives: Summing Up

In pairs or micro groups do the following tasks.

Share your ideas on teaching approaches and techniques that provide better environment for incorporating SEL into a critical reading classroom.

Read the article:

Elias, M. J. (March 30, 2023). The Role of SEL in Developing Reading Skills. Retrieved from: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/sel-reading-skills/>

Read the Thoughtful Learning blog article:

Improve SEL Through Literature. (2024). Retrieved from: <https://k12.thoughtfullearning.com/blogpost/improve-sel-through-literature?srsltid=AfmBOopwxSAwmB9CL1TH-D-z16IwpomCRqEFaniB8PihnGrhMNFQR-->

Watch the video:

Playing an Improv Game for Character Analysis. (October 11, 2024). Retrieved from: <https://www.edutopia.org/video/playing-an-improv-game-for-character-analysis>

Study the materials of the personal blog by Dr. John Spencer:

The Powerful Combination of PBL and SEL. (March 29, 2021). Retrieved from: <https://spencereducation.com/the-powerful-combination-of-pbl-and-sel/>

Suggest an activity that can help incorporate SEL into your reading classroom in the perspective of the problems raised in this chapter's stories. Plan it as teachers and do as learners. Hold a reflective discussion.

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CRITICAL OVERVIEWS

I

Study the critical overview of Saki's work THE INTERLOPERS. List the positive and negative features literary critics have identified in his literary style. What is your personal vision of the things?

The Toys of Peace, and Other Papers, the collection in which "The Interlopers" was included, was published in 1919, three years after Saki's death. The title, one of two books published posthumously, collected thirty-three sketches and stories about prewar England and the war itself. Some of these pieces were humorous, some satirical, and some surprisingly grim. In Britain, critics responded positively to the work, both for the pieces themselves as well as for Saki's heroic death. Some critics speculated on why Saki did not gain more popularity during his lifetime, while others believed that his unexpected death would bring him fame. An anonymous reviewer for the Spectator notes that Saki's "great gifts" consist of 'wit, mordant irony, and a remarkable command of ludicrous metaphor.' However, the writer believes that Saki's "intermittent vein of freakish inhumanity belied his best nature, and disconcerted the plain person." The Toys of Peace, and Other Papers was also reviewed in the United States, where the critic for the New York Times notes that knowledge of Saki's tragic death blunted enjoyment of reading his lighter, wittier pieces. At the same time, this critic praises the collection: "They [the tales] show an understanding of the foibles and weaknesses of human nature, but never a contempt for it, nor any degeneration into bitterness." This writer also singles out the "shock" felt at coming across "that grim story, 'The Interlopers.'" At the time he was writing, Saki was known for his playfulness and wit, his use of satire and irony, his craftsmanship, and his black comedy. In the decades since his death, these characteristics continue to be celebrated among Saki enthusiasts. However, as Adam Frost points out in an article that appeared in Contemporary Review in 1999, few critical works exist about Saki's writing and literary development. Frost notes that Christopher Morley believed, 'Fewer writers are less profitable to write about.' However, Frost finds this "a shame." To Frost, Saki was "never just a humorist" but a knowledgeable writer who explained the culture of his day

CRITICISM

Rena Korb

Korb has a master's degree in English literature and creative writing and has written for a wide variety of educational publishers. In the following essay, Korb examines how Saki explores the dual aspects of the hunt in his short story. Adam Frost points out in a retrospective essay on Saki's career appearing in Contemporary Review, that the author's first published story, "Dogged," ends in a "reversal [that] is typical of Saki"; in that story, the "owner becomes pet and vice versa." Saki would repeat such use of

a surprise ending throughout his career as a short story writer, perhaps most famously so in *The Open Window*. While that story's ending brought about a comic effect, in "*The Interlopers*," which Saki wrote at the end of his career, this pattern is now employed with a more vicious twist: the human hunters become the hunted. This motif is repeated in two different ways. Georg Znaym and Ulrich von Gradwitz are turned into game as each hunts the other, his lifelong enemy. More crucially, however, the men, pinioned under a fallen tree, are about to become the helpless quarry of a pack of wolves. A critic for the *New York Times* points out that "*The Interlopers*" differs from the other stories in *The Toys of Peace* – as it does, in fact, from the bulk of Saki's short story oeuvre – in its grimness. Saki places these two men in a setting that underscores their menacing intent. The forest in which the story takes place is primeval and infused with the ominous characteristics of an entity rife for the hunt itself. On this night particularly, there is "movement and unrest among the creatures that were wont to sleep through the dark hours." The woods are dark and cold, and they contain a "disturbing element." Ulrich peers through the "wild tangle of undergrowth" and listens through the "whistling and skirling of the wind and the restless beating of the branches." Ulrich's own actions further intensify this atmosphere, for he has placed "watchers . . . in ambush on the crest of the hill." Saki immediately sets the atmosphere of the hunt with the story's opening sentence. The reader is introduced to Ulrich, who stands "watching and listening, as though for some beast of the wood to come within the range of his vision, and later, of his rifle." The narrative quickly reveals, however, that Ulrich is not hunting a beast but rather, he "patrolled the dark forest in quest of a human enemy." That enemy is Georg Znaeym. Georg and Ulrich were born enemies, having inherited from their grandfathers a bitter feud over the very piece of land where Ulrich now stands. Instead of dissipating the feud over the years, "the personal ill-will of the two men" had made it grow; "as boys they had thirsted for one another's blood, [and] as men each prayed that misfortune might fall on the other." Now, each has independently determined to bring about the other's death. To accomplish this goal, each has set out in the forest – knowing that is where his enemy lurks – with a "rifle in his hand . . . hate in his heart and murder uppermost in his mind." In these matching desires, Ulrich and Georg have transformed the other into prey. Thus, each man is at the same time the hunter and the hunted. Despite actively placing themselves in these roles, the men are aware of the perversity of the situation. When they finally come face to face with each other and with the opportunity "to give full play to the passions of a lifetime," neither can bring himself "to shoot down his neighbour in cold blood and without word spoken." Both men are unable to give themselves up to the wildness of nature. They still respect "the code of a restraining civilization," thus they recognize that murdering another human – in actuality, hunting him down – is unforgivable "except for an offence against his hearth and honour." Ulrich and Georg's mutual indecision renders them unable to take action. They understand that fulfilling their desires would place them in opposition with the rules of society. Nature, however, is able to act swiftly. A lightning strike makes a beech tree fall down upon them, pinioning them under its branches. The falling of the tree thus places both men

in to the role of the helpless. They are cast into the role of "captive plight" of game in a trap. Like the animals they might hunt, no respite is available to them until their men come to release them. Their speech, as well as Saki's narrative, reflects their understanding of this situation. Georg, "savagely," sees Ulrich as "snared" in the forest. Ulrich, for his part, declares that when his men free him, he will kill Georg and tell others that this enemy "met... death poaching on my lands." The concept of the hunt—as well as the victory it represents—continually shapes the perceptions of the men, even at a time they no longer are in the position to be hunting any man or any beast. Surprisingly, while lying trapped under the tree, the two men come to a historic decision: they vow to put their quarrel behind them and instead make peace. In so doing, they harness the better part of their human nature. Their settlement stands in marked contrast to all of their past enmity and hatred, which required that they suppress their humanity and instead act upon their baser animal nature. The men's language demonstrates their acknowledgment that they are entering this new phase. Ulrich refers to their past behavior as the behavior of a "devil" rather than the behavior of a hunter; he also suggests that they now take on the role of "friend." Georg speaks of coming to visit Ulrich on his land and "never fir[ing] a shot ... save when you invited me as a guest." Ulrich and Georg determine to embrace their human ability to reason and to forgive. The men are eager to get free of their plight, and both are also eager "that his men might be the first to arrive, so that he might be the first to show honourable attention to the enemy that had become a friend." By adding this detail to the narrative, Saki shows that, despite their interest in making peace and giving up the hunt, the men still desire to have victory over the other. Thus, they have not completely given up any notion of competition, they have simply channeled it into a more acceptable, less harmful form. To expedite their release, the men decide to call out for their foresters, and they raise their voices in unison "in a prolonged hunting call." As their luck would have it, instead of beckoning their foresters their calls alert a pack of wolves, which begins to advance toward the captive men. The wolves follow Ulrich's path "down the hillside." By mimicking the earlier movement of Ulrich as well as the movement of the foresters, the wolves manifest the similarity between man and beast; as the men were earlier hunting each other, now the wolves are hunting the men. Alexander Malcolm Forbes writes in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, "[I]n an approximation to parable that is rare for Munro, 'The Interlopers' becomes one of his most idealistic and paradoxically pessimistic stories." Indeed, the story imparts multiple lessons about the benefits of peace as well as the folly of humankind placing itself above the laws of nature. The story implicitly explains why such a cruel fate befalls these enemies: they have dared to intrude, or interlope, on the domains of the forest. In the ongoing feud over possession of this strip of land, both the Gradwitz and Znaeym families have attempted to assert authority where they have no right to do so. Only contrived legal mechanisms gave the von Gradwitz family the forest. In hunting the land and asserting it belongs to them, the men tried to tame the area, but their claim on the land derives only from the authority of civilized society, not from any real sense of belonging or unity. However, the forest is truly primeval; it is a place of survival of

the fittest. When the men return to the forest with the deliberate goal of hunting down and killing their enemy, Ulrich and Georg forsake the protection afforded each by the codes of civilization. Their actions also help return the forest to its rightful occupants: beasts on the hunt. They are unable to fulfill this role, but the wolf pack is able to do so. Before the two men make their peace, Georg announces, "We fight this quarrel out to the death, you and I and our foresters, with no cursed interlopers to come between us." In this declaration, to which Ulrich accedes, Georg demonstrates one crucial error: he believes the interlopers are the representatives of the legal institutions that have come between him and the land. In reality, the interlopers are he and Ulrich, who have attempted to usurp this wild territory. At the end of the story, the wolves assert the primacy of beast over human within the land they can claim as their own. Their impending destruction of Georg and Ulrich show that the animals who hunt in the forest, not the men who hunt there, are in control. Source: Rena Korb, Critical Essay on "The Interlopers," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Douglas Dupler

Dupler has published numerous essays and has taught college English. In this essay, Dupler examines Saki's use of literary device and its impact on the story's effectiveness. Saki was a master of the literary device. Devices are subtle 'tricks' that authors employ to make stories interesting, to move plots along, and to keep readers absorbed. The short story form, with its need to entice readers quickly from beginning to end, lends itself well to the use of literary device. Unlikely events, suddenly twisting plots, and trick endings are devices that allow short stories to pack excitement in small spaces. Saki's story "The Interlopers" has several prime examples of the literary trick in action; in fact, the story relies on literary device for its effectiveness. However, despite the efficiency and excitement in his storytelling, Saki's reliance on literary trickery in "The Interlopers" ultimately detracts from the depth of the story, and keeps the story from being a truly great work of literature. The beginning of "The Interlopers" is normal enough, but then again, every trickster needs a straight act to set up the audience. The story commences by providing a setting with realistic detail, describing a forest "somewhere on the eastern spurs of the Carpathians ... one winter night." The forest also has a particular mood. There are animals "running like driven things," and on this "wind-scourged winter night" there is a "disturbing element" and 'movement and unrest among the creatures.' Despite being placed in a far-off time and place, which hints that it might be a fable or tale, the story begs to be taken seriously because of the precise details and serious tone of the setting. In addition to the scenery, a man is present, and realistic details form his character. His name, Ulrich von Gradwitz, connotes the foreign, while other clues imply he is of aristocratic, central European stock. However, Ulrich is not an average sportsman; he "patrolled the dark forest in quest of a human enemy." Closing the first paragraph with this line, Saki uses foreboding to temper the realism of the setting, to let the reader gently know that something strange might be starting to happen. Continuing with realistic detail, the next paragraphs present a deeper explanation of the characters and setting, and

introduce the conflict of the story, the enmity between two longtime rivals. After the story is set up, the first device, or trick, of the plot quickly takes place at the end of the third paragraph. Just at the time when meeting Georg Znaeym "man to man" was "uppermost in his thoughts," Ulrich steps around a large tree and sees his enemy face-to-face. At first, given the situation, this might not seem too out of the ordinary – two rivals meeting each other on a dark night in a disputed forest. However, from the beginning of the story, the reader is informed that these two men have "thirsted for one another's blood" since they have been boys, and that they have "each prayed that misfortune might fall on the other." Furthermore, the reader has been told that this rivalry spans all the way back to the characters' grandfathers. There has been plenty of time for these two men to act out their aggressions. Of all the times when this story could have taken place, it just so happens that it takes place on the one night the two enemies meet. Thus, the first trick: something happening in a story that is unlikely or out of the ordinary in real life, coming as a surprise to all involved. The tricky plot twists do not stop there. Just when the "chance had come to give full play to the passions of a lifetime" for the main characters, "a deed of Nature's own violence" stops the two enemies right in their tracks. The second major plot twist occurs as a falling tree branch thunders down. This crashing branch lands perfectly enough to trap both men without seriously injuring either of them, leaving them face to face but immobile and helpless. It is an exciting moment for the reader, and a clever step in an unfolding drama between two people with conflict. However, if the first plot twist, of two longtime enemies meeting in the flesh after a lifetime of rivalry, is questionable, this second literary trick might be nearly unbelievable. Surprisingly, though, the reader does not react with disbelief, because the situation has become too interesting to cause the reader to slow down or to think over the likelihood of events. An intense conflict has finally come out in the open, begging to be resolved. This is the beauty of a well-used literary device; the reader, so absorbed in the story, stops demanding strict reality and flows along with the plot. It is at this point that a potent story begins, the story of two people finally being granted what they most desire, the chance to confront a mortal enemy. The characters' first reactions are typical; they insult and threaten one another. The accident brings "a strange medley of pious thank-offerings and sharp curses." Each man fantasizes about the near future when his own version of justice will be served to the other, but both men are helpless. The reader stays absorbed because the outcome remains curious and undecided. Thus, the story has moved from a tale of possibly violent revenge to a situation with more human dimensions: both men are vulnerable. Ulrich sees the pain of Georg, and offers him his wine flask in a gesture of kindness. The story deepens as it begins to address human frailty and a challenging moral puzzle. However, this is also the place in the story that Saki's style and technique, of brevity and tricky plot twists, fail to provide the depth that could make the story truly empathetic and multi-faceted. For example, Ulrich goes from anger and hatred of his rival to compassion in hardly any time at all. At one moment he is threatening Georg with the worst, and the next moment he is offering his wine flask in peace. He has a major change of heart with hardly any intervening

thoughts, except musing on how cold it is, how difficult it is to open his wine flask, and how good the wine tastes. The reader hears his forgiving words, but has no idea how and why this change has occurred so quickly and definitively. Saki does not spend any time examining Ulrich's motives and internal thoughts, because of his style of moving the story along quickly. Humor even enters into the story at this serious moment; when Ulrich asks Georg for his friendship, he comments on the 'stupid strip of forest, where the trees can't even stand upright in a breach of wind.' The situation, in keeping with Saki's style, remains entertaining and lighthearted. Very rapidly and in order, Georg also has a change of heart without much explanation. After a period of silence, conveyed by one quick line, Georg agrees to forgiveness and a new attitude. Compared to his fuming rage just a few minutes earlier, this character is now envisioning a completely new life with a new friend. A lifetime has been changed in "this last half-hour." The dialogue and thoughts of the two characters, as they understand the situation and forgive each other, are important and critical parts of the story. At their best, though, these characterizations come across as superficial and impersonal. Ulrich has a change of heart without any real explanation, as does Georg. The conversation they share is plain, given the circumstances, and the two men, with their unremarkable dialogue, become practically interchangeable. In fact, it would be difficult to pick out which lines belong to which character if they were not labeled, because the two men speak so similarly and topically. Saki's narration indicates that this moment of forgiveness in the story is crucial, when the storyteller writes that "both men were silent, turning over in their minds the wonderful changes that this dramatic reconciliation would bring about." However, letting the reader in on these "wonderful changes" would take longer and deeper narration than Saki gives, and the reconciliation is thus not that dramatic. The two characters remain shadowy, as the focus shifts to the possibility of other "men" entering the story to save them. In great stories, characters are portrayed as unique individuals with personalities, problems, and backgrounds of their own. Furthermore, in great stories, the changes that characters undergo often provide hints of deeper or more general truths for the reader. Using these measures of greatness, Saki's story comes up short. In his zest for brevity and momentum, the author misses the chance to deepen the situation and to more fully develop the characters. At the end of "The Interlopers," it is up to the reader to decide what exactly has happened. Of course, it is a trick ending. The paragraphs toward the end lead the reader into believing that helpers are coming to assist the two fallen men. But in one quick line the story takes a completely different meaning: "Wolves!" Just when the reader has gained some empathy and trust of the characters, the author does them in with a macabre plot twist. With this ending, the story becomes an ambiguous morality tale. Because both men have lived lives full of hatred and dreams of revenge, they are now doomed, because they have learned to forgive too late. Other "interlopers" of fate have surprisingly intervened. At the same time, a more optimistic reading of the ending could be made. Perhaps the two men, being full of compassion and forgiveness at their end, find peace in the face of death. The author leaves no clues, being intent on keeping the plot twisting, the story surprising, and on not demanding

too much of the reader's time or energy. Ultimately, in his flashy use of literary device, Saki leaves it up to the reader to determine the final meaning of the story, that of redemption or punishment. The story is witty, readable, and full of momentum to the very end. However, "The Interlopers" speeds past the chance to provide deeper insight into the lives of two characters and their human dilemma.

Source: Douglas Dupler, Critical Essay on "The Interlopers," in Short Stories for Students, The Gale Group, 2002. Sources Forbes, Alexander Malcolm, "Saki," in Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol.162: British Short-Fiction Writers, edited by John H. Rogers, Gale Research, 1996, pp. 240-50. Frost, Adam, "A Hundred Years of Saki," in Contemporary Review, December 1999, Vol. 275, p. 302. Review of The Toys of Peace, in New York Times Book Review, July 6, 1919, p. 358. Review of The Toys of Peace, in Spectator, March 22, 1919, p. 380.

II

Study the critical overview of Bernard Malamud's works. List the positive and negative features literary critics have identified in his literary style. What is your personal vision of the things?

When Malamud's "The Magic Barrel" first appeared in Partisan Review in 1954, it provided a colorful glimpse into the world of American Jews. Four years later, after his second novel, *The Assistant*, had been enthusiastically received, Malamud reprinted "The Magic Barrel" as the title story in a collection of his short fiction. The collection sold well, and was praised by reviewers for its honesty, irony, and acute perception of the moral dilemmas of American Jews. It won the National Book Award for fiction in 1959. Between the publication of the collection in 1958 and his death in 1986, Bernard Malamud became one of America's most respected writers of fiction, publishing six more novels and numerous collections of short fiction. Malamud's writing has been the subject of critical debate for three decades. Writing in 1966, Sidney Richman examines the emotional sterility of the protagonist Leo Finkle. According to Richman, "... Finkle knows the word but not the spirit; and he makes it clear that in a secret part of his heart he knows it." Theodore C. Miller, in 1972, compares "The Magic Barrel" to Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, pointing out that both stories explore "the love of the minister and the whore." Unlike Hawthorne's minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, however, Malamud's rabbinical student, Finkle, "comes to accept Stella for the reason that he accepts universal guilt." Miller also contends that Salzman has arranged the love affair between Leo and Stella because he wishes "to initiate Leo Finkle into the existential nature of love." When at the end of the story Salzman says Kaddish, the traditional Jewish prayer for the dead, he is "commemorating the death of the old Leo who was incapable of love. But he is also celebrating Leo's birth into a new life." Both Richard Reynolds and Bates Hoffer offer interpretations of

"The Magic Barrel" based on specific Jewish religious traditions. Reynolds's focus is on the role of Kaddish, maintaining that Salzman hopes that Leo will bring Stella, "the prodigal daughter," back to a moral life. In that case, reciting the Kaddish is particularly appropriate given the ancient prayer's emphasis on resurrection. Hoffer compares the five-part structure of the story to the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament, the sacred text of Judaism) and claims that Leo has broken a majority of the ten commandments. Finally, Carmen Cramer maintains that Leo's story is a journey of emotional maturity. Rather, "The Magic Barrel" chronicles the rabbinical student's "Americanization," his gradual assimilation into American culture. Cramer asserts that Finkle "possesses few of the typical American traits – decisiveness, emotionality, action-orientation – but he melts into the American pot by the end of Bernard Malamud's polished piece of writing...."

CRITICISM

Benjamin Goluboff

Goluboff has taught English at Lake Forest College In Lake Forest, Illinois. In the following essay, he places the story within the context of Jewish fiction of the 1950s and focuses on the theme of inter-generational relations. Publishing "The Magic Barrel" in 1954, Bernard Malamud was at the beginning of his career, and near the beginning of a brief and remarkable period in the history of Jewish-American writing. For perhaps a decade, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the American literary imagination seemed to have been captured by a series of books by and about Jews. In 1953 Saul Bellow published *The Adventures of Augie March*, a story of tragicomic misadventures set in Chicago's Jewish immigrant milieu. In 1957 Malamud brought out his second novel, *The Assistant*, the tale of an impoverished Brooklyn grocer who becomes a kind of Jewish every man. 1959 saw the literary debut of Philip Roth, whose *Goodbye, Columbus* was the account of a doomed love affair between two Jewish young people divided by social class. *Goodbye Columbus* won the prestigious National Book Award for fiction in 1960, as Bellow's *Augie March* had done in 1954, and as Malamud's collection of short stories, *The Magic Barrel*, had in 1959. Equally distinguished Jewish-American writers – such as Norman Mailer, Joseph Heller, and Chaim Potok – attracted attention on the literary scene during these years as well. The novelists who made their reputations during this time didn't always have Jewish concerns as the focus of their fiction. Still, for a decade or so, Malamud's fiction seemed to be part of a movement of the American novel toward the lives and problems of Jews. Of course, Jewish-American fiction was not invented in the 1950s; novels by and about American Jews comprised a tradition of some significance and depth by the time Malamud began his career. In one important respect – in its theme of change and conflict between generations – Malamud's "The Magic Barrel" is solidly embedded in the tradition of Jewish-American fiction. The first important Jewish-American novel was Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* of 1912. Born in Russian Poland, Antin immigrated to Boston as a child in 1894 and became a social worker in the immigrant neighborhoods of that city. *The Promised Land* is based on Antin's own immigrant

experience, contrasting the poverty and persecution of Jewish life in Eastern Europe with the freedom and economic opportunity available to immigrants in the United States. The vision of America is not so happy, however, in *The Rise of David Levinsky* by Abraham Cahan (1917). Cahan was a Russian immigrant who found success in America as an editor and journalist. (He edited the *The Jewish Daily Forward*, the Yiddish newspaper in which Leo Finkle reads Pinye Salzman's ad.) Like his creator, David Levinsky encounters an America where opportunity is purchased at great sacrifice. As David rises in New York's garment industry, his success costs him love and personal integrity. Most of all, David's success results in his betrayal of those Jewish spiritual traditions that had sustained his ancestors in Russia. David ends the novel as a representative of an immigrant generation that has lost the integrity of its ancestors.

The theme of change and conflict among generations appears powerfully in Anzia Yeziarska's 1925 novel *Bread Givers*. Yeziarska's novel dramatizes the conflict between Sara Smolinsky, a lively young Jewish woman, and her dictatorial father, a Russian immigrant Rabbi. Rabbi Smolinsky has devoted his life to study of the Torah, and insists that his daughters work to support him as he continues his studies in America. Sara dreams of receiving a secular American education and becoming a teacher, but to do so she must defy the will of her father: "More and more I began to see that father, in his innocent craziness to hold up the Light of the Law to his children, was a tyrant more terrible than the Tsar from Russia." Sara eventually realizes her dream, becoming a teacher in the New York Public Schools, but only at the price of breaking off her relationship with her father. When the two reconcile at the end of the novel, it is because Sara has come to recognize that the drive and will that allowed her to finish her education came from her father. As Leo Finkle and Pinye Salzman pursue each other through the pages of Malamud's "The Magic Barrel," the theme of generational conflict presents itself with rich ambivalence. It's as clear from his profession—an arranger of marriages in the way traditional to nineteenth-century European Jewish communities—as it is from his Yiddish-inflected speech that Pinye Salzman is the story's representative of an older generation of immigrant Jews. Leo Finkle, born in Cleveland and bearing a gentile given name, as clearly embodies a younger population—perhaps those second- or third-generation American Jews who came to maturity in the 1950s. What's less clear, however, is with which of the two generations the story encourages us to empathize.

Who has moral authority in the story, old Salzman or young Finkle? It is tempting to read the story as favoring youth, especially in light of the emotional transformation that Leo Finkle undergoes. Leo enters the story as a cold and passionless young man. He requires a bride not because he is in love, but because he is about to be ordained as a rabbi and believes that he will find a congregation more readily if he is married. Leo praises Salzman's profession with chilly formalism; the matchmaker, he says, makes "practical the necessary without hindering joy." After his date with Lily Hirschorn, Leo comes to recognize and deplore his own passionlessness. Prompted by the

matchmaker, Lily had expected Finkle to be a man of great human and spiritual fervor. Leo disappoints her, of course, and sees ' 'himself for the first time as he truly was – unloved and loveless." In the aftermath of this revelation, Leo appears to change. He tells the matchmaker, ' 'I now admit the necessity of premarital love. That is, I want to be in love with the one I marry." Salzman's reply to this declaration seems to identify the matchmaker with the older generation: "'Love?' said Salzman, astounded. After a moment he remarked, 'For us, our love is our life, not for the ladies. In the ghetto they –.'" (Finkle interrupts here with more about his new resolve to find love on his own.) In his fragmentary response Salzman seems to say that for the older generation – those who had lived in the Jewish ghettos of Europe – romantic love was a frivolous luxury. Survival was what mattered ("our life"), not "the ladies." With that remark, Salzman appears to inhabit a past whose dangers are no longer real to any but himself. Finkle's transformation is complete when he falls in love with the photograph of Salzman's daughter, Stella, left accidentally among pictures of the matchmaker's other clients. Loving this fallen woman, and loving her only on the basis of her photograph, is just the passionate leap of faith of which Leo has been previously incapable. His eyes now "weighted with wisdom," Leo has learned at last the redemptive nature of passion. Old Salzman, however, is more inflexibly than ever rooted in tradition. He considers his daughter dead because of her mysterious sin, and even Finkle's newfound passion for her can't restore Stella to the living in her father's eyes. In the story's mysterious final section, Finkle rushes to Stella with a bouquet of flowers.

Bates Hoffer

In the following excerpt, Hoffer identifies parallels between the first five books of the Old Testament and the story.

No synopsis is a substitute for ["The Magic Barrel"]. One is given here in case you have not read the story for some time. Leo Finkle, a rabbinical student, hears that he may have a chance at a better position if he is married. He approaches Salzman, a poverty-ridden matchmaker who smells of fish, who wears old clothes, and whose suggested brides are not shall we say big winners. After rejecting the few suggested by Salzman, Leo finds a picture in the file of a different girl and immediately falls in "love." The picture is of Salzman's daughter and the story does not make clear whether the picture is there by mistake (as Salzman says) or by design (as Leo suspects). It is clear that Salzman has indeed disowned his daughter who has gone completely bad. Leo demands to meet her, no matter what her background and condition. As the story closes, Leo is rushing toward her with a bouquet while she is standing under a streetlight dressed in red and white. The last paragraph then reads: Around the corner, Salzman, leaning against a wall, chanted prayers for the dead. As common in Malamud's stories, the closing picture is ambiguous upon a superficial reading. Salzman is chanting for whom? His daughter? Leo? The current state of Judaism? Someone even suggested to me that Salzman is singing in happiness because he is a Jew who is about to get his daughter married! One example of a previous

interpretation of the story is given by Rovit [in Bernard Malamud and the Critics, 1970]: The aesthetic form of the story—the precise evaluation of forces—is left to the reader.... In the best of his stories in *The Magic Barrel*, the same pattern of ultimate poetic resolution by metaphor is evident. I assume that you will agree, after re-reading the quote, that Rovit does not provide an interpretation at all. In fact, he finds purposeful ambiguity, as evidenced by: The dramatic action of the story attempts to lead the characters into a situation of conflict which is "resolved" by being fixed poetically in the final ambiguity of conflicting forces frozen and united in their very opposition. (Italics added) In other words, the answer to the question ' 'Who is he chanting for?' ' is ' 'Who knows?' ' That answer is only sufficient if there is no evidence at all for an answer. That there is abundant evidence is made clear below. Another example is from Rahv's Introduction to *A Malamud Reader*. Of all Malamud's stories, surely the most masterful is " *The Magic Barrel*," perhaps the best story produced by an American writer in recent decades ... Salzman contrives to leave one picture in Finkle's room by which his imagination is caught as in a trap. When tracked down, he swears that he had inadvertently left the fatal picture in Finkle's room. "She's not for you. She is a wild one, wild, without shame Like an animal, like a dog. For her to be poor was a sin. This is why to me she is dead now ... This is my baby, my Stella, she should burn in hell." (Rahv then quotes the last two paragraphs of the story.) Thus, the rabbinical student who, as he confesses, had come to God not because he loved Him but precisely because he did not, attempts to find in the girl from whose picture "he had received, somehow, an impression of evil" the redemption his ambiguous nature demands. (Italics added) Rahv, then, sees the basic ambiguity in Finkle and does not worry about Salzman. But worry we must. Where Rahv assumes Salzman "contrives" to leave Stella's picture, others feel that Salzman tells the truth when he swears it was an accident. Assumptions and feelings will convince no one who does not agree with us. Therefore, we must look for evidence in the story for support of one view or another. Let us, then, turn to independent but mutually supporting arguments, based on the story itself, for a non-ambiguous interpretation. We should only accept ambiguity after exhausting all procedures and even then realize that someone else may find the key to clear up the ambiguity. . . . We start by noting that Leo is a final year rabbinical student about to obtain a doctoral degree from Yeshiva, a highly prestigious university. As rabbi, as scholar deeply knowledgeable of the Pentateuch, the Law, he will be "master" and "teacher" ' of the Law to generations of Jewish children. We therefore begin our analysis of Leo by judging his thoughts, words and deeds in light of his vocation. Although we might go deeply into the Law — and the reader is encouraged to do so — in order to judge, here we will mainly use the "basic" part of the Law which most of us know, the Ten Commandments from Deuteronomy 5:6-21. (I use Monsignor Knox's translation for a variety of reasons. It is important to note that Catholics, Protestants and Jews often number the verses, and consequently the commandments, differently.) Surely, we can expect a rabbi to support at least the fundamental parts of the law.

Deuteronomy 5 6 *And thus he spoke: I am the Lord thy God, it was I who rescued thee from the land of Egypt, where thou 7 didst dwell in slavery. Thou shalt not defy me by 8 making other gods thy own. Thou shalt not carve thyself images, or fashion the likeness of anything in heaven above, or on earth, to bow down and 9 worship it. I, thy God, the Lord Almighty, am jealous in my love; be my enemy, and thy children, to the third and fourth generation, shall make amends; 10 love me, keep my commandments, and mercy shall be thine a thousand-fold. (Commandment 1) 11 Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God lightly on thy lips; if a man uses that name lightly, he will not go unpunished. (2) 12 Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as 13 the Lord thy God has bidden thee. Six days for drudgery, for doing all the work thou hast to do; 14 when the seventh day come, it is a sabbath, a day of rest, consecrated to the Lord thy God. That day, all work shall be at an end, for thee and for every son and daughter of thine, thy servants and serving-women, thy ass, loo, and thy ox, and all thy beasts, and the aliens that live within thy city walls. It must bring rest to thy men-servants and thy maid-servants, 15 as to thyself. Remember that thou too wast a slave in Egypt; what constraining force the Lord used, what a display he made of his power, to rescue thee; and now he will have thee keep this day of rest. (3) 16 Honour thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God has bidden thee; so shall thou live long to enjoy the land which the Lord thy God means to give thee. (4) 17 Thou shalt do no murder. (5) 18 Thou shalt not commit adultery. (6) 19 Thou shalt not steal. (7) 20 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. (8) 21 Thou shalt not cover thy neighbor's wife. (9) Thou shalt not sell thy heart upon thy neighbour's house or lands, his servants or handmaids, an ox or ass or anything that is his. (10)*

The first three commandments pertain to God and the next seven to man. As we go through the story and compare Leo's behavior against the standards of the law, recall that the first three were summarized by Christ with the phrase from Deuteronomy 6:5, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with the love of thy whole heart, and thy whole soul, and thy whole strength," and the last seven from Leviticus 19:18, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self; the Lord is his." Note, then, that love of God is the focus of all.

So now we look to Leo. Instead of observing the Sabbath, he goes out on a date with Lily. On the date he mentions the name of God in ordinary conversation.... And on the date he says he "came to God not because I loved Him, but because I did not." Poof! The first three commandments disappear, not broken but evaporated! We begin to suspect we are not here reading of a dedicated religious leader. Before turning to the other commandments, let us pause and look closely at the definition of love in the Law and compare it with Leo's version. In commandment number one we find that love of God includes keeping the commandments: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." "Love," then, is a commitment of the will to behave in a certain manner. It might be helpful to use an example here. In the commandment against adultery, the word "adultery" itself refers to an "adulteration" of the love of God by an illicit love of someone or something. Thus, fornication or sex outside marriage, and sex when married, are both adulterations of the Divine love. Human love is a reflection of Divine love and, therefore, true love is always within the limits of the Divine will be expressed in the commandments and elsewhere. Yet when we turn to Leo's version of love, we find that he has decided to throw away the divine definition: Love, I have said to

myself, should be a by-product of living and worship rather than its own end. Yet for myself I find it necessary to establish the level of my need and fulfill it. He changes "love" to "need" and seeks not God's will but his own: "my" need, he says. Recall here that Leo's great "love" for Stella all comes from a cheap picture. He has not yet met her or seen her in the story. "Who can love from a picture?" Salzman asks. "If you can love her, then you can love anybody." Then Leo confirms what we have suspected, that he has thoroughly confused "love" with sex, desires, needs and etc. "Just her I want," he murmurs. This bastion of Judaism has spent almost seven years in rabbinical preparation and still has the understanding of "love" of a sexstarved sophomore. There is no evidence in the story of any commitment to his religion or his vocation, no evidence of any real practice of his faith or any real knowledge of it. We find that his study has not been rewarding. You can find, if you look, the several other places which indicate that Leo is not what you would call your model rabbi. Let us go on to the other commandments. Numbers 6 and 9 deal with sex. There is evidence that Leo does not understand the morality of sex at all. When he goes out with Lily, he thinks he sees Salzman as a "cloven-hoofed Pan, piping nuptial ditties" throwing flowers in their way. Note the pagan image for marriage. When he first thinks of using a matchmaker, he looks out the window and observed the round white moon, moving high in the sky through a cloud menagerie, and watched with half-open mouth as it penetrated a huge hen, and dropped out of her like an egg laying itself. My judgement is that Leo is thinking primarily of the physical part of the marriage, to put it diplomatically. The last example here occurs when he discovers Stella's picture. You should re-read the whole paragraph, but in case you do not have a copy handy, here are some critical lines: It was not, he affirmed, that she had an extraordinary beauty — no, though her face was attractive enough; it was that something about her moved him. Feature for feature, even some of the ladies of the photographs could do better; but she leaped forth to his heart — had lived, or wanted to — more than just wanted, perhaps regretted how she had lived — had somehow deeply suffered: it could be seen in the depths of those reluctant eyes, and from the way the light enclosed and shone from her, and within her, opening realms of possibility: this was her own. Her he desired. His head ached and eyes narrowed with the intensity of his gazing, then as if an obscure fog had blown up in the mind, he experienced fear of her and was aware that he had received an impression, somehow, of evil. He shuddered, saying softly, it is thus with us all. "Her he desired." He senses she is "evil" and shudders with excitement. Here at the 3/4 point of the story, the climax, he makes his decision to possess the evil. His desire must be attained. That she is evil is clarified by Salzman as he and Leo talk: "She is not for you. She is a wild one — wild, without shame. This is not a bride for a rabbi." "What do you mean wild?" "Like an animal. Like a dog. For her to be poor was a sin. This is why to me she is dead now." "In God's name, what do you mean?" "Her I can't introduce to you," Salzman cried. "Why are you so excited?" "Why, he asks," Salzman said, bursting into tears. "This is my baby, my Stella, she should burn in hell." Ultimately, Leo chooses the wild animal, the dog, the disinherited Stella "dead" in sin. We can only conclude, following this line of reasoning, that eventually Leo consciously chooses evil

and turns his back on God Whom he said he did not love anyhow. Leo is not, to put it mildly, thoroughly dedicated to the Law. The other commandments are broken or ignored in less powerful ways. For example, Leo breaks the one against stealing when he refuses to give Salzman's picture of Stella back. The commandment against greed, avarice and envy of other's goods may be involved in the reason why Leo approached the matchmaker in the first place. Quite simply he wanted to "win" a better congregation. By which might be meant a bigger or more affluent one. The commandment against lying is broken when Leo turns down the lame girl; he tells Salzman, "because I hate stomach specialists," the profession of her father. The one against honoring mother and father is ignored when he decides to avoid the matchmaking institution. [At one point] he couples that institution with the honoring of his father and his mother. Indeed, the only Commandment he does not overtly break is the one against murder – and my judgment is that he does indeed "murder" his own soul by choosing evil. With all this evidence that Leo is precisely the worst possible rabbi – we have not time to note the other rules and laws he breaks – we must conclude that Leo is not a positive picture of a modern rabbi. He may be a picture of some modern rabbi, but Malamud does not give us a positive picture. Leo may even be a picture of one type of rabbi graduating today, one pursuing a "thrust for life" (to use Rahv's phrase) which is actually a grasp of spiritual death. At the story's close, Salzman is around the corner chanting prayers for the dead, which refers to Leo and Stella and their offspring to the third and fourth generation and to that part of Judaism which has a Leo, a great "lion" of God, as its master and teacher.... There is a richer and deeper analysis of 'The Magic Barrel' which carries us across the sweep of Jewish history and takes us into the heart of the Pentateuch itself. For a few moments forget all you have read above and read this subsection independently. In much great literature there is an underlying structure which borrows from religious and/or literary structure. James Joyce builds his Portrait on Dante's Inferno, Greene builds End of the Affair on John of the Cross' Dark Night of the Soul, Faulkner builds The Sound and the Fury on the New Testament through Revelations. Examples abound in any good survey of Western literature. To posit such a structure for "The Magic Barrel" is to suggest that some of the story's power derives from its allegorical structure. The underlying structure begins to take shape when you see that the story is in five parts and that Leo has been studying the Pentateuch, the five parts of the Torah. Here is a brief version of each book...: GENESIS: "In the beginning" the focal point is the fall of Adam which begins the redemption story. EXODUS: "The going out" has Moses as the central figure. The deliverance by means of crossing the Red Sea is referred to throughout the Bible. The wandering in the desert and the manna from heaven are major points. LEVITICUS: "The Levites" or Israelite priesthood discusses the ministry of the Levitical priesthood. This highly legalistic book demands perfect obedience and sets up the rites of the Day of Atonement in precise detail. Obedience will bring redemption. NUMBERS: "In the wilderness" the Israelites are given final preparation for their entrance into the Promised Land. Numbers stresses that disobedience receives its due reward, but repentance results in pardon and restoration. DEUTERONOMY: The "second law" describes the Israelites

as they are about to enter the Promised Land. Moses will not be allowed to enter because of a sin. Moses exhorts the people to follow the law and describes the results of a lack of obedience. The concluding part is an added section on the death of Moses. Before starting the broad outlines of the parallels between the Pentateuch and "The Magic Barrel," recall the simple point that allegories as defined in Linguistics in Literature are parallel structures. The story is divided into five sections overtly, that is, by spaces on the page. "In the beginning" of the story Leo has his sexual image fantasy about the moon while Salzman is there talking about women. In part two, parallel to Exodus or "the going out", he literally "goes out" with Lily. We notice the mention of his walking cane even as Moses carried a staff. This section contains an image that is extremely hard to explain except by reference to Exodus. The winged loaves of bread that Leo sees at the end of the story make perfect sense if we accept a parallel to the "bread from heaven" or manna which occurs in Exodus. The manna came down from heaven as if frost or snow in Exodus and of course just after the loaves of bread fly high overhead it snows in part two. Note also that part two ends with Leo still "out." In part three Leo spends much time thinking of the priest hood (Leviticus), his reasons for his decisions, and so on. Leo seeks redemption for self in the sense of establishing the level of his need. The redemptive picture given by Salzman is the choice of good or evil, that is, he tells Leo that Leo should not choose Stella, "she should burn in hell." In part four, parallel to Numbers in which the methods and choices in the redemption story become clear, Salzman offers Leo yet one more chance to avoid evil. "Who can love from a picture? . . . if you can love her, then you can love anybody." Finally, again only in the broadest terms, in part five Leo rushes towards his self-defined 'promised land,' Stella. Parallel to the funeral prayer for Moses, who could not enter the Promised Land, the section which concludes Deuteronomy, we find the prayers for the dead concluding this part. Now let us pause for a while and reflect. The analysis above accounts for a whole potful of seeming aberrations in the story, for several occurrences which cannot be explained in an internally consistent way by any other analysis: loaves of bread flying overhead; a matchmaker who "appears" out of thin air, who is "transparent," almost "vanishing" ; the prayers for the dead when no one is dead and so on. If, however, we had only the above parallels few would bother searching for the more particular parts of the parallel structure. Here I will give one extended parallel and drop a few hints for parallels you can have fun finding for yourself. Let's look for a moment at the choice which Leo faces, Lily or Stella, coupled with a central choice which the priest has in Leviticus. In making an offering to God, the priest must choose only a clean animal, never an unclean. He must be able to distinguish them. We note here that the girl proposed by Salzman is named "Lily," surely a symbolic name for purity. The priest must also do something to the clean animal or the offering is not valid. That something is that it must be salted. Here we notice that Salzman (which means "salt- man") has disinherited his impure daughter. She is not only "unclean" but unsalted. Thus, we find that the names of Lily and Salzman are perfectly suited to the parallel structure. Let's go a little more deeply into Leviticus. Aaron's two sons mentioned in chapter 10 decide to honor the Lord more than their orders require by

moving closer to the holiest place. They decided to do more; that is, they think they are choosing good when they decide to do it their own way. They are then consumed by fire from the Lord. Leo, too, wants to decide for himself and he decides Salzman's daughter is "good" despite all evidence to the contrary (100% of it). Now if I had written "The Magic Barrel" and had set up the parallel to this point, I would look for a girl's name which suggests purity or whiteness but which also suggests the fire which consumes her ("she should burn in hell") and will, by extension, consume Leo. In fact, 'Stella' does the job to perfection since it means "star"... There are several other parallels you could track down. Part two ought to have a body of water (i.e. "Red Sea"). It does. Leo ought to have other parallels to Moses. He does. There ought to be more examples of law and tradition breaking, since Leo is the great Law-Breaker rather than a Moses or Law-Giver. There are. Since Salzman appears and disappears on "wings of the wind" and has a relative who has fallen and burns in hell, it shouldn't be too difficult to relate them to the redemption story. (If you will permit me – if she indeed is burning, it is interesting to note that when Leo first sees her she is standing "by the lamp post, smoking.")... One last line of analysis must be given here to show clearly that what Leo thinks is a "redemption" process is precisely the opposite. We look at Leo at the end of each section and find how he had "entangled himself to such an extent that he became suspicious of "Salzman's machinations." He acted 'frenziedly" in his craving for Stella, was "afflicted" with a "tormenting suspicion" and finally had "prayers for the dead" prayed for him. Leo looked upon evil, decided it was good, and ran to greet it with flowers outthrust. I do not see how anyone could find the story "ambiguous" with respect to Leo's decision. The analysis presented above uses a great deal of direct textual evidence (such as breaking of various rules) to show that Leo is the opposite of a high-level rabbi and it uses direct textual evidence for parallels between the story and the Pentateuch, that which Leo studied for years and that which he would be expected to teach as a rabbi. In the latter interpretation, Leo becomes the great Law-Breaker as contrasted to the author and "hero" of the Pentateuch, the Law-Giver, Moses. Leo seeks not the Promised Land offered by God, but the promised land of his own desires, union with a prostitute whom he does not even know, save from a cheap picture. Leo breaks God's laws, the Mosaic law, the natural law, the standards appropriate to a rabbinical student and to a Jew in general; he breaks the traditions of his religion, his race, his ancestors, his parents; he breaks the rules of common courtesy and kindness. He seeks that which makes him shudder, a picture of evil which he decides will become his good. From direct textual evidence, Leo is perhaps the greatest loser in the history of literature since Lucifer's Fall.. . . You may disagree with the last sentence, but the point there was exaggerated for a particular reason. Over and over again the commentators on this story project Leo as a winner, as someone who has "matured" and seeks his redemption. Pinye Salzman is even seen as a "criminal." How can anyone hold the idea that Leo is somehow "maturing" by choosing a hooker? Here I would like to attempt an answer, not by quoting endlessly, but by commenting on the type of criticism involved. Let us therefore begin by presenting a case for Leo as the good guy. As we read "The Magic Barrel" we note

that Leo is suspicious that Pinye arranged for him to find Stella's picture and that the whole story was staged. Leo is presented pictures of older or crippled girls so that Stella will seem better. Stella is condemned so as to make her more attractive to Leo. Pinye is a poor, undignified representative of the old, repressive system that must be broken through for true maturation to take place. (Maturation, in this interpretation, consists of doing exactly what one wants to do.) Leo runs toward his redemption to the tune of violins. What precisely is it that is the key to the two polar opposite – and hence ambiguous? – interpretations? Clearly it is the interpretation of the role of the matchmaker. Is Leo right in his suspicion that the whole affair was staged or is Pinye right in denying any duplicity? If you side with Leo, then everything Pinye says is suspect because after all lying is breaking a commandment. If you side with the matchmaker, then you see Leo as having a guilty conscience, one that turns Pinye into a Pan or a liar or a fraud. How do we resolve the issue? We look closely at the story for evidence that one is presented as a positive character and the other as negative. Only if the evidence is mixed can we accurately say the story is 'ambiguous.' A close analysis shows Leo to be the consummate loser. The only evidence for Pinye as wrong comes from Leo's thoughts. No, Leo as hero simply will not hold up if you use the evidence of the story itself. OK, you ask, but aren't we back where we started? How can someone cling to the view that Leo is the good guy? The answer is rather harsh, but I think the harshness is fully justified. My judgment, after some years of studying the issue, is that those critics actually believe that breaking all the rules and sleeping with a prostitute is a maturational experience. ... Those critics must actually believe that "adult" movies are indeed adult, rather than mere adolescent sex fantasies. I am convinced that they believe that breaking God's law, dropping religious beliefs, and doing anything your little ole heart desires are the marks of maturation. They aren't, in the abstract, but the issue raised by their misunderstanding is a serious one. Let us spend a few lines on it. Leo may represent the 'mature' modern rabbi who abandons his entire background and perhaps he may in a more general sense represent the Jew who has nothing of Jewishness left except his race. Certainly, that interpretation fits with other Malamud Jews, especially Henry Levin (of "The Lady of the Lake") who changes his name to Henry R. Freeman and heads for Europe to escape and denies his Jewishness to one and all. But there is more to it than that, simply because Leo's story is more than abandoning his past values. Leo actually decides to treat what is shudderingly evil as a positive good through which to achieve redemption. The critics and commentators who find Leo a 'model' for our youth must have absorbed the same reversal of values, which reversal after all so pervades American society. Leo, then, may also represent all of us who are faced with the profoundly spiritual question: which value system do I choose? We know Leo's choice and have clear and direct textual evidence that he chose wrong. The evidence from the story is clear, but we have come to the point in literary criticism where we may ignore the text, ignore the structure of the story, ignore anything that clashes with the interpretation we want to make. We have come to the point where the choosing of evil is considered a positive good – just as Leo considered it. "The Magic Barrel" is

a great short story. Its power is evident whether you seek a deeper level of meaning or not. It is anthologized widely and discussed by thousands of people every year. Analyses of it are still appearing. The point of this article is that Malamud has constructed his story of the student of the Pentateuch on the structural framework of the Pentateuch and that any interpretation which fails to take into account this integration of content and form is deficient. The conclusion of this analysis is that Malamud as master craftsman and Malamud as artist of vision has created for us a powerful short story which will stand the test of time as a classic of our century.

Source: Bates Hoffer, "The Magic in Malamud's Barrel," in *Linguistics in Literature*, Vol. 2, 1977, pp. 1-26.

III

Study the critical overview of Terry Bisson's works. List the positive and negative features literary critics have identified in his literary style. What is your personal vision of the things?

Although Bisson's first science fiction novel was written in 1980, he did not receive widespread critical acclaim until the early 1990s, when he began to publish science fiction short stories in magazines. In 1993, he collected a number of these stories into *Bears Discover Fire and Other Stories*. In a 1993 review of the collection for *Kirkus Reviews*, the reviewer notes of Bisson that "at his best, he combines a splendidly loopy inventiveness with real poignancy, a hard-edged sense of wonder and a grasp of the genuinely alien." Other 1993 reviews of the collection are equally favorable. A critic from *Publishers Weekly* notes "the astonishing range of Bisson's talent" and calls Bisson "one of science fiction's most promising short story practitioners." Within the collection, most reviewers single out the award-winning title story, "Bears Discover Fire," as worthy of the highest praise. Says Martha Soukup in her 1993 *Washington Post Book World* review, the collection "is worth it for the title story alone." Soukup includes this tale in the category of "Bisson's homier tales of people living on in a world that can change itself more than it can change them." Nevertheless, critics still enjoy "The Toxic Donut," a story that falls into Soukup's category of "very brief japes," which she says can be read "as transcripts of sketch comedy." The story is one of the collection's three environmental stories. The *Publishers Weekly* critic notes of this trio of stories that they "address environmental concerns with a black humor that enhances rather than mitigates their impact." Likewise, the reviewer from *Kirkus* labels it as one of the many "agreeably batty commentaries" in the collection. In fact, reviewers have often noted the humorous aspects of Bisson's writing, to the point that in his entry on Bisson in the *St. James Guide to Science Fiction Writers*, Paul Kincaid labels Bisson as "a humorist." In addition to Bisson's critical success, he has also enjoyed favor with popular audiences, who appreciate his brand of humorous science fiction.

CRITICISM

Ryan D. Poquette

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses the relative unimportance of Kim's involuntary sacrifice in Bisson's story, while exploring the sinister implications of the act. Kim is expected to sacrifice herself for the benefit of the entire world, something that Ron alludes to in the beginning of the story when he says, "You have been chosen to represent all humanity for one evening." However, Kim's sacrifice is involuntary; she has not chosen to die. In one of her unheard statements, Kim notes this. Ron responds, saying, "I'm sorry you feel that way. I'm sure voluntary would be better. But somebody must have bought you a ticket; that's the way it works." Although Ron and the producers of the television show go to great lengths to conceal it, Kim's sacrifice is relatively unimportant, a fact that readers can see when they dig beneath the surface of the story. Bisson encourages his readers to do just this, through the use of several cues. First of all, there is the nature of the sacrifice itself. The idea of a person sacrificing himself or herself to save humanity is present in many cultures throughout history, one notable example being the Christian religion—Jesus Christ's willing death on the cross. In this case, however, the producers of the toxic donut show—and indeed the human world who supports this sacrifice—are making a mockery of the act. Kim's forced sacrifice is neither divine, since it is not done to save humanity's souls, nor eternal, since it only saves humanity for one year. Despite this fact, everybody involved with the show gives the act an increased importance. Says Ron at the beginning of the rehearsal, "You are, for one half hour tonight, the representative of all life on the planet. Hell, all life in the Universe, as far as we know." Yet, even in this statement, Bisson is having Ron undercut the importance of Kim's death. Kim is supposedly the representative of everybody and everything—but only for "one half hour." In fact, the half-hour format of the show, which also provides the structure for the rehearsal, helps lead a reader to understanding the real importance of Kim's sacrifice. Since Ron is all business and cares most about the show's success, he speeds through the rehearsal, giving a minute-by-minute breakdown of how the show will play out. For Ron, there is no time for small talk. At one point, in one of her unheard responses, Kim tries to remind Ron that they have already established what Mr. Crystal, the Host, should call her on the show. Ron is briefly apologetic and then goes back to his itinerary: "Okay. Anyway. A little ad-lib and it's 9:10. I have it all here on my clipboard, see? To the minute." Ron is also unresponsive to many of Kim's concerns, such as the fact that she has been chosen against her will. Ron thinks that Kim is joking when she brings up such issues. For example, at one point, Kim asks why she and the other annual guests on the show are called "Consumers." Ron responds, asking, "What would you want us to call you?" Kim's response causes Ron to think that she is just being funny. Although it is impossible to guess exactly what Kim might have said, given the context of Ron's responses, one assumes that it is a derogatory name. Kim is obviously not happy.

But Ron's only concern—and the main concern of the producers—is to maintain the good image of the show, which, as he tells her, everybody watches. Says Ron, "More than watch the Academy Awards. Eight to ten points more. A point is about thirteen million people these days, did you know that?" Bisson helps to underscore the importance of this image campaign by giving capitalized titles to many people and items on the show. To begin with, almost everybody in the story has a capitalized title that denotes his or her position. Mr. Crystal is "the Host," Ron is "the Host's Chief Administrative Assistant," there is going to be a presentation by the "Native People," and there is going to be a brief statement by the five "Presidents of the Common Market." Even Kim has a title—"Consumer." In addition to these actual titles or designations; however, there are some people and items that are capitalized, which normally would not be. For example, the women who lead people on and off the stage are called "the Girls," and the toxic pastry that Kim is expected to eat is called "the Donut." The effect of all of this capitalization is to give an added importance to the whole production. However, this importance is fake, just as all of the glitz and glamour of the show is fake. The trumped-up titles are merely an aspect of the television show's image, and—like Kim's death—hold no importance outside of the live production. However, Kim cannot say much about her unimportance, because Bisson removes her dialogue. Bisson's use of a monologue, which he uses in other stories in the *Bears Discover Fire and Other Stories* collection, is particularly effective here. As the story progresses, Kim's silence helps to underscore the urgency of the story, since the reader does not have to bounce back and forth between Ron and Kim's dialogue. As a result, Bisson pulls his readers quickly through the story. However, Kim's obvious problem over her involuntary selection and the excessive use of capitalization, among other clues, tip readers off, letting them know that they might want to go back and read between the lines. If readers do this, the real importance of the television show is revealed. Bisson is making a statement with Kim's silence. She is already dead. She stands for the silent masses of people who are being killed, and who will be killed in the future if something is not done to address the toxic pollution problem. In the story, however, Kim's death is buried, just as the involvement of the businesses that ultimately kill her is buried. Says Ron, "No, the corporations themselves don't make a presentation. They want to keep a very low profile." On the surface of the story, just as on the surface of this futuristic society, it appears that the environment is a top priority to everybody. Says Ron, ". . . everybody in the world who cares about the environment, and these days that includes everybody." However, once one examines the nature of Kim's sacrifice—and the glitzy television production that showcases it—it is apparent that businesses rule this world. The show tries to distract its viewers from this fact by including several traditional icons of environmentalism, such as colors, and by including aspects that are guaranteed to get an emotional response. The producers of the television show feature the rainbow, one of the symbols used in modern-day society to denote environmentalism. Ron tells Kim that "there will be one song from the International Children's Rainbow Chorus," an obvious ploy by the producers to use both children and the environment to tug at

viewers' heartstrings. Even more apparent than the rainbow, however, is the color green, which is synonymous with environmentalism. In the television show, the girls who help lead people on and off stage will be wearing "little green outfits." Also, there are "green marks" on the stage designating where "the President of the International Institute of Environmental Science" – whom Ron and the others call "the Green Meany" – will stand. This widespread use of an established environmental color is recognizable to most readers. What may not be as apparent at first is the fact that green is also the color of money, at least in the United States. Once again, by reading in between the lines, the reader can see that in the case of this story, green stands for both. The environment has become big money for corporations. Many of the wastes that comprise the toxic donut are from technological corporations. When Kim eats the donut, she may be saving humanity and the environment for a year, but she is really preserving the corporations' ability to continue to serve the human desire for consumption – the by-products of which become toxic wastes. With Kim's sacrificial murder, the companies will now have free license to produce as much toxic waste over the next year as they need to make big money in their manufacturing operations. The whole television production is ruled by this very money-centric idea, as evidenced by Ron's explanation about the year's worth of wastes that Kim is going to eat. Says Ron, "The fiscal year, by the way. That's why the Ceremony is tonight and not New Year's Eve." In fact, the story seems to imply that the corporations, who want to keep "a very low profile," are probably sponsoring the show. This is a small price to pay to avoid the types of expensive, image-damaging battles and economic sanctions that some corporations in Bisson's time had to contend with to continue dumping their hazardous wastes. In the end, Bisson's message is simple. Many people are at fault for the current state of the environment, but unless everybody works to solve the problem, technology may come up with its own solution – one that involves sacrificing the individual consumer to save production.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "The Toxic Donut," in *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2003.

Curt Guyette

Guyette is a longtime journalist who received a bachelor's degree in English writing from the University of Pittsburgh. In this essay, Guyette discusses Bisson's use of satire as a literary device employed to draw attention to serious issues. In his short story "The Toxic Donut," science fiction writer Terry Bisson effectively draws attention to a variety of important issues by employing the literary device of satire, which can be defined as using humor to ridicule vices, stupidities, or abuses. With remarkably spare prose, the author's sharp wit and pointed barbs are directed at the shallow nature of popular culture, secretive corporate control, the primitive bloodlust that shadows even the most technologically advanced societies, and, most significantly, a lifestyle of consumerism and waste that threatens the future of the entire planet. "The Toxic Donut" is a deceptively simple story that must be read more than once if it is to be fully appreciated. Although amusing from the outset, the tale takes on a whole new

level of poignancy, or significance, when the true fate of the character Kim is revealed in the story's final line. Once the reader learns that this woman must eat that toxic donut, is there any doubt she is the subject of a very public execution? The author foreshadows her predicament within the first two lines as the administrative assistant Ron suffers a slip of the tongue and refers to her in the past tense when he queries, "Did you, I mean do you have a family?" It is not until the concluding sentence, however, that the lethal purpose of her appearance on the show is made certain. The fact that the character Kim is doomed makes the black humor pervading this story even darker. Almost every line contains a satiric jab of some sort. For example, in the first reading, the fact that an International Rainbow Chorus provides the equivalent of a musical happy face by singing a lilting, optimistic tune by the Beatles titled "Here Comes the Sun" does not seem all that remarkable. But when seen as the prelude to a televised execution, the morbid irony of music that upbeat being played as a sort of processional to the gallows is overwhelming. Examples of this kind of satire permeate the story. There is, however, more to this tale than dark comedy. When one looks at it closely, the story reveals itself to be a masterful work of art. Although it is impressive that Bisson can achieve so much in a piece so sparse, what elevates this accomplishment to an even higher level is that it serves as an ironic antithesis, or counterpoint, to what appears to be his main theme. In a story that warns mankind that it is at risk of killing itself with the excessive toxic waste it produces, Bisson does not waste a single word. Taking brevity to the extreme, he creates a story featuring just two characters, and only one of those is ever heard actually speaking. He achieves this in large part by merely outlining the subjects of his satire without filling in the details. Think of the targets found at shooting ranges that are simply the black silhouette of a human form. That's the way Bisson handles this story. He does not dwell on the subjects being stung by his jibes; instead, he merely alludes to them, letting the reader fill in all the implications. Take, for example, this passage in the story where Ron tells Kim: You're the first woman in two years, by the way; the last two consumers were men. I don't know why, consumers is just what we call them; I mean, call you. What would you want us to call you? Those few lines accomplish so much. For one thing, the brief passage reveals how little value is being placed on human life in this world Bisson depicts. Kim is no longer seen as a person; she is simply a consumer. The description can be interpreted in a strictly literal sense: she will actually consume that toxic donut as the climax of the game-like show upon which she appears. But the idea of her as a consumer can also be viewed in a much broader way as a metaphor that implies deeper meaning. After all, as the author tells readers at the outset of the story, Kim represents all of mankind. In that context, consumerism dovetails perfectly with this story's overarching concern with the issue of pollution and its lethal potential. In a throwaway society, consumption and waste are inevitably bound together. Evidence of this is everywhere, from fuel-inefficient cars that create poisonous carbon monoxide when gasoline is "consumed," to the prevalence of items like disposable razors, which are used a few times then discarded, ending up in municipal trash incinerators that spew from their smokestack's pollutants such as

the dioxin Bisson mentions. But the author does not bog down his story exploring these sorts of tangents. The same is true when it comes to pollution and the role corporations play in the problem. Bisson does not launch into a diatribe attacking companies that wield so much power over the direction society takes, and play such a large role in creating the pollution that poses such a threat. Instead, he refers to them only once, in an almost offhand manner, introducing the subject with an unheard question from Kim and Ron's response: "What? No, the corporations themselves don't make a presentation. They want to keep a very low profile." And that is it. The issue raised, Bisson is content to let the cryptic reference end there, with all its implications of string-pulling corporations left hanging, hovering like a shadow. It is almost like a game of tag. Bisson quickly hits on one theme, then moves on to the next. There are certain issues, however, that emerge throughout the story. It is as if Bisson is using satire as a microscope that allows us to examine society in ways we don't usually see it. Although this takes place in the future, it is not at all distant. Published in 1993, this story was written at a time when newscasts were already providing frightening predictions from many scientists warning about the potential threat of global warming being caused by polluting greenhouse gases. And as far back as the 1950s, writers such as Rachel Carson were raising alarm over the threat which pesticides and other toxic chemicals posed to both human beings and nature as a whole. So, the problems the author focuses on are not at all remote. Compounding the problem is what Bisson apparently sees as a lack of urgency on the part of society at large to understand and deal with the issue. This attitude is reflected in the way Ron describes the part of the program portraying the "evils of science." A video depicting poisoned rivers and dead animals accompanies the presentation. But for Ron, it is all just part of the show. That attitude is made perfectly clear when he tells Kim: "You don't have to watch if you don't want to. Just look concerned, alarmed, whatever." And when he is asked by Kim how it is that science is able to condense a years worth of toxic waste into one donut, Ron replies, "I don't know exactly. I never listen to the technical part. Some kind of sub molecular-nano-mini-mumbo-jumbo."

Ron and the show he works for are the epitome of a shallow culture. Almost everything about it is slick and fabricated and false. Presidents are scheduled to present Kim with a plaque honoring her for her courage, but she is warned not to touch it. Native-American performers will give her a bark scroll, but she is cautioned not to try and unroll it. Obviously, it is fake. And while this is happening, a wind machine will be providing the illusion of nature. However, despite all the phoniness, the main feature of the show could not be more real, and the resulting popularity is quite telling. Despite living in a society so technologically advanced it can compress uncounted tons of toxic waste from across the planet into a single pastry, the people inhabiting this world still have not evolved. What could be more primitive than a ritual human sacrifice? As Ron tells her, for this one night Kim represents all humanity, all life on the planet, perhaps the entire universe for all he knows. Like some sacrificial lamb being led to the slaughter, Kim will eat this donut and, in a way that is both symbolic and quite literal, suffer the consequences that would otherwise be shared by all

the inhabitants of this world. And what is the public's response to this? Morbid fascination on a global scale. Viewers tune in by the millions to watch the spectacle of it all. The big moment arrives with the fanfare of a drum roll. Even someone as crass as Ron cannot help but be moved by the moment, with the camera pulling slowly in on the subject, standing there alone, clutching a white, grease-stained bag holding all the world's poison. Bisson ends the story with a punch line that hits hard. It is really a message to every reader who, like Kim, continues moving inevitably toward a lethal end, cracking jokes all the way up to the last moment. As with all good satire, the underlying message being conveyed is completely serious. In fact, the moral of this story can rightfully be said to be of life and death importance. Continue on this course, Bisson seems to be saying, and the world will present to each of us a life filled with toxic donuts, and there will be no choice but to follow the instructions Ron gives Kim: "You eat it."

Source: Curt Guyette, Critical Essay on "The Toxic Donut," in *Short Stories for Students*, Gale, 2003.

IV

Study the critical overview of Ann Beattie's works. List the positive and negative features literary critics have identified in her literary style. What is your personal vision of the things?

CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Reviews of Beattie's work are often mixed; it seems as if critics either love or hate her work. Although her 1989 novel, *Picturing Will*, was both a popular and critical success, her short story collection *Where You'll Find Me*—the collection which includes "Janus"—met with mixed reviews. For example, Thomas Edwards, in an otherwise fairly negative review appearing in *The New York Times Book Review*, singled out "Janus" as being "sufficiently open and worked out to give convenient access to the materials from which they are all made." He found the rest of the stories "terse" and less "ample in scale and mood" than her earlier stories. On the other hand, Michiko Kakutani deemed the story "a highly crafted, almost surreal meditation on the intrusion of time past into time present and on the perils of everyday life." A good deal of the controversy surrounding Beattie's work deals with her reputation as a minimalist writer. According to Christina Murphy in her book *Ann Seattle*, "There is a persistent focus upon cutting away from fiction all that need not be there to 'tell' the story." Many critics find the bare, lean prose of minimalist writers to be flat and uninteresting. Further, those critics who take issue with minimalism argue that by reducing the exposition, minimalist writers produce limited stories without moral import. In a famous article appearing in the *New Criterion*, Joshua Gilder attacks minimalist writers such as Beattie, Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff, and Alice Munro,

stating that writers like these "seem intent on proving the proposition that less is, indeed, less." However, other commentators contend that these writers are the best of their generation. Minimalism requires active involvement on the part of the reader; they must read what is not said as well as what is. Readers such as Margaret Atwood, herself a noted novelist, short story writer, poet, and critic, admire Beattie's stories and novels precisely for their terse and understated style. Although Beattie's stories have generated much critical controversy among reviewers, there are few recent scholarly studies of her work. Indeed, although "Janus" continues to be anthologized as one of Beattie's best stories, few scholars have examined the story closely. In *The Explicator*, Philip Miller links the bowl to the Roman god Janus. According to Roman mythology, Janus is responsible for guarding both entrances and exits. The story, Miller asserts, is about beginnings and endings, and thus the title is particularly apt. Other critics, such as Carolyn Porter in *Contemporary American Women Writers: Narrative Strategies* (1985) and Susan Jaret McKinstry in *Studies in Short Fiction* focus on the gaps Beattie inserts into her stories. These two studies, while not about "Janus" directly, help readers better understand Beattie's narrative approach.

CRITICISM

Diane Andrews Henningfeld

Henningfeld is an associate professor at Adrian College who writes extensively for educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses the use of the bowl as a symbol of the main character's sexuality in "Janus." Ann Beattie's short story, "Janus," first appeared in 1985 in the *New Yorker*. Included in her 1986 short fiction collection, *Where You'll Find Me*, the story is widely anthologized and frequently cited as one of Beattie's best works. At first glance, the story seems much like Beattie's other stories. It is limited in character, plot, and scope, focusing on the small details of life. The prose is lean and spare, and there are empty spaces, or gaps, in what Beattie tells the reader. Such gaps require active participation on the part of the reader, who must "read" what is missing in the story. Yet there are some very important ways that this story is different from her other stories. In the first place, "Janus" is told in past tense, rather than present. The past tense creates a sense of recollection and meditation in the story, as the narrator recalls the history of the bowl. There are many references to the passing of time in the story. Unlike other Beattie stories, told in the present tense and happening in the moment, "Janus" unfolds over a period of years; this is an unusual framework, given the brevity of the story. Another difference is the emphasis placed on one object: the bowl. Images are generally important in Beattie's short stories; one riveting image can replace in just a few words what might take pages of exposition to accomplish. Nevertheless, Beattie rarely indulges in the kind of symbolic significance the bowl in this story seems to take on. As Jonathan Penner in *Book World—The Washington Post* points out, "The beloved bowl becomes a psychoanalytical symbol, odd as an archaeopteryx in Beattie's post-Freudian world." Penner's observation paves the way for a reading that requires some understanding of the theories of Sigmund Freud, widely regarded as the father of modern psychotherapy. Although his theories have been questioned and even discredited as the basis for psychiatric treatment, they still provide an interesting and informative way to examine literature. Literary scholars who use Freud's ideas are often called

psychoanalytic critics; they are interested in examining the imagery and symbolism in a story to find ways of explaining the actions of the characters. These critics approach a story the same way a psychiatrist might approach a dream – by analyzing images for symbolic content, both the critic and the psychiatrist learn something about the character or the patient. In many cases, the images present in stories or dreams can be called "phallic." Phallic symbols are everyday objects in a story that stand for male or female sexual organs and often represent the repressed sexual desires or fears of the characters. Analyzing the significance of phallic symbols can reveal important insights into both the characters and the meaning of the story. Generally, objects such as towers or rockets, or any item that is taller than it is wide, often serve as male phallic symbols. Lakes, swimming pools, tunnels, and other rounded structures with openings are often used as female phallic symbols. Another Freudian concept is that of the "fetish." In anthropological terms, "fetish" refers to an object that the bearer regards with reverence and trust. The bearer believes that the object has magical powers that both protect its owner and lead the owner to success. In psychology, the word fetish means, according to The American Heritage Dictionary: "an object or body part whose real or fantasized presence is psychologically necessary for sexual gratification and that is an object of fixation to the extent that it may interfere with complete sexual expression." Using this background information, the reader can view "Janus" as a psychoanalytical exploration into the sexuality of the main character. The dominant image in "Janus" is the bowl, and Andrea's attachment to the bowl suggests that it has more than passing importance for the story. As the story moves forward, the bowl fulfills the function of a fetish for Andrea, at least in the anthropological sense. She credits it with almost magical power and believes that it is responsible for her financial success. When one considers the bowl as a psychological fetish, however, the story grows in depth and complexity. It is possible to read the bowl as a symbol for the female womb. In literature, the womb is often seen as a mysterious, hidden entity, and is the primary difference between men and women. When a woman is not pregnant, the womb remains small and flat, hidden in the woman's body. However, when a woman is pregnant, her womb swells to house the growing fetus and gives the woman's midsection a bowl-shaped appearance. Thus, when Beattie describes the bowl as "both subtle and noticeable – a paradox of a bowl," it can be interpreted that she is commenting on the dual nature of the womb: small and hidden in its nonpregnant state, and rounded and noticeable in its pregnant state. In addition, Beattie tells the reader that although people are drawn to the bowl, "they always faltered when they tried to say something." Over the course of the story, the bowl takes on increasing significance to Andrea. She "asked her husband to please not drop his house key in it. It was meant to be empty." Such a statement at least suggests Andrea's desire to remain without child. Indeed, for a woman to be successful in a career often requires a choice between having children and remaining childless. Andrea's connection of the bowl with her own success as a real-estate agent may reflect this. Furthermore, Beattie is explicit about the husband's response to the bowl. "When her husband first noticed the bowl, he had peered into it and smiled briefly.... In recent years, both of them had acquired many things to make up for all the lean years when they were graduate students, but now that they had been comfortable for quite a while, the pleasure of new possessions dwindled." The husband also "turned away" from

the bowl. Such disinterest suggests that the husband is content to ignore the bowl; like his wife, he seems to have no need for children. Andrea's lover—the man who purchased the bowl for her—asks her to change her life, perhaps implying a fertile and productive relationship. "Why be two-faced, he asked her." Again, the comment calls attention to the dual nature of the womb. If Andrea looks toward her husband with one face, she is looking toward a financially secure, yet essentially sterile relationship. By looking at her lover, however, Andrea opens the possibility of a different kind of life, one that includes a potentially fertile relationship. Phillip Miller explains the significance of the title of the story by exploring the connection between the Roman deity Janus and the bowl. According to Miller, Janus is a "two-faced household god," who is also the god of beginnings and endings. Furthermore, Janus "guarded Roman entrances and exits." Miller's point is pertinent; certainly, Beattie's choice of title is deliberate. It is also possible, however, to connect the entrances and exits brought into play by the title with a woman's womb. The womb is both a place of entrance for the male sperm, and a port of exit for the about-to-be-born baby. Andrea refuses her lover's offer but keeps the bowl, choosing a life for herself that is much like the description of the bowl in the last paragraph of the story: Alone in the living room at night, she often looked at the bowl sitting on the table, still and safe, unilluminated. In its way, it was perfect: the world cut in half, deep and smoothly empty. Near the rim, even in the dim light, the eye moved toward one small flash of blue, a vanishing point on the horizon. Significantly, Andrea is "alone." The bowl is "unilluminated"—that is, without light, or life. Like her womb, the bowl remains "deep and smoothly empty." Yet the bowl only represents half a world, like a womb fulfilling only one part of its dual nature. The "vanishing point on the horizon," for Andrea, is the loss of a potential new life, both for herself with her lover, and for the child she does not bear. By choosing to keep her womb empty and unilluminated, Andrea chooses a path without progeny. The tragedy of the story, however, is not only the loss of potential life, but also Andrea's failure to recognize the choice. As Thomas R. Edwards asserts in *The New York Times Book Review*: Andrea is not allowed fully to recognize how aptly the bowl reflects her own condition." Without noticing, Andrea has displaced her own sexuality onto the bowl. By so doing, she can keep it perfect and undamaged. Furthermore, the displacement allows her to relate to both her husband and her lover from a distance, unencumbered by emotional or physical attachment. Thus, the bowl—a symbol for her own displaced sexuality—operates in the story as a fetish, an object she regards with increasing fascination and obsession. As the story ends, Andrea is alone with her bowl—living in half a world, a world without emotional or physical intimacy. Beattie seems to making a comment here on the ability (or lack of ability) of people of her generation to form lasting human connections. Rather they seem better able to form relationships with things and objects, choosing a sterile path.

Source: Diane Andrews Henningfeld, for *Short Stories for Students*,
The Gale Group, 2000.

Liz Brent

Brent has a Ph.D. in American Culture with a specialization in cinema studies from The University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in American cinema. In the following essay, she discusses the significance of the bowl as fetish

object in "Janus." In Anne Beattie's short story, "Janus," the bowl functions as a fetish object for Andrea, the story's main character. The term "fetish" refers to small stone carvings of animals that are found in some cultures and are thought to have spiritual powers. Merriam Webster Online defines "fetish" as "an object believed to have magical power to protect or aid its owner." More generally, Webster defines fetish as "a material object regarded with superstitious or extravagant trust or reverence." A fetish can also be defined as "an object of irrational reverence or obsessive devotion." (The term fetish also has sexual connotations in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, which will not be discussed here.) Andrea's treatment of the bowl as a fetish is indicative of the emotional and spiritual emptiness of her life. While Andrea endows the bowl with spiritual and emotional significance and regards it with fetishistic reverence and devotion, it is, in fact, an empty vessel. The bowl's emptiness is suggestive of the overwhelming meaninglessness of Andrea's life. While it is just an ordinary bowl that Andrea found at a flea market, it eventually takes on the role of a fetish as she regards it with "a superstitious or extravagant trust or reverence." Andrea's "extravagant" reverence for the bowl as an object of devotion is indicated by the first line of the story: "The bowl was perfect." Its spiritual or mystical properties for Andrea are suggested in part by her sense that it emits its own light, or glow: "Its glaze was the color of cream and seemed to glow no matter what light it was placed in." The bowl for Andrea takes on an otherworldly quality: "The bowl was a mystery, even to her." Its mystery is connected to a sense of wonder in relation to the forces of life: "There were a few bits of color in it—tiny geometric flashes—and some of these were tinged with flecks of silver. They were as mysterious as cells seen under a microscope." Andrea's fetishistic attachment to the bowl reflects the total lack of meaning in her life. Her relationships to other people become equated with her relationship to a consumer object—spiritually and emotionally empty, and devoid of all meaning." The mystical or spiritual significance of the bowl for Andrea is further suggested by the fact that it enters into her half-waking dreams, almost as a vision or sign from a spiritual source: "In time, she dreamed of the bowl. Twice, in a waking dream—early in the morning, between sleep and a last nap before rising—she had a clear vision of it. It came into sharp focus and startled her for a moment—the same bowl she looked at every day." As with a fetish, Andrea believes the bowl to have "magical power to protect and aid its owner." Andrea views the bowl as a powerful good luck charm: "She was sure that the bowl brought her luck." The bowl seems to her to be a benevolent godlike force, responsible for all of her good fortune. As many people feel a gratitude toward God for their blessings in life, Andrea feels a gratitude toward the bowl: "She had the foolish thought that if only the bowl were an animate object she could thank it." Yet she has no method of prayer by which to show her gratitude: "It was frustrating because her involvement with the bowl contained a steady sense of unrequited good fortune." As many people feel an obligation to God, Andrea wishes for a means by which to carry out some kind of duty in service to the bowl: "it would have been easier to respond if some sort of demand were made in return." Andrea even equates the bowl with some kind of fairy godmother, or another supernatural force, which could assign her some task in return for her good fortune: "But that only happened in fairy tales." Out of her reverence for and devotion to the bowl, Andrea develops a fear that something bad might happen to it. Andrea therefore treats the bowl like a fetish,

an object that possesses strong spiritual powers, but that could cause bad luck or disaster if not treated with the proper reverence. "It was clear that she would not be the one who would do anything to the bowl. The bowl was only handled by her, set safely on one surface or another; it was not very likely that anyone would break it." Her fears of what forces could potentially destroy the bowl suggest an irrational fear of godlike retribution, in the form of lightning: "A bowl was a poor conductor of electricity: it would not be hit by lightning." Since lightning is, in Greek mythology, the means by which the god Zeus expresses his wrath, Andrea's fear that lightning may strike the bowl suggests a sense of guilt or anxiety that she may be punished by some godlike force. Thus, Andrea regards the bowl as the source of all meaning in her life, without that her life would be unimaginable: "Yet the idea of damage persisted. She did not think beyond that – to what her life would be without the bowl. She only continued to fear that some accident would happen." Andrea's "obsessive devotion" to it takes on an air of secrecy and deception. Originally purchased by her lover during a secret rendezvous, the bowl comes to represent not only Andrea's secret love affair, but an entire inner life – spiritual as well as emotional – which she does not share with him: "There was something within her, something real, that she never talked about." While she occasionally feels the urge to share this part of herself with her husband, she does not do so. "There were times when she wanted to talk to her husband about the bowl. But she never talked to him about the bowl." Yet she continues to harbor a desire to share with her husband the reverence in which she holds the bowl: "she was often tempted to come right out and say that she thought that the bowl in the living room, the cream-colored bowl, was responsible for her success. But she didn't say it. She couldn't begin to explain it." In her secrecy, Andrea harbors feelings of guilt: "Sometimes in the morning, she would look at him and feel guilty that she had such a constant secret." While the bowl takes on many properties associated with a religious fetish, it also represents a pure form of "love" for Andrea – in terms of human relationships as well as spiritual yearnings: "The bowl was just a bowl. But she did not believe that for a second. What she believed was that it was something she loved." When she accidentally leaves the bowl behind at someone's house, she compares it to losing a friend, or even a child. "All the way home, Andrea wondered how she could have left the bowl behind. It was like leaving a friend at an outing – just walking off. Sometimes there were stories in the paper about families forgetting a child somewhere and driving to the next city. Andrea had only gone a mile down the road before she remembered." Andrea even entertains the idea that her relationship with and love for the bowl has taken on the quality of a relationship to another human being: "Could it be that she had some deeper connection with the bowl – a relationship of some kind? She corrected her thinking: how could she imagine such a thing, when she was a human being and it was a bowl? It was ridiculous." Andrea begins to wonder if her relationship to her husband may be no more meaningful than a relationship to an inanimate object: "Just think of how people lived together and loved each other. But was that always so clear, always a relationship? She was confused by these thoughts, but they remained in her mind." Indeed, her fear of losing the bowl becomes equated with the fear of losing a lover: "She wondered how the situation would end. As with a lover, there was no exact scenario of how matters would come to a close. Anxiety became the operative force. It would be irrelevant if the lover rushed into someone

else's arms, or wrote her a note and departed to another city." Andrea's love for the bowl takes on the status of the only source of love in her life, and she comes to fear that she could not live without it: "The horror was the possibility of the disappearance. That was what mattered." It is significant that the bowl is a consumer object. Andrea and her husband are financially successful. In fact, their relationship seems to be based largely on their mutual appreciation for indulging themselves in the purchase of consumer luxuries: "When her husband first noticed the bowl, he had peered into it and smiled briefly. He always urged her to buy things she liked. In recent years, both of them had acquired many things to make up for all the lean years when they were graduate students." Her husband's appreciation for her seems to be largely based on her ability to both earn money and spend money: "He was a stockbroker, and sometimes told people that he was fortunate to be married to a woman who had such fine aesthetic sense and yet could also function in the real world." And Andrea herself understands the relationship in such terms: "They were a lot alike, really – they had agreed on that." However, this relationship lacks any lasting meaning or remnant of human love: "But now that they had been comfortable for quite a while, the pleasure of new possessions dwindled." Andrea's fetishistic attachment to the bowl reflects the total lack of meaning in her life. Her relationships to other people become equated with her relationship to a consumer object – spiritually and emotionally empty, and devoid of all meaning. She sees the bowl as "the world cut in half," but what she finds inside the world, as inside herself, is a complete absence of meaning, "deep and smoothly empty." While she lives in fear of losing the bowl, Andrea neglects her attachments to other human beings, such as her lover and her husband. The final image is of utter loneliness, emptiness and meaninglessness; a woman with nothing in the world but an empty bowl purchased at a flea market by a lover long gone: "Time passed. Alone in the living room at night, she often looked at the bowl sitting on the table, still and safe, unilluminated." What she sees in the bowl is a "flash" of blue light, "a vanishing point on the horizon." Ultimately, all the bowl has to offer her is an illusive vision that vanishes into nothingness. Like most of Beattie's stories, "Janus" offers no hope for redemption. We are left in a world of material luxury, where love and the spirit are devoid of all meaning, and human beings surround themselves with consumer objects.

Source: Liz Brent, Overview of "Janus" for Short Stories for Students,
The Gale Group, 2000.

Sarah Madsen Hardy

Madsen Hardy has a doctorate in English literature and is a freelance writer and editor. In the following essay, she analyzes how Beattie's writing technique reflects the themes of emptiness and deception in "Janus." Ann Beattie's "Janus" tells the story of one woman's powerful feelings for a ceramic bowl, exploring what the protagonist describes in the most personal terms as her "relationship" with the object. "The bowl was just a bowl. She did not believe that for one second. What she believed was that it was something she loved," Beattie writes of Andrea, the discontented real-estate agent who is the story's central character. Andrea sees the bowl as a lucky charm, a secret passion, and a bulwark against the emptiness and loss in her life. She invests the bowl with imagined powers and reaches a point where she can't imagine life without it.

Readers are unlikely to have a hard time identifying the bowl as the story's most important literary symbol. Clearly the bowl is more than just a bowl. By focusing the story exclusively on an inanimate object, Beattie makes this fairly obvious. However, because Beattie reveals so little other than Andrea's strange and furtive feelings for the bowl, interpreting the symbolism becomes somewhat bewildering. It is important to note that when approaching any piece of literature, readers must participate in making connections between characters, actions, symbols, and ideas. Yet in the case of a minimalist story like "Janus," active participation is paramount, since gaps in the story are in some ways just as relevant as the words on the page. It is up to readers to do the work that Andrea is unwilling or unable to do in interpreting the connections between the significance of the bowl and the most important and troubling aspects of Andrea's life. Though Janus, for whom the story is named, is the Roman god of beginnings and endings, nothing notable begins or ends within the action of the story. As the story closes, Beattie notes that time has passed. Andrea is still married, still using the bowl to sell real estate, and still – like the bowl – "unilluminated." That is, she feels the power of the bowl's hold on her but she does not understand what it symbolizes or why, which is part of the reason that she is unable to take action to change her unsatisfying life. "The bowl was a mystery, even to her." The superficial simplicity and smoothness of Beattie's prose is deceptive, belying its difficulty. Her narration is rich in detail, but information about the situation is doled out extremely selectively, and the interpretive guidance offered by the narrator is sparse. This quality has won Beattie as many detractors as fans. In her article "The Art of Missing," Carolyn Porter comments on Beattie's unpopularity among scholars, pointing out that many have suggested that something is missing in Beattie's stories. Some focus on her subject matter – the homogeneity of her white, upper-middle-class characters. These characters' problems exist only within a narrow range of experience. Others find fault with her style – the pared down quality that leaves it up to the reader to make all of the missing connections and figure out all of the 'whys' behind the characters and their actions. Porter argues that in Beattie's most successful stories, her technique is appropriate to her subject, reflecting "the peculiar quality of [Beattie's] fictive yet familiar world – the sense that something has been lost, although no one can quite remember what." Porter does not deny that there is something missing in Beattie's narration, but argues that the gaps and omissions that riddle her fiction express something true and painful about the rootless, valueless, and materialistic aspects of contemporary society. "Beattie's techniques," Porter writes, "even while producing results that often seem highly artificial, are informed by a clean aim at the real, the here and now." In other words, the form of Beattie's stories suits their content. Absence, emptiness, and loss, as well as deception and withheld information, shape Andrea's life as well as the form of the story. Although there are hints that the bowl is somehow intimately involved in aspects of Andrea's relationships, the only concrete thing that readers learn is of Andrea's use of it as a prop for her real-estate business. It is in this capacity that we learn most about the bowl's powers. Andrea secretly places the ordinary-yet-extraordinary looking bowl in property up for sale in order to inspire a positive feeling about the house, a 'trick used to convince the buyer that the house is quite special." Though Andrea has used many different tricks in the past, the bowl is especially effective, and she attributes her success to it. The houses up

for sale, trading hands as commodities through the anonymous intervention of a realtor, have been stripped of their status as centers of individual and family identity. Andrea compares the bowl to a friend, a child, a husband, and a lover. When she places the bowl in a house, it subtly evokes a longed-for human touch, standing in for what has been lost to the house-hunters, who are, like Andrea, part of a class and generation that moves frequently. Andrea believes that the bowl helps her sell houses by making a house that is up for sale—emptied of its human life, if not its physical contents—feel like a home. Andrea moves the bowl to various properties she is selling and then brings it back home—a place as lacking as a source of intimacy and identity as the houses Andrea sells. And the bowl serves a similar purpose in Andrea's private life as it does in her real-estate business. Just as a realtor might bring any number of homey "props" to cover up the coldness of the sales transaction, Andrea and her husband fill their home of any number of beautiful and valuable possessions to cover up the underlying dissatisfaction of their life together. There is emptiness and secrecy in Andrea's marriage, which the bowl comes to both represent and compensate for. Her husband has encouraged Andrea to buy "things she liked" to "make up for all the lean years when they were graduate students," and appreciates her good taste. Yet he does not understand the allure of the bowl or Andrea's attachment to it. He deems it pretty, but expresses no further interest in it. To Andrea, the bowl is more than a source of aesthetic or consumerist pleasure. She has come to see the bowl as different from all of her other possessions, reflecting a part of her private self that her husband does not recognize, "something within her now, something real, that she never talked about." How inauthentic the rest of Andrea's life must be, if a ceramic bowl is the closest thing to what is real in her innermost self. As Andrea becomes more obsessed with the bowl—more grateful to it for her success and more anxious about some harm befalling it—she begins to see her relationship to the bowl as something to feel guilty about, a "constant secret." Very near the end of the story—almost as an afterthought—the narrator reveals that the bowl was a gift from an ex-lover. This seems to explain a lot of the "whys" behind Andrea's fixation. The lover is now absent, and the bowl remains as a token of what is lost and a symbol of what is longed for. The bowl is a presence in Andrea's marriage, representing her secret and reminding her of what is missing. Before leaving her, the lover accuses Andrea of being "two-faced"—Beattie's only direct reference to the story's title. Janus, the Roman god of doorways, boundaries, and beginnings, faces both east and west and is represented by an icon of two faces. "Two-faced" also implies deceptiveness—not being what one appears to be. The lover was referring to Andrea's inability to reveal their relationship and leave her husband for him, accusing her of being "too slow to know what she really loved." By having a covert intimate relationship with the bowl that is a token of the lover's affection as well as a symbol of his absence, Andrea can maintain her passivity and continue, Janus-like, to "have it both ways." Ultimately, then, Andrea may feel such a deep connection to the bowl less because it represents the lost lover than because it reflects her own empty, passive condition. It is Andrea's own mental trick in an insecure, frightening "world full of tricks." Like Andrea, the bowl has it "both ways" and is "two-faced." The language that Beattie uses to describe the physical qualities of the bowl reflects the bowl's simultaneous association with fulfillment and its absence. It is "a paradox of a bowl," representing the opposite qualities of emptiness

and completion at once. ' 'In its way, it was perfect, the world cut in half, deep and smoothly empty." Beattie goes on to compare it to the horizon, which, in keeping with the bowl's perfection, suggests that the bowl is complete unto itself, a whole world. Yet it is ' 'a world cut in half," evoking lack and loss. The outside of a bowl is smooth and round, circular, suggesting the first set of qualities—completeness, fullness, perfection—while the inside is an empty space for something that is not there. This is, after all, the purpose of a bowl, and Andrea insists that "it was meant to be empty." The same might be said of Beattie's narrative technique.

Source: Sarah Madsen Hardy, for *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2000.

V

Study the critical overview of Ray Bradbury's works. List the positive and negative features literary critics have identified in his literary style. What is your personal vision of the things?

Ray Bradbury gained critical acclaim early in his career, with the publication of *The Martian Chronicles*. This was an unusual situation because Bradbury was writing in the science fiction genre, a genre not usually very well-respected among the literary elite. Despite this, he was able to break through the prejudice and win many admirers. As Willis E. McNelly states in *Voices for the Future*, Ray Bradbury, hailed as a stylist and a visionary by critics such as Gilbert Highet and authors such as Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, remained for years the darling, almost the house pet, of a literary establishment otherwise (sic) unwilling to admit any quality in the technological and scientific projections known as science fiction. In fact, it was Isherwood's praise of *The Martian Chronicles* that first propelled Bradbury into the limelight and helped him find a wider audience of dedicated fans. Bradbury followed this success with the publication of *The Illustrated Man*, another book that showcased his talent for writing in the short story format. *The Illustrated Man* was popular with critics and casual readers alike and has continued to be one of Bradbury's most influential works. As Robin Anne Reid notes in her book *Ray Bradbury: A Critical Companion*, *The Illustrated Man* "is widely considered one of Bradbury's strongest works." "The Veldt" has been a particularly popular story from the collection as evidenced by the fact that it was chosen for inclusion in the 1969 feature film and the stage play that Bradbury himself adapted from the book. Though Bradbury is usually known as a science fiction writer, this label has been in dispute throughout his entire career. For purists, the definition of a science fiction story is one that uses present scientific knowledge to create events that are plausible. Plausibility is the key here, and it is this element that has caused disagreement about how to classify Bradbury's work. Because Bradbury sometimes creates implausible situations, some critics argue that he is a fantasy writer. As Damon Knight notes in his essay, "The purists are right in saying he does not write science fiction, and never has." Donald A. Wollheim also comments in *The Universe Makers* that "Ray Bradbury is not really a science-fiction writer at all."

Labels notwithstanding, over the years Bradbury's reputation has continued to grow, and he has been recognized as one of the most important American writers of the past fifty years. In his introduction to a collection of critical essays on Bradbury, Harold Bloom calls him, "one of the masters of science fiction and fantasy," and Wollheim praises him as "a mainstream fantasist of great brilliance." The fact that *The Illustrated Man* remained in print for over fifty years since it was first published in 1951 is evidence that the themes contained in these stories continued to hold a fascination for readers through the decades. It is also a testament to Bradbury's talent. The stories contained in *The Illustrated Man* have found an audience for over five decades, and they continue to delight a new generation of readers in the early 2000s.

CRITICISM

Beth Kattelman

Kattelman holds a Ph.D. in theater. In this essay, Kattelman examines Bradbury's use of literary devices to create his taut, well-crafted short story. Writing a well-crafted short story is not easy. To be a good short story writer, the writer must know how to use many literary devices. Because the finished piece will not be very long, each word must be carefully chosen to deliver the maximum impact. Edgar Allen Poe, master of the short story, believed that a good short story must provide a "single effect." In other words, the action of a short story should be concentrated to deliver one strong emotional jolt, especially if that story is dealing with horror, suspense, or terror. Ray Bradbury openly acknowledges that he as a young writer was influenced by Poe, and he always strives to create the single, concentrated effect suggested by Poe. Bradbury masterfully uses similes, metaphors, dialogue, point of view, tone, and many other literary devices to draw the reader in and to heighten the emotional experience. In his story "The Veldt," for instance, there are many fine examples of how Bradbury uses these literary devices to create a story that is engaging, clever, and shocking. Bradbury always has a very strong start to his stories, and this is true of "The Veldt" as well. The story opens with the following bit of dialogue: George, I wish you'd look at the nursery. What's wrong with it? I don't know. Well, then. I just want you to look at it, is all, or call a psychologist in to look at it. From these five brief lines the reader learns several things. First, he/she learns that there is a problem with the nursery and that one of the characters is concerned enough about it to ask for a second opinion. Also, through the somewhat unusual request for a psychologist, the reader gets the idea that the problem with the nursery is somehow connected with the human mind, thus raising the possibility that the story is taking place on another planet or during another time far in the future. The opening definitely lets the reader know that something strange is going on here. By dropping bits of provocative information right at the beginning, Bradbury piques the reader's interest and propels the reader into the story. This opening exchange also clues the reader in to what will become the central problem in the story—the nursery. From these few lines of dialogue, one immediately knows that the nursery is going to somehow be important, and now that Bradbury has accomplished this set-up, he can slowly reveal the strange world of the story bit by bit. Bradbury often builds his themes around things that should be familiar but that are slightly altered in some way. He uses this idea in "The Veldt." Many people have an idea of what a nursery is, and they usually picture it as a safe,

happy place in which children can play and interact with their caregivers. In this story, however, Bradbury has injected a twist. He has kept the idea of the nursery being a place for play and interaction, but he has replaced the typical caregivers – parents or a nanny – with an inanimate, unfeeling machine. This change becomes the catalyst for all of the disastrous events that take place in “The Veldt.” Because the children have shifted their emotional attachments from their parents to the mechanistic nursery, it becomes both caregiver and an instrument of destruction. The nursery remains a safe, happy place for the children, but it becomes something entirely different for the parents. It becomes a mechanized beast. This technique of taking something very familiar and altering it in some way is one that is used by Bradbury consistently. In the volume *Voices for the Future*, Willis E. McNelly comments upon how Bradbury’s use of this technique provides not only an interesting story, but adds an element of social commentary as well. He pivots upon an individual, a specific object, or particular act, and then shows it from a different perspective or a new viewpoint. The result can become a striking insight into the ordinary, sometimes an ironic comment on our limited vision. The atmosphere or ambience in a short story helps to build a reader’s expectations and to set him or her up for the “single effect” that Poe lists as a short story’s desired result. Two literary devices that Bradbury employs to help create a strong atmosphere in his stories, and thus to achieve his desired effect, are similes and metaphors. In his essay “When I was in Kneepants: Ray Bradbury,” Damon Knight calls these similes and metaphors Bradbury’s “trademarks,” and he remarks that the use of these devices is one of the primary features that sets Bradbury apart from other, more traditional science fiction writers. Throughout “The Veldt” there are excellent examples of how Bradbury uses similes and metaphors to help create the ambience in the story. For example, when George is eating dinner and thinking about his recent experience in the nursery, Bradbury uses the phrases, “That sun. He could feel it on his neck, still, like a hot paw.” This simile serves two purposes. Not only does it heighten the description of George’s sensation by making the sun’s heat seem much more tangible, it also foreshadows the ending of the story when George and Lydia are attacked by lions. Bradbury also uses a metaphor effectively near the end of the piece when he has George ask, “Lord, how did we ever get in this house? What prompted us to buy a nightmare?” By using the metaphor of house as nightmare, Bradbury not only conveys the fact that George has become very concerned but also that he still believes everything will turn out all right. After all, a nightmare is only an illusion. Or, at least that’s what George believes. While reading “The Veldt,” one may notice that there are no very long passages describing what the characters are thinking. Bradbury sometimes provides brief phrases to let the reader know what is going on in a character’s mind, but never more than a few carefully chosen words. This is typical of a well-written short story. Since there is no time for extended descriptions or long discussions, the author’s choice of words must convey as much information as possible quickly and succinctly. As Robin Anne Reid comments in her *Ray Bradbury: A Critical Companion*, in short stories “more character development occurs through dialogue and description of actions than through in-depth descriptions of characters’ thoughts and emotions.” Bradbury is a master at this technique. He is always economizing and making his descriptive passages and dialogue serve a dual purpose. One fine example of this occurs in the following

exchange between George and his son, Peter: Will you shut off the house sometime soon? We're considering it. I don't think you'd better consider it any more, Father. I won't have any threats from my son! "Very well." And Peter strolled off to the nursery. Here, the reader should notice that, rather than whining or crying when his father says the house might be shut off, Peter very calmly says, "I don't think you'd better consider it any more, Father." This well-spoken sentence, coming from a little boy who is upset, clues the reader into the fact that Peter is not your average ten-year-old. The measured, almost overly-subdued tone also conveys a coldness about the child. The reader gets the idea that Peter is a very calculating boy who is well in control of his own emotions. Even the fact that Peter replies with the phrase, "Very well," rather than saying "okay" provides a clue that this young boy is different than other boys of his age. The word choices convey a subtle creepiness about the boy. Another instance of effective dialogue occurs in the following exchange between George and Lydia: Those screams—they sound familiar. Do they? Yes, awfully. This is a wonderful instance of foreshadowing, as well as a subtle pun. The phrase, "awfully familiar" usually means extremely familiar. By breaking it up and inserting it into the dialogue in the manner above, however, Bradbury subtly evokes another meaning. Now the screams are not only awfully familiar, but they are also familiar as well as awful. Bradbury is indeed a skilled writer, who brings together many important literary elements in "The Veldt." This ability to manipulate and combine words for maximum effect is what has set Bradbury apart from many other short story writers. It is what has cemented Bradbury's reputation as an important and influential American writer. It is this skill that has also sustained Bradbury's popularity throughout his long and varied career. In her essay, "Ray Bradbury and the Gothic Tradition," Hazel Pierce explains the ultimate appeal that Bradbury has had for fans throughout the years. She notes that, while readers admire his imagination and creativity, they also appreciate his artistry. "Devoted readers of Bradbury have long recognized him as a poet in the fullest sense of the word—a maker and doer with words." Critics and fans alike recognize that Bradbury is a gifted artist who is constantly striving to write the very best story he can. His short stories continue to provide that "single effect" for readers, and they also stand as a fine example for other writers of what can be accomplished if you know how to use the tools correctly. As Damon Knight notes in the essay collection titled *Ray Bradbury*, "He is a superb craftsman, a man who has a great gift and has spent fifteen years laboriously and with love teaching himself to use it."

*Source: Beth Kattelman, Critical Essay on "The Veldt,"
in Short Stories for Students, Gale, 2005*

Joyce Hart

Hart, a former writing teacher, is a freelance writer and author of several books. In this essay, Hart examines the reversal relationships that make up the heart of this story. Ray Bradbury has a point to make in his short story "The Veldt." It is a rather simple and obvious point—Bradbury does not like machines. But the more interesting part of this story is not his dislike of a mechanical world but rather it is Bradbury's explanation of why he does not look upon a world run by machines as some kind of utopia in which human beings are free to pursue things other than the mundane chores of every day living. Quite contrary to the notion of a utopia, in Bradbury's view, machines turn

the world upside down, ruining human relationships and destroying the minds of children. Instead of leaving time for people to ponder the higher thoughts of spirituality and philosophy, a world run by machines leaves people open to boredom and thoughts riddled with fear, anger, and vengeance. And it is these results that make Bradbury very unhappy. Bradbury's husband and wife protagonists, George and Lydia Hadley, live in what Bradbury calls a Happy life Home, a place any person in their right mind would drool over, or at least that is what the Hadleys thought when they plunked down the cash to convert their normal habitat into one they thought would solve all their problems. The house was energy efficient, turning lights off and on when people entered or left a room. The house was soothing, rocking them and their children to sleep at night. The house was nurturing, fixing their meals, dressing them, and keeping their environment as clean as if they had a twenty-four-hour maid. Who could ask for more from a house? Well, as some people believe, there is no such thing as utopia. And this concept partially forms the foundation of Bradbury's story. In the least, Bradbury contends that an existence heavily dependent on machines will cause as much strife as it eases. It might be fun to imagine fantastic realities but attempting to put them into play in a material world causes unforeseen hardships or maybe even fatal catastrophes. Something always seems to go wrong. In the case of Bradbury's creation, a lot of things go wrong, and the Hadleys' world is turned on its head. Something is wrong, they suspect, but they do not quite know what it is. What they do know is the heart of this unnamed flaw is located somewhere in the nursery. The Hadleys are well intended parents who do not let money stand in the way of their children's happiness. They have installed something that Bradbury has imagined well before its time, a personal virtual reality room, which in turn would provide them with well-balanced, happy little minds. But the Hadley children's minds, as it turns out, are only happy at their parents' expense, and the debt involves a lot more than their parents' money. It takes a while for the Hadleys to realize that something is amiss in the nursery. When George steps into the room one day he suddenly is overwhelmed by the heat. And the lions! They seem so real. Is it possible that the virtual reality machine has converted itself, has moved up a notch closer to being less virtual and more real? And what has happened to George, once ruler and lord of his household? He seems incapable of doing anything to change the course of the foreshadowed disaster that looms in the nursery. Even though he tries to avert a catastrophe and recapture the power that once was his, his attempts come up short. He locks the room and threatens to shut the machine off, but the children overthrow his rule. George is a king dethroned in his own castle. The children, the narrator informs the reader, have taken over the parental role, whether or not George and Lydia want to face this. They throw tantrums when George locks them out of the nursery. And George, the misguided parent that he is, wants his children to be happy. After all, this is the reason he bought the Happy life Home in the first place. So, the tantrums work. George does not want to see his children cry. Tantrums make no one happy. George backs down yet another degree as the children mastermind a plot to ensure total authority over their parents. Next, in steps fear. Lydia is afraid of the nursery. Those virtual reality lions look like they are ready to pounce on George and Lydia. But then Lydia thinks this thought out again. Maybe she is just growing paranoid. After all, she has so much time to think now that she has less to do around the house. As a matter of

fact, it is not that she has less to do, rather she has nothing to do at all. And that is another problem. The Happy life Home has left her with too much leisure. The mechanisms of her Happy life Home were supposed to give Lydia time to relax and have fun. So why does George examine his wife and tell her she looks tired? And why does Lydia say that maybe they need a vacation from this perfect little home? What has happened to their initial concept that this house will alleviate all their burdens? This house that does everything for them is obviously making their life worse. Surely the Happy life Home keeps their house clean, feeds and cares for them in every way a full range of maids and butlers would, but the Happy life Home has also robbed George and Lydia of something very precious to them—their roles. It has taken away Lydia's need to be a wife, mother, and nursemaid. This is what her dream was. With the Happy life Home having rid Lydia of these chores, in Lydia's mind, she has no other reason to exist. The house has also corrupted George's role as head of household and makes George feel superfluous. This makes George very nervous. He smokes and drinks more than he should and is confused about how to handle his children. Whereas he thought the house would make his son and daughter happy and therefore grateful, they have instead turned into vile and spoiled children. This so-called utopian invention is giving them the opposite of what they want. On top of this, everyone in the Hadley household appears to be stuck in a rut. Lydia wants the family to run away from the home, but the children will not hear of it. George wants to change the course of their lives, but as soon as the children complain, he reverses his intent. The children, too, seem to be stuck. Or at least, their parents think so. George and Lydia have never known their children to become so involved in one nursery theme for such a long time. Why are they so interested in Africa? And worse yet, why are they so fascinated with death? In an act of desperation, the parents consult David McClean, the psychologist who understands the virtual reality machine and uses it to evaluate the health of children's minds. The mechanisms are supposed to clean (as in David's last name) all the bad parts of a child's psyche by allowing them to play out their neuroses. But when David walks into the nursery, he immediately senses that something is not right. The room has evolved into something unintended by the psychologists. Instead of alleviating negativity, it has drawn the Hadley children toward destructive thoughts. It has encouraged them to run amuck in childhood alienation. As the Hadleys will soon find out, the children's anger has actually developed more fully with the help of the virtual reality room, and the Hadley kids have become preoccupied with getting rid of their parents. The good doctor, although he suggests that George and Lydia immediately get rid of the mechanisms in the children's nursery, points his finger of blame not at the virtual reality diagnostic tool but rather at the parents. They have spoiled their children, he tells them, more than most parents would do. And in many ways, as the Hadleys attempt to rein their children in, they are now disappointing them. The children, David tells them, have replaced their parents with their room. The children believe that their parents are disposable. They have everything they need. As a matter of fact, they could quite easily function much better without mom and dad, or so they think. Turn it all off, the doctor suggests. And George follows his orders. It is not too late, David says, to save the children. But everyone must go through retraining. It appears that George is finally learning a very important lesson. But Lydia is lagging behind him. The children throw

tantrums again, and Lydia suggests that they give the children one more trip to the nursery. George gives in. Anything to keep the children happy. Of course, this is just what the children want. They set the trap, and the parents walk right into it and disappear. But the story does not end here. The doctor returns to make a visit. He engages the children in their room. They seem content, but not everything looks well. That sun, which represents the children's anger, is still visible and very hot. And now it is the psychologist's turn to sweat. In addition, George and Lydia are nowhere to be found. But there is even more going on, things that Bradbury just leaves to the reader's imagination. Although the children believe that things have once more gone topsy-turvy in their favor as they relish what they imagine to be a new-found freedom, readers might question just how free they are in allowing the nursery to replace their parents. The children sit there in their room in apparent calm, acting as adults as they entertain the doctor and offer him some tea. But what is really to become of them? How long can they pull off this charade? Just how much of a benefactor is this Happy life Home? Will it provide the children with food forever? What is the source of its energy? And more importantly, who will pay the bills? The children may be smart, but it is easy to conclude that they have not thought out all the consequences of their actions. They are, after all, just children. So, by the end of Bradbury's story, the factual reality sets in. Despite all the promises of the mechanical world, Bradbury seems to be saying, machines will never fully replace humans. And in the process of humans making machines to improve the world, people should, unlike the Hadleys, think through their choices and the consequences of those choices.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on "The Veldt," in Short Stories for Students, Gale, 2005.

VI

Study the critical overview of Conrad Aiken's works. List the positive and negative features literary critics have identified in his literary style. What is your personal vision of the things?

Given the interest in the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud in the 1930s, it is not surprising that early interpretations of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" examined the story from that perspective. Leo Hamalaian provided an early example of psychoanalytic analysis in his "Aiken's 'Silent Snow, Secret Snow'" of 1948. Frederick Hoffman's 1957 study of Freudianism and the Literary Mind, which devotes considerable space to Aiken's fiction, is another case in point, although it should be added that Hoffman later de-emphasized the Freudian aspect of his reading of Aiken. Psychoanalysis still influences readings of the tale. As late as 1980, Laura Slap invoked the Oedipus complex as the unconscious theme of Aiken's story: "My thesis is that Paul Hasleman's illness is a reaction to his realization of his parents' sexual activity." When the doctor asks Paul to read a passage from a book taken from the shelves, the passage happens to be from Sophocles' play Oedipus at Colonus. This permits Slap to work the Oedipus

theme into her discussion. Some critics have avoided the psychoanalytic approach in favor of a purely aesthetic approach, inspired by the fact that Aiken considered himself a poet first and a prose-writer second. An example of the aesthetic, or formalist, approach is to be found in Elizabeth Tebeaux's "'Silent Snow, Secret Snow': Style as Art" (1983). In the essay, Tebeaux discusses Aiken's careful usage of such poetic devices as ambiguity and polysemy (the endowing of one simple word with many meanings, each of which depends on a particular context); she also looks closely at the use of rhythm and alliteration as a means of reproducing the feelings that accompany Paul's descent into madness. According to Tebeaux, "focusing only on Paul is to miss the most remarkable literary aspects of the story. Combining sense and symbol and rhythm and tone and sound, Aiken uses his poetic skills to draw the reader into Paul's world." A more recent tendency is to deconstruct the story by making a deliberately counter-intuitive interpretation. Such interpretations turn insanity into a positive; Paul's behavior is viewed as a symbolic breaking away from an oppressive society and the restrictive bonds of community and family. As such, Paul's growing individuality and independence is seen as insanity. Ann Gossman and Jesse Swan both exemplify this critical trend. Gossman's thesis is that "Paul's withdrawal is not psychopathic, but rather the alienation of the artist from society." Gossman argues that what we mistake for Paul's madness is his flowering "as an artist" or seer who "must die" rather than "'mature' into perhaps another Mr. Hasleman." While admitting that the "reasonable modern reader naturally seems to recoil from accepting" what she calls "Paul's choice" to embrace madness, Jesse Swan nevertheless contends that this same "modern reader" might actually resent "Paul for having the courage" to turn his back on the world and enter the secret, artistic world of the snow.

CRITICISM

Thomas Bertonneau

Bertonneau is a Temporary Assistant Professor of English and the Humanities at Central Michigan University, and Senior Policy Analyst at the MackInac Center for Public Policy. In the following essay, he surveys the various critical interpretations of Paul's mental disturbance in Aiken's "'Silent Snow, Secret Snow.'" Critics do not interpret Conrad Aiken's short story "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" (1934) in a literal way. Upon initial examination, they consistently regard the story as something other than what it is. Thomas L. Erskine, for example, in his 1972 psychoanalytical interpretation of the story, claims that "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" is about the "balance" between "two worlds" and the "discovery" that results by leaving one to enter the other. For Snow covered spruce tree. Erskine, each of young Paul Hasleman's deformed or defamiliarized perceptions of the world amount to an "epiphany," an intense vision with deep symbolic meaning. Appreciating the story on purely aesthetic grounds, Elizabeth Tebeaux calls attention to Aiken's work, stating that he "enables us to feel some of the magic and terrifying wonder that the snow world, whatever it is, offers Paul." Tebeaux concludes by noting that the story "will more than likely continue to be enjoyed long after the nature of Paul's problem has ceased to be of any psychological

interest." Moreover, Jesse Swan maintains that we are not to believe that Paul is insane, because madness is a label applied in an arbitrary and oppressive manner. Similarly, Ann Gossman referred to Paul's parents, and to the whole adult world in the story, as ' 'philistine' '—an extreme judgment. Paul Hasleman, the protagonist of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," suffers the terrible fate of having his life annihilated by a "fixed idea," or an overwhelming obsession. What should one say about those critics who attempt to convert the tragedy into something other than what it is by claiming that Paul's condition corresponds to something other than what the evidence dictates? Starting from the fact, however, that Aiken understood the effects of insanity—his father killed his mother and then himself in a psychotic fit, and Aiken himself later attempted suicide—I believe that readers need to understand that Paul's disturbance may never qualify as an experience through which he might live and personally or artistically profit, but that his collapse is simply the end of all of his conscious experiences. Aiken has something in common with Edgar Allan Poe, an earlier American short story writer, who also struggled with madness and wrote about it in such stories as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "Ligeia." In the former, insanity is rooted in guilt, while in the latter, it assumes the form of an evil entity. The term "possession" appears in the first paragraph of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow." The setting is Mrs. Buell's sixth-grade classroom during a geography lesson. Paul ignores her, and instead concentrates on his growing obsession with the snow: "It was like a peculiarly beautiful trinket to be carried unmentioned in one's trouser pocket—a rare stamp, an old coin, a few tiny gold links found trodden out of shape on a path in the park, a pebble of carnelian, a seashell distinguishable from all others by an unusual spot or stripe—and, as if it were any of these, he carried around with him everywhere a warm and persistent and increasingly beautiful sense of possession." All aspects of Paul's state of mind in regard to his "possession" may strike the reader as sinister foreshadowings of the story's climax. Even at the grammatical level, Aiken's use of the nonspecific pronoun ' 'it' ' to designate the encroaching psychosis carries a frightening connotation, for a thing that cannot be named cannot be fully understood. Thinking of "it" as a seashell with "an unusual spot or stripe" admits to the oddness of the condition but does nothing to pinpoint or solve it. Thinking of "it" as a broken chain of gold links "trodden out of shape" also anticipates the subsequent breakup and deformation of Paul's mind, not to mention the sundering of his family. At this early point in the story, Aiken deliberately confounds the idea of possession. Does the word designate an item which one owns, or does it designate an involuntary state to which one submits? Paul mistakenly thinks that he possesses ' 'it,' ' when "it" really possesses him. Moreover, "it" has already drawn Paul out of his world, out of the world in which healthy people live and love. When Deirdre gives an unwittingly silly answer to one of Mrs. Buell's questions, Paul does not join in the laughter—not because he disapproves of it, but because the madness has already abstracted him from the generality of the classroom community. The scene with Deirdre in part one of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" tends to slip past in the parade of Paul's confusion, although it offers one key to understanding the story. What Paul notices about Deirdre is not that she is an eager student, willing

to rise to answer questions, but that her neck sports a "funny little constellation of freckles ... exactly like the Big Dipper." Paul has failed to see the full, human Deirdre, and instead reduces her to an anomalous blemish. Aiken skillfully interweaves Paul's autistic inner monologue with brief intrusions from Mrs. Buell's lesson (sometimes reported parenthetically). At one point during the story Mrs. Buell gently admonishes Paul that if he stopped day-dreaming he might answer a question about Henry Hudson's success or failure in finding the Northwest Passage. Paul rouses himself momentarily to correctly respond that Hudson "was disappointed." As he sits down, "Deirdre half turned in her chair and gave him a shy smile, of approval and admiration." Setting all theories aside, consider what Deirdre's smile means in the context of a sixth-grade classroom. All of the children have begun to take an interest in the opposite sex, and all are quite shy about admitting to it. Admitting to such an interest before the eyes of one's classmates is usually dreadful, but Deirdre does just that, spontaneously turning to smile shyly and approvingly at Paul. We cannot discount the episode, for it constitutes a moment of healthy adolescence in that the girl probably wants to establish intimacy with the boy. It is an opportunity for Paul to experience the world of adolescence. The "exploration" theme implied by the geography lesson about Henry Hudson, I would argue, refers to the potential romance offered by Deirdre. Paul's madness prohibits any such exploration and any such issue from childhood from taking place. Paul's madness, then, robs him of the possibility of love. It is suggested that Paul's mental distraction has multiple consequences, for he has become slovenly and neglectful. He has not, for example, recently polished his shoes because (as he rationalizes) ' 'they were one of the many parts of the increasing difficulty of the daily return to daily life, the morning struggle." Paul's declining interest in and growing aversion to the world is very much a sickness, with physical as well as psychological symptoms. The attraction that Paul ought to feel toward Deirdre is directed toward the hallucinatory snowstorm: ' 'He loved it—he stood still and loved it. Its beauty was paralyzing—beyond all words, all experience, all dream. No fairy story he had ever read could be compared with it." The reader needs to remember, however, that "it" does not exist. At the same time, the snowstorm strikes him as "faintly and deliciously terrifying," a reaction that belongs to that vanishing part of him that is still sane. The psychosis will soon rob Paul of his memory—a terrifying prospect, although Paul will not be able to recognize it as such. When he arrives at the gate of the family home, for example, and sees the stenciled H (for Hasleman), he fails to understand its import. The final terror comes after Paul is examined by the doctor. Paul feels compelled to divulge the secret of the snow and then, in a panic, he runs upstairs to his bedroom and throws himself into bed. The snow begins to speak to Paul, telling him: "Lie down. Shut your eyes—you will no longer see much—in this white darkness who could see, or want to see? We will take the place of everything." In conclusion, readers of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" need to be wary of the numerous interpretations of Paul's affliction. Psychoanalytic approaches tend to reduce the full humanity of the event. More recent approaches which rely on making insanity into something other than what it is, also

deserve to be regarded with skepticism. Aiken did not regard insanity either as a purely theoretical or desirable phenomenon. His understanding of insanity might be described as existential, although that, too, is an oversimplification. Perhaps one should simply say that Aiken is a profound observer of the human condition, a lover of life, and a writer who can lead us to appreciate life by giving us the example of someone who loses life by losing his mind.

Source: Thomas Bertonneau, Overview of "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," for Short Stories for Students, The Gale Group, 2000.

Jesse G. Swan

In the following excerpt, Swan discusses the major themes of Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow." In "Senlin: A Biography" and "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," Conrad Aiken explores the psyches of two people, one an old man, the other a child, who seem to be confronting something much larger than they are. In both pieces, the central figures experience something to which no one else seems to be sensitive. As this experience is uncommon, the depiction of it demands uncommon material. Aiken succeeds in presenting these nebulous experiences by carefully casting silences in his work. Aiken's silences surround man, embody man, and are embodied by man. They also resemble the Christian God in their ubiquity as well as their comprehensiveness. In both pieces, Aiken tries to communicate the import of these silences, and he does this by stretching our consciousness to include the edges of our minds. Although "Senlin" is an early poem of Aiken's and "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" is a later short story, both rely on silence to convey their intent. Realizing that Aiken employs silence in "Senlin" and develops that employment in "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," we not only develop a greater understanding of Aiken's Weltanschauung, we also perceive new possibilities for reading Paul Hasleman's confrontation with the silent snow.... Silence motivates the events of Aiken's greatest work, his short story, "Silent Snow, Secret Snow." Like "Senlin," "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" is an investigation of a psyche that involves much more than only the psyche. Indeed, in an even more developed fashion, "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" reveals a struggle that, it appears, Aiken believes we all experience. Some dismiss the confrontation with silence in the story as puberty or madness. However, since the silence in the story develops the silence of "Senlin," it appears that this story, like the poem, depicts a serious confrontation with eternity, with truth, with silence. A common temptation is to view the silent snow negatively. Paul, we may be tempted to say, is going mad. This conclusion, however, is one that Mr. and Mrs. Hasleman would form. Paul knows that he cannot tell his parents about his silent snow, "No — " he thinks, "it was only too plain that if anything were said about it, the merest hint given, they would be incredulous — they would laugh — they would say 'Absurd!' — think things about him which weren't true...." And clearly the parents would think him insane, but we are not to do so. The parents are "gross intelligences ... humdrum minds so bound to the usual, the ordinary" that they cannot experience something "irrational." This description from Paul's point of view, if not wholly accurate because of its extremity, does represent

the parents' general character. Perhaps it is inappropriate to be so harsh on the parents for being "normal," but they clearly are normal. The parents notice a change in their son's usual, acceptable character and think that something must be wrong with him. If they knew that he was listening to silent snow, they would think him mad. They do not see it, so, for them, it is not there. Like any good parent, they decide to call in an authority—the family physician. The physician epitomizes the typical adult. We believe that there must be a "rational" explanation for everything and that the world is a rationally understandable environment. Anything supernatural cannot be accounted for and is therefore relegated to the realm of "irrationality," "madness," and the like. The parents believe this as does the physician. The physician asks Paul, 'Now, young man, tell me, —do you feel all right?' When Paul tells him that he feels fine—indeed Paul feels exceptionally well because of his silent, secret snow—the doctor performs a physical survey of Paul which includes Paul's reading from a passage of a book. When this reveals nothing out of the ordinary, "silence thronged the room", and the doctor asks Paul, moving to a psychological survey assuming that if nothing is physically wrong, something psychologically must be wrong with Paul, whether there is "anything that worries you?" Since Paul's answer remains "No," the doctor becomes exasperated and exclaims: "Well, Paul! ... I'm afraid you don't take this quite seriously enough". The doctor has given Paul numerous chances to declare himself mad, but since he does not, the doctor concludes that Paul is not only mentally troubled but unacceptably obstinate. Thinking about the doctor's and the parents' actions and portraits, it seems that Paul is not so unreasonable. Concluding that the story is about a boy "whose mind finally breaks down" [Edward Stone, *Voices of Despair: Four Motifs in American Literature*, 1996] ignores the possibility, if not fact, that the parents and physician are blind, insensitive and thereby negative agents in the story and that the silent snow and Paul's embrace of it are the positive agents. Such a narrow reading reveals that the readers, like the parents, are 'so bound to the usual, the ordinary ... [that it is] impossible to tell them about' the positive beauty and peacefulness of the silent snow. These readers, like the parents and the doctor, have pushed away the silence which surrounds them and have chosen to embrace the rational, language-centered world. Paul, many try to conclude, is mad, and the parents and doctor, they silently assume, are the standard by which to judge sanity and madness. That the silent snow is positive not only provides additional support for reading the story as a representation of one of Aiken's favorite points in human development, it also seems rather obvious to the unprejudiced reader. From the very beginning the silent snow is a pleasant experience. In the opening scene where Paul is in class, we find out that he was already, with a pleasant sense of half-effort, putting his secret between himself and the [Miss Buell' s] words. Was it really an effort at all? For effort implied something voluntary, and perhaps even something one did not especially want; whereas this was distinctly pleasant, and came almost of its own accord. Although this can be read negatively, as a sign of Paul's ensuing madness, a more positive reading suggests itself as well. The silent secret comes on to Paul, perhaps as 'madness' does 'a schizoid personality' [William M. Jones, *Explicator*, 18,

March 1960], but also as nature's breezes and soothing sounds do. A breeze is not an effort, but we often feel a half-effort to experience it fully. Like the silent secret, a breeze is not voluntary and it is often pleasant. Hence, the silent secret snow is not ipso facto madness and therefore negative. In fact, it seems really quite a positive experience for Paul, much like a mystical experience must be for a devout Christian or a cognitive insight for a critical theorist. The development of the silent, secret snow seems to provide further evidence that the snow is a positive force. As in "Senlin," the silence is first a quality that characterizes as well as surrounds, and second it is an entity itself. The silence in the story characterizes the snow which comes to surround Paul's world and then becomes ' 'the most beautiful and secret story" in the end. In class, Paul contemplates the fact that All he now knew was, that at some point or other – perhaps the second day, perhaps the sixth – he had noticed that the presence of the snow was a little more insistent. .. There, outside, were the bare cobbles; and here, inside, was the Snow growing heavier each day, muffling the world, hiding the ugly, and deadening increasingly – above all – the steps of the postman. The snow is "hiding the ugly" of the world much like Percy Bysshe Shelley claims poetry does in his *A Defence of Poetry* [Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, eds., *A Defence of Poetry: the Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 1965]. Shelley claims that "Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed. ... It subdues to union under its light yoke, all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches...." The snow, then, may resemble poetry. If the snow resembles poetry, is Paul a poet? Perhaps, but since Aiken concerns himself with Everyman and not just artists, it seems more likely that Paul is an Everyman. The snow may be poetic without Paul being a poet if the silent snow is universal truth that poets, children, and old people are sensitive to. If the snow is universal truth that includes both the rational and the irrational, as it is in "Senlin," the significance of its "deadening increasingly – above all – the steps of the postman" may be ambiguous. The postman has been seen as representing death as well as, more modestly, 'the plain ordinary world in which small boys have to get up, eat breakfast, go to school, listen attentively, and do all the other things expected of small boys" [Ballew Graham, *English Journal*, 57, May 1968]. The more modest view seems more appropriate especially if we see the silent snow as positive. If the snow hides what is ugly, as poetry does, it would muffle the sound of the postman since the postman is "the bringer of information from the outside world" (Jones). The postman, with the parents and the doctor, becomes associated with the adult and loud world that has chosen to ignore the silent truth Paul decides to embrace. By incessantly assaulting the beauty of Paul's newly discovered world with news from the adult's mundane world, the postman must be silenced by the purifying silent snow. The silent snow, after imposing itself on the world, reveals the essential silent entity that embodies everything. Toward the end of the story, when Paul is being interviewed by the physician, the silent snow becomes an entity that "Even here, even amongst these hostile presences, and in this arranged light, he could see the snow, he could hear it – it was in the corners of the room, where the shadow was deepest". The snow occupies

the corners—the fringes—of the room much like silence encompasses the edges of sound. Moreover, this silent snow tells Paul to resist his parents and the doctor so that it can provide him with "something new! Something white! Something cold! something sleepy! something of cease, and peace, and the long bright curve of space!" This is a rather tempting promise to make, especially when contrasted with what the parents and the world they represent offers him. The end of the story presents Paul's realization of the silent secret of the universe. The silent snow exclaims: Listen! ... We'll tell you the last, the most beautiful and secret story—shut your eyes—it is a very small story—a story that gets smaller and smaller—it comes inward instead of opening like a flower—it is a flower becoming a seed—a little cold seed—do you hear? We are leaning closer to you. This statement, compounded by the closing line that describes the snow becoming a fierce "moving screen of snow—but even now it said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold, it said sleep", leads many readers to conclude that Paul dies, that his death wish is fulfilled. But the scene has other possibilities, as Jay Martin notes that "we seem always about to break through to the truths contained in the 'secret' snow. But we never, in the story, transcend the snow itself, whose meanings remain secret" [Conrad Aiken: A Life of his Art, 1962]. Secret they remain to those who, as "reasonable" adults, embrace only what can be understood with mere human language. The snow's depiction of the secret as a flower growing inward back to the beginning of life seems more positive than what is normal—i.e., a flower growing outward and dying! If the secret grows inward it can grow outward again, and repeat this cycle infinitely. The secret that grows inward is related to the silence that developed before Paul dashed up to bed. That "silence seemed to deepen, to spread out... to become timeless and shapeless, and to center inevitably ... on the beginning of a new sound." Hence, we have the most beautiful and secret story; namely, we have the story of the dynamics of eternal life. Life grows out to grow in, indefinitely. There is certainly more to it than this. However, as the meaning is obviously ultimately silent, all that any of us can do is approximate the truth. Approaching the truth is what Aiken does best. He takes us to the edge of our minds momentarily innumerable times in his poetry and fiction. Senlin has been recognized as a character who probes the problem of understanding who we are. However, Paul, because he is a child, has received incomplete recognition. Like Senlin, Paul is encountering silent truth. Like Senlin, Paul embraces this beauty which "was simply beyond anything—beyond speech as beyond thought—utterly incommunicable". But unlike Senlin, Paul is twelve years old and the "reasonable" modern adult reader naturally seems to recoil from accepting Paul's choice as courageous and insightful. Perhaps the modern reader recognizes the situation and resents Paul for having the courage that only old men, such as Senlin, usually have. In both cases, Aiken clearly presents a person at a critical point in a human's life—that is, at the edge of sound and silence—and both choose the one which encompasses the other.

Source: Jesse G. Swan, "At the Edge of Sound and Silence: Conrad Aiken's 'Senlin: A Biography' and 'Silent Snow, Secret Snow,'" in *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. XXII, No. 1, Fall, 1989, pp. 41-9.

VII

Study the critical overview of Margaret Atwood's works. List the positive and negative features literary critics have identified in his literary style. What is your personal vision of the things?

Margaret Atwood is one of Canada's foremost writers, and arguably one of the most popular. Her work has been hailed by feminist critics as an incisive portrayal of women's inequality within society and relations between the sexes. Marxist critics have noted her comments upon materialism and commodification within a capitalist social order. More traditional academic appraisals have noted her awareness of and clever use of literary conventions such as the quest romance. Postcolonial theory has opened the way for her works being seen to comment upon international and imperial relations, particularly in terms of imperialism and the schism between the developed and developing worlds. More recently her work has been positioned as postmodernist given its fascination with the fragmentation of identity and multiple versions of reality. In addition to this, she has never lost her position as being a kind of national figure who has presented Canada, Canadians and the Canadian viewpoint to the world. Given what appears to be a wide range of reactions and appraisals of her work, is there room — or need — for yet another critical stance?

I would like to argue that despite the prolific amount of critical work which has been written to-date, there is indeed the scope and necessity for another approach to Atwood's work. Further to this, I would like to suggest and hopefully substantiate my own claims that this new approach should be based on two particular schools of philosophy-psychoanalysis and phenomenology.

In this paper I would like to do a number of things. First, I would like to introduce my own approach to Atwood's novels. Without going into the details of the novels themselves, I will describe the kind of analysis I have undertaken, and in doing so put forward a new critical approach — an approach which draws upon psychoanalytic and phenomenological theories to interpret Atwood's work. Having described my own approach, next I would like to discuss other approaches to Atwood's work. Since space does not permit me to discuss them all, I will summarise the most significant and popular approach to Atwood's work to-date — the feminist approach. After summarising the feminist approach, I will point out some of the problems with this particular critical stance. In doing so, I would not wish to negate the importance of this approach but to point out what I consider to be certain oversights feminist critics have made. Finally, I will suggest some ways in which a psychoanalytic and phenomenological interpretation can solve these problems, and in doing so justify my own approach.

I would like to begin by describing my work — a book entitled *In Search of the Split Subject: Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology and the Novels of Margaret Atwood* recently published in Canada. As the title suggests, the book is a critical account of Margaret

Atwood's novels in terms of psychoanalytic and phenomenological theories, and in it I interpret six of the novels — *The Edible Woman*, *Lady Oracle*, *Life Before Man*, *Bodily Harm*, *Cat's Eye* and *The Robber Bride* — from this theoretical perspective. *Surfacing* and *The Handmaid's Tale* are discussed in a separate section of their own, since they are significantly and fundamentally different in form from the other six novels, and are best suited to other forms of critical analysis.

The methodology I have used to interpret Atwood's novels is a strategic interweaving of psychoanalytic and phenomenological theories, and the application of these theories to the text by way of close reading. By this I mean that I take certain events, characters, behaviours and emotions as they occur in the fictional world of each novel and analyse and interpret them according to psychoanalytic and phenomenological thought. To do this I draw upon key notions and concepts for my interpretation; and while ideas such as the 'oedipal complex', 'the unconscious', 'the ego', 'the symbolic' are undoubtedly intrinsic concepts, they remain open to idiosyncratic use on the part of critic and theorist alike. In acknowledgment of this, and in deference to the magnitude of the field, I wrote a glossary of key terms.

It would be a fair question to ask why I chose to work with these particular frameworks. I believe psychoanalysis has the greatest theoretical potential and allows for the complexity necessary for a highly developed account of human existence and of the self. In this I draw upon psychoanalysis not in its clinical setting, but as a body of knowledge that theorises psychological and psychical life. That is, I draw upon psychoanalytic theory for its philosophical and ontological insights into the human condition, not for its value as a therapeutic or transference dynamic between analyst and analysand. In this, of course, my approach is at odds with a transference model of reading practice (a focus on process rather than content) which marks contemporary use of psychoanalysis and is regarded by some in the field as either most appropriate¹ or definitive² of a psychoanalytic approach. Certainly, psychoanalysis functions in a therapeutic context by invoking certain interpersonal relations between analyst and analysand. Nonetheless outside the clinical setting, it provides explanations for certain actions, and in theory establishes models and patterns according to which human behaviour may be explained, and it is this non-therapeutic function of the discipline upon which I call.

At times, however, I choose to weave in phenomenological concepts, and my reason for doing this is an attempt to enhance rather than detract from the complexity of the issues raised. For while psychoanalysis theorises a self, that self is a subject of perception, and phenomenology best explains the way a person perceives. That is, while psychoanalysis addresses the ways in which an 'I' is constructed, phenomenology investigates the ways in which that I relates to the world. In this the theories are perfectly compatible, and together they provide an excellent framework from which to examine subjectivity and the complexities of the self. In turn, my methodology becomes a kind of interlacing of approaches in textual interpretation.

This interlacing occurs at strategic points. Whenever a particular character, relationship, behaviour or emotion is best explained by phenomenological notions rather than psychoanalytic ones or indeed by a combination of the two, I draw upon whatever is most pertinent.

As may be obvious from my concern with the self, the psyche and subjectivity, in general my focus is upon characterisation – why the characters are the way they are, why they do what they do, and why we identify with them. Through the 'marriage' of psychoanalytic and phenomenological theories, I try to explain the idiosyncrasies of Atwood's characters, their distinct personalities, and the inner workings of their minds. However, I freely admit that my interpretations are both illustrative and speculative. The result is that meaning is conferred; in much the same way as analytic discourse acts to construct meaning by including elements not immediately accessible, so too does my reading of Atwood's work impute meaning to the text. In this, my approach is not unlike the more traditional schools of criticism that seek metaphorical, symbolic or allegorical meanings in their exposition of theme. In much the same way as the analyst looks to make sense of a situation presented through circumscribed dialogue, I try to make sense of fictional events, times, places and thoughts, and then suggest an interpretation that is credible given the parameters of the text. This may mean, however, that interpretations reach beyond the obvious commonsense significance of a particular event, character, statement or setting. And it is, perhaps, at this point that an approach that is 'conservative' in that it is a close reading becomes contentious by generating meanings otherwise non-existent and opening the significance of the text beyond its manifest scope. While I would contend that such a reading has the potential to 'open' the text, in order to counteract critical audacity informed by psychoanalytic assumption, I try to remain faithful to the text by supporting statements with evidence – direct quotes from the text.

In ending this description of my project, I would like to outline what I think are the results. I do think that the book provides new interpretations of the novels, and explains what were hitherto considered as inconsistencies or ambiguities within each text. I also think that the book establishes a new critical method for interpreting Atwood's work, and it is possible that this method could be used to explicate both the poetry and the short fiction for which Atwood is otherwise known.

What of other approaches to Atwood's work? The most significant and most popular critical approach to Atwood's novels has been a feminist approach. Looking back over the entire body of criticism, it is quite startling how often initial reviews of the novels have reflected a socio-political standard of measure, in that the question of whether or not or to what degree each novel can be termed 'feminist' has often dominated the reviews³. By this Atwood's novels were immediately positioned within a feminist, political or ideological domain.

While reviews may, by nature of their length and purpose, oversimplify issues, a distinct body of criticism emerged which looked into these concerns in more depth.

In his *Margaret Atwood: a Feminist Poetics*, Frank Davey noted that all Atwood's fiction has a didactic tone and appears to be offered as a commentary upon contemporary society (165). His view is, I believe, indicative of a general tendency among what was a growing body of feminist scholars who analysed the novels in sociological terms, with a focus upon the problems of contemporary society as they pertain to the marginalised position of women. In general, feminist appraisal depended upon a perceived preoccupation with sexual difference and social restraint in Atwood's work. Consequently, Atwood was seen to be examining issues such as marriage, female sexuality, male-female relations, the female body and body image, stereotyping, socialisation and the pressures of conforming to pre-ordained oppressive roles. In short, the broadly-based sexually specific exploitation which allegedly marks our society was seen to be the determining feature in Atwood's work.

This focus upon society and women's position within it took a number of forms within the critical domain. Gender roles and socialisation became the centre of attention for some critics⁴. Much attention was paid to the female protagonists of Atwood's novels, specifically their identity as women. For some critics, the perceived feminist consciousness in Atwood's work was a vehicle for consciousness-raising in the female reader.⁶ As literature with a feminist agenda, Atwood's work was seen by some to not only describe gender inequalities, but to prescribe possible avenues of liberation, of female growth, insight and change. Some critics identified a kind of feminist manifesto whereby Atwood was seen to be advocating or suggesting a certain plan of action, telling her female readers how they should behave. Another common strategy of feminist scholarship was to position Atwood's work within a definable literary tradition which has at heart a specific feminist aim. In this, Atwood's novels were placed alongside those of other women writers, and contextualised as being part of a canon of twentieth century women's writings.

In general, a distinct lack of theorising characterised the early feminist accounts of Atwood's novels. In part, this may reflect upon the nature of the Anglo-American feminist movement as a whole, its early emphasis upon empirical evidence over what is conceivably ivory-tower philosophical debate, and its privileging of the actual lived experiences of women as an index of literary criticism. Nonetheless, as the influence of post-structuralist theories spread, so too did feminist acceptance of them, and along with this, feminist accounts of Atwood's novels informed by contemporary theory began to appear. While the titles of articles published recently reflect the influence of theoretical discourse in the reception of Atwood's work, the earlier critical accounts, and indeed accounts which are identifiably feminist readings, tended to rely mainly on what was, in the American, British and Australian academy called French feminist' theory, notably the work of Luce Irigaray. Speaking of theories which are external to the text, it is worth noting that significant attention was paid to analysing *Lady Oracle* in light of the feminist tradition of women's mythology — the figure of the Great Goddess or Great or Earth Mother in her various manifestations and forms. The application of certain psychoanalytic principles or elements of a psychoanalytic

approach to the feminist analysis of Atwood's work occurred periodically. However, the accounts which drew upon psychoanalysis either used the terminology in a somewhat perfunctory manner, or employed the psychoanalytic model for a specific aim or with political intent.

Having summarised the feminist approach to Atwood's work, I would like to raise some of the problems I think are inherent within a feminist critical stance. Elsewhere I have discussed these problems in detail and with respect to individual texts, however, for the purpose of this paper I would wish to raise a number of general issues which are common to many accounts.

One problem with the feminist approach is to do with its emphasis upon social realism. The stress upon social reality – the judgment that Atwood's novels are feminist ones because they realistically portray the experience of being a woman in a contemporary (patriarchal) world – means a feminist approach privileges the lived experience of reader and author, and uses that lived experience as an index of literary worth. This, I believe, is too limiting. In most of the feminist accounts, the novels are judged according to how accurately and authentically they represent women's experience. Such a judgement may hinder creativity, negate the autonomy of the text, and place too much value on authorial intention.

Another problem is to do with characterisation. Feminist critics too often negate (or ignore) the complexity of characterisation in Atwood's work. In feminist accounts, individual men are too often seen to be the direct cause of women's oppression, while women are too often seen to be victims not responsible for their own plight. At the level of the narrative, this is a problem since Atwood's characters are not readily drawn into good and bad camps. We see women who are assertive, aggressive and destructive, and men who are passive victims unable to protect themselves against this onslaught of feminine power (think of the dynamic between Nate and Elizabeth in *Life Before Man*). Female friendship often seems conditional, other times it is nonexistent, and certain women readily inflict pain on other women as well as men (*The Robber Bride* is the most poignant example of this, although *Cat's Eye* is an earlier example). Women cannot be totally exonerated, and often men when portrayed as holding more power, are themselves part of a System they may perpetuate but have not necessarily chosen and as individuals can do nothing about.

In general, then, the feminist judgment of male characters tends to disregard the complex nature of the relationships between characters in the fictional world. There are a number of consequences of this, and they are both theoretical and linked to our understanding of the narrative and thematic significance of the texts.

First, the function of the male characters is not fully explored since these characters are condemned or deemed insignificant for the protagonist's development, or significant only in a negative way.

Second, only the structures of male aggression and female passivity are given any theoretical credibility. The female psyche is connected to social structures of male power, and the relationship of self to society and the inter-subjective dynamics of self and other is confined solely within a matrix of gendered dynamics of power.

Third, inter-subjective dynamics (relations between characters) are prioritised over intra-subjective ones (or what goes on within a character's own mind). Most of the feminist accounts of Atwood's novels, like much of the so-called Anglo-American feminist theory upon which they have been based, rely solely upon the conscious, deliberate factors involved in the formation of identity, without taking into account the ambiguity and contradiction which are the manifestation of deeper unconscious thoughts and feelings.

Fourth, characters tend to be analysed in terms of a broadly-based, sexually-specific exploitation. While such an approach may appear to retain an emphasis upon collectivity and its effects upon the women characters, it threatens to neglect the specificities of each protagonist's situation. In other words, generic social movements are analysed at the expense of investigations into the construction of each protagonist's particular and individual psyche.

Fifth, simplistic concepts of blame on the one hand, and vindication on the other are not productive, either in interpreting the themes of the novels or in understanding the inequalities within society that feminism is concerned about.

Implicit in my naming these difficulties is a belief that these difficulties can be overcome, and I believe that psychoanalysis in conjunction with phenomenology is the perfect framework for overcoming these problems.

There are, I would argue, certain theoretical benefits associated with my approach. The first is that my approach allows for a more expansive notion of sexuality — one from which the women characters and protagonists stand to gain. In my work, a psychoanalytic perspective allows me a focus on libidinal rather than purely sexual energy, to deal with familial libidinal relations rather than conventional notions of sex and the struggle for power. This means I am able to look not at the masculine as such but at the paternal, and also at interconnected maternal and oedipal desires. This wider focus is an important distinction because while feminist accounts have focused upon relations of inequity between the sexes, they have failed to acknowledge the fact that it is the familial pre-social situation which sets the dynamic in place. It is precisely in the familial situation that relations of power and structure are formed — relations which are fundamental and pre-date and pre-determine adult relations in later life. It is also important to note that this more expansive notion of sexuality allows for a focus not only on the sexual but on the corporeal, and the role corporeality (through the investment of libidinal energies) plays in signification and the construction of the symbolic order.

Another distinct theoretical advantage is that psychoanalysis and phenomenology posit a complex relationship between self and society. Rather than constrict this relationship within the parameters of gendered power, psychoanalysis theorises a two-way relationship of introjection and projection between the subject and the social world. With this comes the recognition that self and society are reciprocal, that in constructing a self, a social order is constructed which in turn continues to structure that self. Within this there are sexual or libidinal dynamics since paternal and maternal desire take different 'directions' and underpin the basic development of the subject and that subject's entry into the symbolic or social order. However, psychoanalysis theorises complex relations of alterity, whereby the object is not merely a gendered object, and the other is more than a sexual other, but object and other are integral for the establishment and continued maintenance of subjective identity. Thus, relations between self and other, subject and object, are inherently complex and rife with ambiguity. These relations are constitutive at the same time as they are destructive, attractive at the same time as they are repellent, intra – as well as inter-subjective, and above all, necessary. Further to this, phenomenology inflects these dynamics with the realities of our external relations to the world – location, position, intention, motility, perspective, and consciousness of the self. I believe this more complex formulation of relations between the individual and society allows for the complexity (and ambiguities) evident in the characterisation of Atwood's characters to be explained.

The third theoretical advantage of the approach I have taken is that it allows for a close examination of subjectivity – the actual construction of identity and of the self. The emphasis upon social regulation within feminist accounts means that these accounts name the existence of cultural rules without always looking at the construction of subjective identity which accompanies these cultural rules. In this, the feminist approaches too often look at social codes without looking at how those codes come into being and how and why an individual accepts them. In other words, they look at society in general but not the subject who enters it and upon whom it depends. It may be true that society and the symbolic order pre-dates the individual; but it is equally true that the individual introjects social realities and accepts them as part of himself or herself. Psychoanalysis not only describes male and female roles and identities but it attempts to explain how those very identities are constructed and assumed. A psychoanalytic account can focus upon the initial acquisition of symbolic roles as well as examining the social functioning of these roles at a later date. This is because psychoanalysis explores the construction of subjectivity itself and with it the individual's actual entry into society, and this allows for a more complex approach to the issue of gender identity. This is important because it means that the ambiguity which often surrounds gender roles can be accounted for, rather than ignored. Atwood's novels often present relationships in which men exhibit feminine characteristics, while women show personality traits normally perceived to be masculine. Using psychoanalytic theory such ambiguities in the construction of gender roles can be fruitfully explored.

Another theoretical advantage is that psychoanalysis acknowledges unconscious processes and compulsions which rational thought belies. This acknowledgment of the unconscious and a dynamic model of the psyche whereby this unconscious is in an active relationship with the ego or conscious parts of the self is particularly productive in the case of Atwood's characters who often seem not to be in full control of their own actions or driven by irrational demands. Thus, the psychoanalytic approach allows for a focus upon intra-subjective as well as inter-subjective relations and a good look at what goes on within a character's mind. Psychoanalysis analyses relations between different parts of the self; with this sexual strategies and other forms of power play can be analysed with a much greater complexity-the complexity with which the characters interact not only with each other, but with themselves.

The fifth theoretical advantage is that my approach broadens the significance of the protagonist's position in the domestic and marital economy by seeing it as indicative of all subjectivity and illustrative of a structural and founding principle of the social order. My approach does not negate the significance of social commentary as an aspect of Atwood's work. Indeed, I focus upon society in that I focus upon the social contract and the symbolic order — this is necessary given Atwood's focus upon social dynamics. However, in focusing upon processes which are social, psychoanalysis and phenomenology allow me to acknowledge that they are structural and symbolic. Dynamics such as sexual and marital relations are post-oedipal dynamics of paternal law. They provide a symbolic position through which the individual subject participates in necessary circulatory networks of exchange. Hence, they are the foundation of the social contract in general, rather than the consequence of a specifically Atwoodian scenario or a specifically patriarchal form of society. As a consequence, I can examine the identity of each protagonist in a way which acknowledges the sexually-specific place of the women while also recognising that the demands placed upon these women are, in fact, symbolic ones. This opens the way for analysis into the question of how the protagonists negotiate the contents and forms of their own psyches in light of symbolic demands.

Lastly, my approach allows for a more complex understanding of the characters. In my analysis the protagonists, their identities as women, are brought to the fore. However, their structural role within society is also recognised. Drawing upon the theories of psychoanalysis and phenomenology allows me to acknowledge the sexually specific place of women, but do so by interrogating the very terms upon which culture is founded. In this there are no simple victors and vanquished, but people — both men and women — who are caught in a System which is not easy to change. This focus upon the construction of identity means I can explore the very issues feminist critics assess — female sexuality, male-female relations, marriage, the maternal, masculine desire. However, psychoanalysis and phenomenology allow me a more refined exploration by analysing these issues in a wider context of other determinants of subjective identity — representation, signification, libidinal energy, the body, the ego, the unconscious and the like. This makes for a more theoretically

precise analysis than conventional feminist accounts which see the situation the protagonist finds herself in largely in terms of broadly-based social discrimination.

My approach does not apportion blame; it does not see men as one-dimensional willful oppressors and women as helpless victims. I try to attribute to the characters a more precise function. Where the characters are undeniably acting in their capacity as men or women, I try to articulate the nature – the aim and function – of their sexually-specific roles. This often means that peripheral characters, especially male characters, are explained. My account shows, for example, that the men function as agents or signifiers of paternal desire. In this they are necessary – even if unpalatable. After all, psychoanalysis teaches us that the intervention of paternal and hence masculine desire is essential in order that the daughter not remain locked in the stifling symbiosis of maternal union. Therefore, the male characters offer a means of escape from the pre-subjective and pre-oedipal bond, and allow the protagonist entry into the circulatory and symbolic realm. Thus, rather than condemn these figures as power-hungry, I try to explain their behaviour, and acknowledge that they too have a necessary role to play.

Margaret Atwood is a novelist whose writing shows a concern with the inner workings of the mind. She creates psychologically complex protagonists and very interesting peripheral characters. The relationships between the characters are complicated, and sometimes difficult to understand. The fact that both psychoanalysis and phenomenology are theoretical disciplines that explore the formation of identity and construction of the self make them the perfect framework for analysing Atwood's novels. Together these philosophies can provide the key to understanding recurrent motifs, events and relationships in the fictional world and shed light on the subtleties of Atwood's fiction which are often overlooked. I would hope that the credibility of this reading will show the value of psychoanalysis and phenomenology in interpreting and understanding literature, and provide a framework by which other writers' works could be analysed.

«Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology, and the Novels of Margaret Atwood:
A New Critical Approach» by Sonia Mycak

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CHRESTOMATHY

Chapter 1.

Story 1. INTERLOPERS by SAKI



In a forest of mixed growth somewhere on the eastern spurs of the Karpathians, a man stood one winter night watching and listening, as though he waited for some beast of the woods to come within the range of his vision, and, later, of his rifle. But the game for whose presence he kept so keen an outlook was none that figured in the sportsman's calendar as lawful and proper for the chase; Ulrich von Gradwitz patrolled the dark forest in quest of a human enemy.

The forest lands of Gradwitz were of wide extent and well stocked with game; the narrow strip of precipitous woodland that lay on its outskirts was not remarkable for the game it harboured or the shooting it afforded, but it was the most jealously guarded of all its owner's territorial possessions. A famous law suit, in the days of his grandfather, had wrested it from the illegal possession of a neighbouring family of petty landowners; the dispossessed party had never acquiesced in the judgment of the Courts, and a long series of poaching affrays and similar scandals had embittered the relationships between the families for three generations. The neighbour feud had grown into a personal one since Ulrich had come to be head of his family; if there was a man in the world whom he detested and wished ill to it was Georg Znaeym, the inheritor of the quarrel and the tireless game-snatcher and raider of the disputed border-forest. The feud might, perhaps, have died down or been compromised if the personal ill-will of the two men had not stood in the way; as boys they had thirsted for one another's blood, as men each prayed that misfortune might fall on the other, and this wind scourged winter night Ulrich had banded together his foresters to watch the dark forest, not in quest of four-footed quarry, but to keep a look-out for the prowling thieves whom he suspected of being afoot from across the land boundary. The roebuck, which usually kept in the sheltered hollows during a storm-wind, were running like driven things to-night, and there was movement and unrest among the creatures that were wont to sleep through the dark hours. Assuredly there was a disturbing element in the forest, and Ulrich could guess the quarter from whence it came.

He strayed away by himself from the watchers whom he had placed in ambush on the crest of the hill, and wandered far down the steep slopes amid the wild tangle of undergrowth, peering through the tree trunks and listening through the whistling and skirling of the wind and the restless beating of the branches for sight and sound of the marauders. If only on this wild night, in this dark, lone spot, he might come across Georg Znaeym, man to man, with none to witness – that was the wish that was uppermost in his thoughts. And as he stepped round the trunk of a huge beech, he came face to face with the man he sought.

The two enemies stood glaring at one another for a long silent moment. Each had a rifle in his hand, each had hate in his heart and murder uppermost in his mind. The chance had come to give full play to the passions of a lifetime. But a man who has been brought up under the code of a restraining civilisation cannot easily nerve himself to shoot down his neighbour in cold blood and without word spoken, except for an offence against his hearth and honour. And before the moment of hesitation had given way to action a deed of Nature's own violence overwhelmed them both. A fierce shriek of the storm had been answered by a splitting crash over their heads, and ere they could leap aside a mass of falling beech tree had thundered down on them. Ulrich von Gradwitz found himself stretched on the ground, one arm numb beneath him and the other held almost as helplessly in a tight tangle of forked branches, while both legs were pinned beneath the fallen mass. His heavy shooting-boots had saved his feet from being crushed to pieces, but if his fractures were not as serious as they might have been, at least it was evident that he could not move from his present position till someone came to release him. The descending twig had slashed the skin of his face, and he had to wink away some drops of blood from his eyelashes before he could take in a general view of the disaster. At his side, so near that under ordinary circumstances he could almost have touched him, lay Georg Znaeym, alive and struggling, but obviously as helplessly pinioned down as himself. All round them lay a thick-strewn wreckage of splintered branches and broken twigs.

Relief at being alive and exasperation at his captive plight brought a strange medley of pious thank-offerings and sharp curses to Ulrich's lips. Georg, who was nearly blinded with the blood which trickled across his eyes, stopped his struggling for a moment to listen, and then gave a short, snarling laugh.

"So, you're not killed, as you ought to be, but you're caught, anyway," he cried; "caught fast. Ho, what a jest, Ulrich von Gradwitz snared in his stolen forest. There's real justice for you!"

And he laughed again, mockingly and savagely. "I'm caught in my own forest-land," retorted Ulrich. "When my men come to release us, you will wish, perhaps, that you were in a better plight than caught poaching on a neighbour's land, shame on you."

Georg was silent for a moment; then he answered quietly:

"Are you sure that your men will find much to release? I have men, too, in the forest to-night, close behind me, and they will be here first and do the releasing. When they drag me out from under these damned branches it won't need much clumsiness on their part to roll this mass of trunk right over on the top of you. Your men will find you dead under a fallen beech tree. For form's sake I shall send my condolences to your family."

"It is a useful hint," said Ulrich fiercely. "My men had orders to follow in ten minutes time, seven of which must have gone by already, and when they get me out — I will remember the hint. Only as you will have met your death poaching on my lands I don't think I can decently send any message of condolence to your family."

"Good," snarled Georg, "good. We fight this quarrel out to the death, you and I and our foresters, with no cursed interlopers to come between us. Death and damnation to you, Ulrich von Gradwitz."

"The same to you, Georg Znaeym, forest-thief, game-snatcher."

Both men spoke with the bitterness of possible defeat before them, for each knew that it might be long before his men would seek him out or find him; it was a bare matter of chance which party would arrive first on the scene.

Both had now given up the useless struggle to free themselves from the mass of wood that held them down; Ulrich limited his endeavours to an effort to bring his one partially free arm near enough to his outer coat-pocket to draw out his wine-flask. Even when he had accomplished that operation it was long before he could manage the unscrewing of the stopper or get any of the liquid down his throat. But what a Heaven-sent draught it seemed! It was an open winter, and little snow had fallen as yet, hence the captives suffered less from the cold than might have been the case at that season of the year; nevertheless, the wine was warming and reviving to the wounded man, and he looked across with something like a throb of pity to where his enemy lay, just keeping the groans of pain and weariness from crossing his lips.

"Could you reach this flask if I threw it over to you?" asked Ulrich suddenly; "there is good wine in it, and one may as well be as comfortable as one can. Let us drink, even if to-night one of us dies."

"No, I can scarcely see anything; there is so much blood caked round my eyes," said Georg, "and in any case I don't drink wine with an enemy."

Ulrich was silent for a few minutes, and lay listening to the weary screeching of the wind. An idea was slowly forming and growing in his brain, an idea that gained strength every time that he looked across at the man who was fighting so grimly against pain and exhaustion. In the pain and languor that Ulrich himself was feeling the old fierce hatred seemed to be dying down.

"Neighbour," he said presently, "do as you please if your men come first. It was a fair compact. But as for me, I've changed my mind. If my men are the first to come you shall be the first to be helped, as though you were my guest. We have quarreled like devils all our lives over this stupid strip of forest, where the trees can't even stand upright in a breath of wind. Lying here to-night thinking I've come to think we've been rather fools; there are better things in life than getting the better of a boundary dispute. Neighbour, if you will help me to bury the old quarrel I — I will ask you to be my friend."

Georg Znaeym was silent for so long that Ulrich thought, perhaps, he had fainted with the pain of his injuries. Then he spoke slowly and in jerks.

"How the whole region would stare and gabble if we rode into the market square together. No one living can remember seeing a Znaeym and a von Gradwitz talking to one another in friendship. And what peace there would be among the forester folk if we ended our feud to-night. And if we choose to make peace among our people there

is none other to interfere, no interlopers from outside . . . You would come and keep the Sylvester night beneath my roof, and I would come and feast on some high day at your castle. I would never fire a shot on your land, save when you invited me as a guest; and you should come and shoot with me down in the marshes where the wildfowl are. In all the countryside there are none that could hinder if we willed to make peace. I never thought to have wanted to do other than hate you all my life, but I think I have changed my mind about things too, this last half-hour. And you offered me your wine-flask. Ulrich von Gradwitz, I will be your friend."

For a space both men were silent, turning over in their minds the wonderful changes that this dramatic reconciliation would bring about. In the cold, gloomy forest, with the wind tearing in fitful gusts through the naked branches and whistling round the tree-trunks, they lay and waited for the help that would now bring release and succour to both parties. And each prayed a private prayer that his men might be the first to arrive, so that he might be the first to show honourable attention to the enemy that had become a friend.

Presently, as the wind dropped for a moment, Ulrich broke silence.

"Let's shout for help," he said, "in this lull our voices may carry a little way."

"They won't carry far through the trees and undergrowth," said Georg, "but we can try. Together, then." The two raised their voices in a prolonged hunting call.

"Together again," said Ulrich a few minutes later, after listening in vain for an answering halloo.

"I heard nothing but the pestilential wind," said Georg hoarsely. There was silence again for some minutes, and then Ulrich gave a joyful cry.

"I can see figures coming through the wood. They are following in the way I came down the hillside."

Both men raised their voices in as loud a shout as they could muster.

"They hear us! They've stopped. Now they see us. They're running down the hill towards us," cried Ulrich. "How many of them are there?" asked Georg.

"I can't see distinctly," said Ulrich; "nine or ten,"

"Then they are yours," said Georg; "I had only seven out with me."

"They are making all the speed they can, brave lads," said Ulrich gladly.

"Are they your men?" asked Georg.

"Are they your men?" he repeated impatiently as Ulrich did not answer.

"No," said Ulrich with a laugh, the idiotic chattering laugh of a man unstrung with hideous fear.

"Who are they?" asked Georg quickly, straining his eyes to see what the other would gladly not have seen.

"Wolves.

Story 2. THE MAGIC BARREL by Bernard Malamud



Not long ago there lived in uptown New York, in a small, almost meager room, though crowded with books, Leo Finkle, a rabbinical student at the Yeshiva University. Finkle, after six years of study, was to be ordained in June and had been advised by an acquaintance that he might find it easier to win himself a congregation if he were married. Since he had no present prospects of marriage, after two tormented days of turning it over in his mind, he called in Pinye Salzman, a marriage broker whose two-line advertisement he had read in the *Forward*.

The matchmaker appeared one night out of the dark fourth-floor hallway of the graystone rooming house where Finkle lived, grasping a black, strapped portfolio that had been worn thin with use. Salzman, who had been long in the business, was of slight but dignified build, wearing an old hat, and an overcoat too short and tight for him. He smelled frankly of fish, which he loved to eat, and although he was missing a few teeth, his presence was not displeasing, because of an amiable manner curiously contrasted with mournful eyes. His voice, his lips, his wisp of beard, his bony fingers were animated, but give him a moment of repose and his mild blue eyes revealed a depth of sadness, a characteristic that put Leo a little at ease although the situation, for him, was inherently tense.

He at once informed Salzman why he had asked him to come, explaining that but for his parents, who had married comparatively late in life, he was alone in the world. He had for six years devoted himself almost entirely to his studies, as a result of which, understandably, he had found himself without time for social life and the company of young women. Therefore, he thought it the better part of trial and error—of embarrassing fumbling—to call in an experienced person to advise him on these matters. He remarked in passing that the function of the marriage broker was ancient and honorable, highly approved in the Jewish community, because it made practical the necessary without hindering joy. Moreover, his own parents had been brought together by a matchmaker. They had made, if not a financially profitable marriage—since neither had possessed any worldly goods to speak of—at least a successful one in the sense of their everlasting devotion to each other. Salzman listened in embarrassed surprise, sensing a sort of apology. Later, however, he experienced a glow of pride in his work, an emotion that had left him years ago, and he heartily approved of Finkle.

The two went to their business. Leo had led Salzman to the only clear place in the room, a table near a window that overlooked the lamp-lit city. He seated himself at the matchmaker's side but facing him, attempting by an act of will to suppress the unpleasant tickle in his throat. Salzman eagerly unstrapped his portfolio and removed a loose rubber band from a thin packet of much-handled cards. As he flipped through them, a gesture and sound that physically hurt Leo, the student pretended not to see and gazed steadfastly out the window. Although it was still February, winter

was on its last legs, signs of which he had for the first time in years begun to notice. He now observed the round white moon, moving high in the sky through a cloud menagerie, and watched with half-open mouth as it penetrated a huge hen, and dropped out of her like an egg laying itself. Salzman, though pretending through eyeglasses he had just slipped on to be engaged in scanning the writing on the cards, stole occasional glances at the young man's distinguished face, noting with pleasure the long, severe scholar's nose, brown eyes heavy with learning, sensitive yet ascetic lips, and a certain almost hollow quality of the dark cheeks. He gazed around at shelves upon shelves of books and let out a soft, contented sigh.

When Leo's eyes fell upon the cards, he counted six spread out in Salzman's hand.

"So few?" he asked in disappointment.

"You wouldn't believe me how much cards I got in my office," Salzman replied. "The drawers are already filled to the top, so I keep them now in a barrel, but is every girl good for a new rabbi?"

Leo blushed at this, regretting all he had revealed of himself in a curriculum vitae he had sent to Salzman. He had thought it best to acquaint him with his strict standards and specifications but, in having done so, felt he had told the marriage broker more than was absolutely necessary.

He hesitantly inquired, "Do you keep photographs of your clients on file?"

"First comes family, amount of dowry, also what kind promises," Salzman replied, unbuttoning his tight coat and settling himself in the chair. "After comes pictures, rabbi."

"Call me Mr. Finkle. I'm not yet a rabbi."

Salzman said he would, but instead called him doctor, which he changed to rabbi when Leo was not listening too attentively.

Salzman adjusted his horn-rimmed spectacles, gently cleared his throat, and read in an eager voice the contents of the top card:

"Sophie P. Twenty-four years. Widow one year. No children. Educated high school and two years college. Father promises eight thousand dollars. Has wonderful wholesale business. Also, real estate. On the mother's side comes teachers, also one actor. Well known on Second Avenue."

Leo gazed up in surprise. "Did you say a widow?"

"A widow don't mean spoiled, rabbi. She lived with her husband maybe four months. He was a sick boy she made a mistake to marry him."

"Marrying a widow has never entered my mind."

"This is because you have no experience. A widow, especially if she is young and healthy like this girl, is a wonderful person to marry. She will be thankful to you the rest of her life. Believe me, if I was looking now for a bride, I would marry a widow."

Leo reflected, then shook his head.

Salzman hunched his shoulders in an almost imperceptible gesture of disappointment. He placed the card down on the wooden table and began to read another:

"Lily H. High school teacher. Regular. Not a substitute. Has savings and new Dodge car. Lived in Paris one year. Father is successful dentist thirty-five years. Interested in professional man. Well-Americanized family. Wonderful opportunity.

"I know her personally," said Salzman. "I wish you could see this girl. She is a doll. Also, very intelligent. All day you could talk to her about books and theater and whatnot. She also knows current events."

"I don't believe you mentioned her age?"

"Her age?" Salzman said, raising his brows. "Her age is thirty-two years."

Leo said after a while, "I'm afraid that seems a little too old."

Salzman let out a laugh. "So how old are you, rabbi?"

"Twenty-seven."

"So, what is the difference, tell me, between twenty-seven and thirty-two? My own wife is seven years older than me. So what did I suffer? —Nothing. If Rothschild's a daughter wants to marry you, would you say on account her age, no?"

"Yes," Leo said dryly.

Salzman shook off the no in the yes. "Five years don't mean a thing. I give you my word that when you will live with her for one week you will forget her age. What does it mean five years—that she lived more and knows more than somebody who is younger? On this girl, God bless her, years are not wasted. Each one that it comes makes better the bargain."

"What subject does she teach in high school?"

"Languages. If you heard the way she speaks French, you will think it is music. I am in the business twenty-five years, and I recommend her with my whole heart. Believe me, I know what I'm talking, rabbi."

"What's on the next card?" Leo said abruptly.

Salzman reluctantly turned up the third card:

"Ruth K. Nineteen years. Honor student. Father offers thirteen thousand cash to the right bridegroom. He is a medical doctor. Stomach specialist with marvelous practice. Brother-in-law owns own garment business. Particular people."

Salzman looked as if he had read his trump card.

"Did you say nineteen?" Leo asked with interest.

"On the dot."

"Is she attractive?" He blushed. "Pretty?"

Salzman kissed his fingertips. "A little doll. On this I give you my word. Let me call the father tonight and you will see what means pretty."

But Leo was troubled. "You're sure she's that young?"

"This I am positive. The father will show you the birth certificate."

"Are you positive there isn't something wrong with her?" Leo insisted.

"Who says there is wrong?"

"I don't understand why an American girl her age should go to a marriage broker."

A smile spread over Salzman's face.

"So, for the same reason you went, she comes." Leo flushed. "I am pressed for time."

Salzman, realizing he had been tactless, quickly explained. "The father came, not her. He wants she should have the best, so he looks around himself. When we will locate the right boy, he will introduce him and encourage. This makes a better marriage than if a young girl without experience takes for herself. I don't have to tell you this."

"But don't you think this young girl believes in love?" Leo spoke uneasily.

Salzman was about to guffaw but caught himself and said soberly, "Love comes with the right person, not before."

Leo parted dry lips but did not speak. Noticing that Salzman had snatched a glance at the next card, he cleverly asked, "How is her health?"

"Perfect," Salzman said, breathing with difficulty. "Of course, she is a little lame on her right foot from an auto accident that it happened to her when she was twelve years, but nobody notices on account she is so brilliant and also beautiful."

Leo got up heavily and went to the window. He felt curiously bitter and upbraided himself for having called in the marriage broker. Finally, he shook his head.

"Why not?" Salzman persisted, the pitch of his voice rising.

"Because I detest stomach specialists."

"So, what do you care what is his business? After you marry her do you need him? Who says he must come every Friday night in your house?"

Ashamed of the way the talk was going, Leo dismissed Salzman, who went home with heavy, melancholy eyes.

Though he had felt only relief at the marriage broker's departure, Leo was in low spirits the next day. He explained it as arising from Salzman's failure to produce a suitable bride for him. He did not care for his type of clientele. But when Leo found himself hesitating whether to seek out another matchmaker, one more polished than Pinye, he wondered if it could be — his protestations to the contrary, and although he honored his father and mother — that he did not, in essence, care for the matchmaking institution? This thought he quickly put out of mind yet found himself still upset. All day he ran around in the woods — missed an important appointment, forgot to give out his laundry, walked out of a Broadway cafeteria without paying and had to run back with the ticket in his hand; had even not recognized his landlady in the street when she passed with a friend and courteously called out, "A good evening to you, Dr. Finkle." By nightfall, however, he had regained sufficient calm to sink his nose into a book and there found peace from his thoughts.

Almost at once there came a knock on the door. Before Leo could say enter, Salzman, commercial Cupid, was standing in the room. His face was gray and meager, his expression hungry, and he looked as if he would expire on his feet. Yet the marriage broker managed, by some trick of the muscles, to display a broad smile.

"So good evening. I am invited?"

Leo nodded, disturbed to see him again, yet unwilling to ask the man to leave.

Beaming still, Salzman laid his portfolio on the table. "Rabbi, I got for you tonight good news."

"I've asked you not to call me rabbi. I'm still a student."

"Your worries are finished. I have for you a first-class bride."

"Leave me in peace concerning this subject." Leo pretended lack of interest.

"The world will dance at your wedding."

"Please, Mr. Salzman, no more."

"But first must come back my strength," Salzman said weakly. He fumbled with the portfolio straps and took out of the leather case an oily paper bag, from which he extracted a hard, seeded roll and a small smoked whitefish. With a quick motion of his hand, he stripped the fish out of its skin and began ravenously to chew. "All day in a rush," he muttered.

Leo watched him eat. "A sliced tomato you have maybe?" Salzman hesitantly inquired.

"No."

The marriage broker shut his eyes and ate. When he had finished, he carefully cleaned up the crumbs and rolled up the remains of the fish, in the paper bag. His spectacled eyes roamed the room until he discovered, amid some piles of books, a one-burner gas stove. Lifting his hat he humbly asked, "A glass tea you got, rabbi?"

Conscience-stricken, Leo rose and brewed the tea. He served it with a chunk of lemon and two cubes of lump sugar, delighting Salzman.

After he had drunk his tea, Salzman's strength and good spirits were restored.

"So, tell me, rabbi," he said amiably, "you considered some more the three clients I mentioned yesterday?"

"There was no need to consider."

"Why not?"

"None of them suits me."

"What then suits you?"

Leo let it pass because he could give only a confused answer.

Without waiting for a reply, Salzman asked, "You remember this girl I talked to you – the high school teacher?"

"Age thirty-two?"

But, surprisingly, Salzman's face lit in a smile. "Age twenty-nine."

Leo shot him a look. "Reduced from thirty-two?"

"A mistake," Salzman avowed. "I talked today with the dentist. He took me to his safety deposit box and showed me the birth certificate. She was twenty-nine years last August. They made her a party in the mountains where she went for her vacation. When her father spoke to me the first time, I forgot to write the age and I told you thirty-two, but now I remember this was a different client, a widow."

"The same one you told me about, I thought she was twenty-four?"

"A different. Am I responsible that the world is filled with widows?"

"No, but I'm not interested in them, nor, for that matter, in schoolteachers."

Salzman pulled his clasped hands to his breast. Looking at the ceiling he devoutly exclaimed, "Yiddishe kinder, what can I say to somebody that he is not interested in high school teachers? So, what then you are interested?"

Leo flushed but controlled himself.

"In what else will you be interested," Salzman went on, "if you not interested in this fine girl that she speaks four languages and has personally in the bank ten thousand dollars? Also, her father guarantees further twelve thousand. Also, she has a new car, wonderful clothes, talks on all subjects, and she will give you a first-class home and children. How near do we come in our life to paradise?"

"If she's so wonderful, why wasn't she married ten years ago?" "Why?" said Salzman with a heavy laugh. " —

Why? Because she is partikiler. This is why. She wants the best."

Leo was silent, amused at how he had entangled himself. But Salzman had aroused his interest in Lily H., and he began seriously to consider calling on her. When the marriage broker observed how intently Leo's mind was at work on the facts he had supplied, he felt certain they would soon come to an agreement.

Late Saturday afternoon, conscious of Salzman, Leo Finkle walked with Lily Hirschorn along Riverside Drive. He walked briskly and erectly, wearing with distinction the black fedora he had that morning taken with trepidation out of the dusty hat box on his closet shelf, and the heavy black Saturday coat he had thoroughly whisked clean. Leo also owned a walking stick, a present from a distant relative, but quickly put temptation aside and did not use it. Lily, petite and not unpretty, had on something signifying the approach of spring. She was au courant, animatedly, with all sorts of subjects, and he weighed her words and found her surprisingly sound—score another for Salzman, whom he uneasily sensed to be somewhere around, hiding perhaps high in a tree along the street, flashing the lady signals with a pocket mirror; or perhaps a cloven-hoofed Pan, piping nuptial ditties as he danced his invisible way before them, strewing wild buds on the walk and purple grapes in their path, symbolizing fruit of a union, though there was of course still none.

Lily startled Leo by remarking, "I was thinking of Mr. Salzman, a curious figure, wouldn't you say?"

Not certain what to answer, he nodded.

She bravely went on, blushing, "I for one am grateful for his introducing us. Aren't you?"

He courteously replied, "I am."

"I mean," she said with a little laugh—and it was all in good taste, or at least gave the effect of being not in bad —"do you mind that we came together so?"

He was not displeased with her honesty, recognizing that she meant to set the relationship aright, and understanding that it took a certain amount of experience in life, and courage, to want to do it quite that way. One had to have some sort of past to make that kind of beginning.

He said that he did not mind. Salzman's function was traditional and honorable—valuable for what it might achieve, which, he pointed out, was frequently nothing.

Lily agreed with a sigh. They walked on for a while and she said after a long silence, again with a nervous laugh, "Would you mind if I asked you something a little bit personal? Frankly, I find the subject fascinating." Although Leo shrugged, she went on half-embarrassedly, "How was it that you came to your calling? I mean, was it a sudden passionate inspiration?"

Leo, after a time, slowly replied, "I was always interested in the Law."

"You saw revealed in it the presence of the Highest?"

He nodded and changed the subject. "I understand that you spent a little time in Paris, Miss Hirschorn?"

"Oh, did Mr. Salzman tell you, Rabbi Finkle?" Leo winced but she went on, "It was ages ago and almost forgotten. I remember I had to return for my sister's wedding."

And Lily would not be put off. "When," she asked in a slightly trembly voice, "did you become enamored of God?"

He stared at her. Then it came to him that she was talking about not Leo Finkle but a total stranger, some mystical figure, perhaps even passionate prophet that Salzman had dreamed up for her – no relation to the living or dead. Leo trembled with rage and weakness. The trickster had obviously sold her a bill of goods, just as he had him, who'd expected to become acquainted with a young lady of twenty-nine, only to behold, the moment he had laid eyes upon her strained and anxious face, a woman past thirty-five and aging rapidly. Only his self-control had kept him this long in her presence.

"I am not," he said gravely, "a talented religious person," and, in seeking words to go on, found himself possessed by shame and fear. "I think," he said in a strained manner, "that I came to God not because I loved Him but because I did not."

This confession he spoke harshly because its unexpectedness shook him.

Lily wilted. Leo saw a profusion of loaves of bread go flying like ducks high over his head, not unlike the winged loaves by which he had counted himself to sleep last night. Mercifully, then, it snowed, which he would not put past Salzman's machinations.

He was infuriated with the marriage broker and swore he would throw him out of the room the moment he reappeared. But Salzman did not come that night, and when Leo's anger had subsided, an unaccountable despair grew in its place. At first, he thought this was caused by his disappointment in Lily, but before long it became evident that he had involved himself with Salzman without a true knowledge of his own intent. He gradually realized – with an emptiness that seized him with six hands – that he had called in the broker to find him a bride because he was incapable of doing it himself. This terrifying insight he had derived as a result of his meeting and conversation with Lily Hirschorn. Her probing questions had somehow irritated him into revealing – to himself more than her – the true nature of his relationship to God, and from that it had come upon him, with shocking force, that apart from his parents, he had never loved anyone. Or perhaps it went the other way, that he did not love God so well as he might, because he had not loved man. It seemed to Leo that his whole life stood starkly revealed and he saw himself for the first time as he truly was – unloved and loveless. This bitter but somehow not fully unexpected revelation brought him to a point of panic, controlled only by extraordinary effort. He covered his face with his hands and cried.

The week that followed was the worst of his life. He did not eat and lost weight. His beard darkened and grew ragged. He stopped attending seminars and almost never opened a book. He seriously considered leaving the Yeshiva, although he was deeply troubled at the thought of the loss of all his years of study – saw them like pages torn from a book, strewn over the city – and at the devastating effect of this decision upon his parents. But he had lived without knowledge of himself, and never in the Five Books and all the Commentaries – mea culpa – had the truth been revealed to him. He did not know where to turn, and in all this desolating loneliness there was no to whom, although he often thought of Lily but not once could bring himself to go downstairs and make the call. He became touchy and irritable, especially with his landlady, who asked him all manner of personal questions; on the other hand, sensing his own disagreeableness, he waylaid her on the stairs and apologized abjectly, until, mortified, she ran from him. Out of this, however, he drew the consolation that he was a Jew and that a Jew suffered. But gradually, as the long and terrible week drew to a close, he regained his composure and some idea of purpose in life: to go on as planned. Although he was imperfect, the ideal was not. As for his quest of a bride, the thought of continuing afflicted him with anxiety and heartburn, yet perhaps with this new knowledge of himself he would be more successful than in the past. Perhaps love would now come to him and a bride to that love. And for this sanctified seeking who needed a Salzman?

The marriage broker, a skeleton with haunted eyes, returned that very night. He looked, withal, the picture of frustrated expectancy – as if he had steadfastly waited the week at Miss Lily Hirschorn's side for a telephone call that never came.

Casually coughing, Salzman came immediately to the point: "So how did you like her?"

Leo's anger rose and he could not refrain from chiding the matchmaker: "Why did you lie to me, Salzman?"

Salzman's pale face went dead white, the world had snowed on him.

"Did you not state that she was twenty-nine?" Leo insisted.

"I give you my word –"

"She was thirty-five, if a day. At least thirty-five."

"Of this don't be too sure. Her father told me –"

"Never mind. The worst of it is that you lied to her."

"How did I lie to her, tell me?"

"You told her things about me that weren't true. You made me out to be more, consequently less than I am. She had in mind a totally different person, a sort of semi-mystical Wonder Rabbi."

"All I said, you was a religious man."

"I can imagine."

Salzman sighed. "This is my weakness that I have," he confessed. "My wife says to me I shouldn't be a salesman, but when I have two fine people that they would be wonderful to be married, I am so happy that I talk too much." He smiled wanly. "This is why Salzman is a poor man."

Leo's anger left him. "Well, Salzman, I'm afraid that's all."

The marriage broker fastened hungry eyes on him.

"You don't want any more a bride?"

"I do," said Leo, "but I have decided to seek her in another way. I am no longer interested in an arranged marriage. To be frank, I now admit the necessity of premarital love. That is, I want to be in love with the one I marry."

"Love?" said Salzman, astounded. After a moment he remarked, "For us, our love is our life, not for the ladies. In the ghetto they —"

"I know, I know," said Leo. "I've thought of it often. Love, I have said to myself, should be a product of living and worship rather than its own end. Yet for myself I find it necessary to establish the level of my need and fulfill it."

Salzman shrugged but answered, "Listen, rabbi, if you want love, this I can find for you also. I have such beautiful clients that you will love them the minute your eyes will see them."

Leo smiled unhappily. "I'm afraid you don't understand."

But Salzman hastily unstrapped his portfolio and withdrew a manila packet from it.

"Pictures," he said, quickly laying the envelope on the table.

Leo called after him to take the pictures away, but as if on the wings of the wind, Salzman had disappeared.

March came. Leo had returned to his regular routine. Although he felt not quite himself yet—lacked energy—he was making plans for a more active social life. Of course it would cost something, but he was an expert in cutting corners; and when there were no corners left, he would make circles rounder. All the while Salzman's pictures had lain on the table, gathering dust. Occasionally as Leo sat studying, or enjoying a cup of tea, his eyes fell on the manila envelope, but he never opened it.

The days went by and no social life to speak of developed with a member of the opposite sex—it was difficult, given the circumstances of his situation. One morning Leo toiled up the stairs to his room and stared out the window at the city. Although the day was bright his view of it was dark. For some time, he watched the people in the street below hurrying along and then turned with a heavy heart to his little room. On the table was the packet. With a sudden relentless gesture, he tore it open. For a half hour he stood by the table in a state of excitement, examining the photographs of the ladies Salzman had included. Finally, with a deep sigh he put them down. There were six, of varying degrees of attractiveness, but look at them long enough and they all became Lily Hirschorn: all past their prime, all starved behind

bright smiles, not a true personality in the lot. Life, despite their frantic yoohooings, had passed them by; they were pictures in a briefcase that stank of fish. After a while, however, as Leo attempted to return the photographs into the envelope, he found in it another, a snapshot of the type taken by a machine for a quarter. He gazed at it a moment and let out a low cry.

Her face deeply moved him. Why, he could at first not say. It gave him the impression of youth—spring flowers, yet age—a sense of having been used to the bone, wasted; this came from the eyes, which were hauntingly familiar, yet absolutely strange. He had a vivid impression that he had met her before, but try as he might he could not place her although he could almost recall her name, as if he had read it in her own handwriting. No, this couldn't be; he would have remembered her. It was not, he affirmed, that she had an extraordinary beauty—no, though her face was attractive enough; it was that something about her moved him. Feature for feature, even some of the ladies of the photographs could do better; but she leaped forth to his heart—had lived, or wanted to—more than just wanted, perhaps regretted how she had lived—had somehow deeply suffered: it could be seen in the depths of those reluctant eyes, and from the way the light enclosed and shone from her, and within her, opening realms of possibility: this was her own. Her he desired. His head ached and eyes narrowed with the intensity of his gazing, then as if an obscure fog had blown up in the mind, he experienced fear of her and was aware that he had received an impression, somehow, of evil. He shuddered, saying softly, It is thus with us all. Leo brewed some tea in a small pot and sat sipping it without sugar, to calm himself. But before he had finished drinking, again with excitement he examined the face and found it good: good for Leo Finkle. Only such a one could understand him and help him seek whatever he was seeking. She might, perhaps, love him. How she had happened to be among the discards in Salzman's barrel he could never guess, but he knew he must urgently go find her.

Leo rushed downstairs, grabbed up the Bronx telephone book, and searched for Salzman's home address. He was not listed, nor was his office. Neither was he in the Manhattan book. But Leo remembered having written down the address on a slip of paper after he had read Salzman's advertisement in the "personals" column of the Forward. He ran up to his room and tore through his papers, without luck. It was exasperating. Just when he needed the matchmaker he was nowhere to be found. Fortunately, Leo remembered to look in his wallet. There on a card he found his name written and a Bronx address. No phone number was listed, the reason—Leo now recalled—he had originally communicated with Salzman by letter. He got on his coat, put a hat on over his skullcap, and hurried to the subway station. All the way to the far end of the Bronx he sat on the edge of his seat. He was more than once tempted to take out the picture and see if the girl's face was as he remembered, but he refrained, allowing the snapshot to remain in his inside coat pocket, content to have her so close. When the train pulled into the station he was waiting at the door and bolted out. He quickly located the street Salzman had advertised.

The building he sought was less than a block from the subway, but it was not an office building, nor even a loft, nor a store in which one could rent office space. It was a very old tenement house. Leo found Salzman's name in pencil on a soiled tag under the bell and climbed three dark flights to his apartment. When he knocked, the door was opened by a thin, asthmatic, gray-haired woman, in felt slippers.

"Yes?" she said, expecting nothing. She listened without listening. He could have sworn he had seen her, too, before but knew it was an illusion.

"Salzman— does he live here? Pinye Salzman," he said, "the matchmaker?" She stared at him a long minute.

"Of course."

He felt embarrassed. "Is he in?"

"No." Her mouth, though left open, offered nothing more.

"The matter is urgent. Can you tell me where his office is?"

"In the air." She pointed upward.

"You mean he has no office?" Leo asked.

"In his socks."

He peered into the apartment. It was sunless and dingy, one large room divided by a half-open curtain, beyond which he could see a sagging metal bed. The near side of the room was crowded with rickety chairs, old bureaus, a three-legged table, racks of cooking utensils, and all the apparatus of a kitchen. But there was no sign of Salzman or his magic barrel, probably also a figment of the imagination. An odor of frying fish made Leo weak to the knees.

"Where is he?" he insisted. "I've got to see your husband." At length she answered, "So who knows where he is? Every time he thinks a new thought he runs to a different place. Go home, he will find you."

"Tell him Leo Finkle."

She gave no sign she had heard.

He walked downstairs, depressed.

But Salzman, breathless, stood waiting at his door.

Leo was astounded and overjoyed. "How did you get here before me?"

"I rushed."

"Come inside."

They entered. Leo fixed tea, and a sardine sandwich for Salzman. As they were drinking, he reached behind him for the packet of pictures and handed them to the marriage broker.

Salzman put down his glass and said expectantly, "You found somebody you like?"

"Not among these." The marriage broker turned away. "Here is the one I want." Leo held forth the snapshot. Salzman slipped on his glasses and took the picture into his trembling hand. He turned ghastly and let out a groan.

"What's the matter?" cried Leo.

"Excuse me. Was an accident this picture. She isn't for you."

Salzman frantically shoved the manila packet into his portfolio. He thrust the snapshot into his pocket and fled down the stairs.

Leo, after momentary paralysis, gave chase and cornered the marriage broker in the vestibule. The landlady made hysterical outcries but neither of them listened.

"Give me back the picture, Salzman."

"No." The pain in his eyes was terrible.

"Tell me who she is then."

"This I can't tell you. Excuse me."

He made to depart, but Leo, forgetting himself, seized the matchmaker by his tight coat and shook him frenziedly.

"Please," sighed Salzman. "Please."

Leo ashamedly let him go. "Tell me who she is," he begged. "It's very important for me to know."

"She is not for you. She is a wild one – wild, without shame. This is not a bride for a rabbi."

"What do you mean wild?"

"Like an animal. Like a dog. For her to be poor was a sin. This is why to me she is dead now."

"In God's name, what do you mean?"

"Her I can't introduce to you," Salzman cried.

"Why are you so excited?"

"Why, he asks," Salzman said, bursting into tears. "This is my baby, my Stella, she should burn in hell."

Leo hurried up to bed and hid under the covers. Under the covers he thought his life through. Although he soon fell asleep, he could not sleep her out of his mind. He woke, beating his breast. Though he prayed to be rid of her, his prayers went unanswered. Through days of torment, he endlessly struggled not to love her; fearing success, he escaped it. He then concluded to convert her to goodness, himself to God. The idea alternately nauseated and exalted him.

He perhaps did not know that he had come to a final decision until he encountered Salzman in a Broadway cafeteria. He was sitting alone at a rear table, sucking the bony

remains of a fish. The marriage broker appeared haggard, and transparent to the point of vanishing.

Salzman looked up at first without recognizing him. Leo had grown a pointed beard and his eyes were weighted with wisdom.

"Salzman," he said, "love has at last come to my heart."

"Who can love from a picture?" mocked the marriage broker.

"It is not impossible."

"If you can love her, then you can love anybody. Let me show you some new clients that they just sent me their photographs. One is a little doll."

"Just her I want," Leo murmured.

"Don't be a fool, doctor. Don't bother with her."

"Put me in touch with her, Salzman," Leo said humbly. "Perhaps I can be of service."

Salzman had stopped eating and Leo understood with emotion that it was now arranged.

Leaving the cafeteria, he was, however, afflicted by a tormenting suspicion that Salzman had planned it all to happen this way.

Leo was informed by letter that she would meet him on a certain corner, and she was there one spring night, waiting under a street lamp. He appeared, carrying a small bouquet of violets and rosebuds. Stella stood by the lamppost, smoking. She wore white with red shoes, which fitted his expectations, although in a troubled moment he had imagined the dress red, and only the shoes white. She waited uneasily and shyly. From afar he saw that her eyes—clearly her father's—were filled with desperate innocence. He pictured, in her, his own redemption. Violins and lit candles revolved in the sky. Leo ran forward with flowers outthrust.

Around the corner, Salzman, leaning against a wall, chanted prayers for the dead.

Story 3. THE TOXIC DONUT by Terry Bisson



I, I'M RON, the Host's Chief Administrative Assistant, but you can just call me Ron.

Let me begin, at the risk of seeming weird, by saying congratulations.

Of course I know. I've been doing this show every year for six years; how could I not know? But look at it this way, Kim—do you mind if I call you Kim? You have been chosen to represent all humanity for one evening. All the birds and beasts too. The worms and the butterflies. The fishes of the sea. The lilies of the field. You are, for one half hour tonight, the representative of all life on the planet. Hell, all life in the Universe, as far as we know. That calls for congratulations, doesn't it? You have a right to be proud. And your family, too.

Did you, I mean do you have a family? How nice. Well, we all know what they'll be watching tonight, don't we? Of course, I know, everybody watches it anyway. More than watch the Academy Awards. Eight to ten points more. A point is about thirteen million people these days, did you know that?

Okay. Anyway. Have you ever been on TV before? "Long shot at a ball game" — that's good. I loved Bill Murray too. God rest his soul. Anyway. Okay. TV is ninety-nine percent preparation, especially live TV. So if you'll walk over here with me, let's take this opportunity to run through the steps for our lighting people, as well as yourself; so you will be able to concentrate on the Event itself.

After all, it's your night.

Watch your step. Lots of wires.

Okay. We call this Stage Left. At 8:59, one minute to Airtime, one of the Girls will bring you out. Over there, in the little green outfits. What? Since you're a woman it should be guys in bikinis? I get it, a joke. You have quite a sense of humor, Kim.

Do you mind if I call you Kim?

Right, we did.

Anyway. Okay. You'll stand here. Toes on that mark. Don't worry, the cameras won't linger on you, not yet. You'll just be part of the scene at the beginning. There will be one song from the International Children's Rainbow Chorus. "Here Comes the Sun," I think. All you have to do is stand here and look pretty. Dignified, then. Whatever. You're the first woman in two years, by the way; the last two Consumers were men.

I don't know why, Consumers is just what we call them; I mean, call you. What would you want us to call you?

That's another joke, right? Whatever.

Okay. Anyway. Song ends, it's 9:07. Some business with the lights and the Host comes on. I don't need to tell you there'll be applause. He walks straight up to you, and – kiss or handshake? Suit yourself. After the handshake, a little small talk. Where you're from, job, etc. Where are you from, by the way? How nice.

I didn't know they spoke English, but then it was British for years, wasn't it?

Anyway. Okay. Don't worry about what to say; the Host has been briefed on your background, and he'll ask a question or two. Short and sweet, sort of like Jeopardy.

To meet him? Well – of course – maybe – tonight right before the show, if time allows. But you have to understand, Mr. Crystal's a very busy man, Kim.

Do you mind if I call you Kim? Right, we did. I remember. Sorry.

Okay. Anyway. A little ad-lib and it's 9:10. I have it all here on my clipboard, see? To the minute. At 9:10 there's some business with the lights, then the Girls bring out the Presidents of the Common Market, the African Federation, the Americas, Pacific Rim, etc. Five gentlemen, one of them a lady this year, I believe. There's a brief statement; nothing elaborate. "Your great courage, protecting our way of life" sort of thing. A few words on how the Lottery works, since this was the first-year people were allowed to buy tickets for others.

I'm sorry you feel that way. I'm sure voluntary would be better. But somebody must have bought you a ticket; that's the way it works.

Anyway. Okay. Where were we? 9:13, the Presidents. They have a plaque that goes to your family after. Don't take it; it's just to look at. Then a kiss; right, handshake. Sorry. I'll make a note of it. Then they're out of here, Stage Right. Don't worry, the Girls manage all the traffic.

Okay. 9:14, lights down, then up on the Native People's presentation. You're still standing here, Stage Left, watching them, of course. You might even like it. Three women and three men, clickers and drums and stuff. While the women dance, the men chant. "Science, once our enemy, now our brother" sort of thing. You'll feel something on the back of your neck; that's the wind machine. They finish at 9:17, cross to here, give you a kind of bark scroll. Take it but don't try to unroll it. It's 9:18 and they're out of here, Stage Left. That's the end of the –

What? No, the corporations themselves don't make a presentation. They want to keep a very low profile.

Anyway. Okay. 9:19 and that's the end of the warm-up, as we call it. The Host comes back out, and you walk with him – here, let's try it – across to Center Stage. He'll help you stay in the spotlight. He admires the scroll, makes a joke, ad-lib stuff; don't worry about it. He's done it every year now for six years and never flubbed yet.

There won't be so many wires underfoot tonight.

Okay. It's 9:20. You're at Center Stage, toes here. That's it, right on the mark. There's more business with the lights, and the Host introduces the President of the International Institute of Environmental Sciences, who comes out from Stage Left. With the Donut. We don't see it, of course. It's in a white paper sack. He sets it here, on the podium in front of you.

He stands out there, those green marks are his — we call him the Green Meany — and gives his Evils of Science rap, starting at 9:22. "For centuries, poisoned the Earth, fouled the air, polluted the waters, etc., etc." It's the same rap as last year but different, if you know what I mean. A video goes with it; what we call the sad video. You don't have to watch if you don't want to, just look concerned, alarmed, whatever. I mean it all really happened! Dead rivers, dead birds, dioxins. Two minutes' worth.

Okay. Anyway. It's 9:24, and he starts what we call the glad video. Blue sky, birds, bears, etc. Gives the Wonders of Science rap where he explains how they have managed to collect and contain all the year's toxic wastes, pollutants, etc., and keep them out of the environment —

How? I don't know exactly. I never listen to the technical part. Some kind of submolecular-nano-mini-mumbo-jumbo. But he explains it all, I'm pretty sure. I think there's even a diagram. Anyway, he explains how all the toxic wastes for the year have been collected and concentrated into a single Donut. The fiscal year, by the way. That's why the Ceremony is tonight and not New Year's Eve. Okay. Anyway. Hands you the bag.

Exits Stage Right, 9:27. Now it's just you and the Host, and of course, the Donut, still in the bag.

It might be a little greasy. You can hold it at the top if you want to. Whatever.

Anyway. Okay. 9:28. You'll hear a drumroll. It might sound corny now but it won't sound corny then. I know because I've been here every year for six years, standing right over there in the wings, and I get a tear in my eye every time. Every damn time. The camera pulls in close. This is your moment. You reach in the bag and —

Huh? It looks like any other donut. I'm sure it'll be glazed, if that's what you requested.

Okay. Anyway. 9:29, but don't worry about the time. This is your moment. Our moment, really, everybody in the world who cares about the environment, and these days that includes everybody. You reach in the bag, you pull out the Donut —

What happens next? I get it, still joking. I admire somebody with your sense of humor. Kim.

Anyway. Okay. We all know what happens next.

You eat it.

Story 4. THEY'RE MADE OUT OF MEAT by Terry Bisson



THEY'RE MADE OUT OF MEAT.

"Meat?"

"Meat. They're made out of meat."

"Meat?"

"There's no doubt about it. We picked up several from different parts of the planet, took them aboard our recon vessels, and probed them all the way through. They're completely meat."

"That's impossible. What about the radio signals? The messages to the stars?"

"They use the radio waves to talk, but the signals don't come from them. The signals come from machines."

"So, who made the machines? That's who we want to contact."

"They made the machines. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Meat made the machines."

"That's ridiculous. How can meat make a machine? You're asking me to believe in sentient meat."

"I'm not asking you, I'm telling you. These creatures are the only sentient race in that sector and they're made out of meat."

"Maybe they're like the orfolei. You know, a carbon-based intelligence that goes through a meat stage." "Nope. They're born meat and they die meat. We studied them for several of their life spans, which didn't take long. Do you have any idea what's the life span of meat?"

"Spare me. Okay, maybe they're only part meat. You know, like the weddilei. A meat head with an electron plasma brain inside."

"Nope. We thought of that, since they do have meat heads, like the weddilei. But I told you, we probed them. They're meat all the way through."

"No brain?"

"Oh, there's a brain all right. It's just that the brain is made out of meat! That's what I've been trying to tell you."

"So . . . what does the thinking?"

"You're not understanding, are you? You're refusing to deal with what I'm telling you. The brain does the thinking. The meat."

"Thinking meat! You're asking me to believe in thinking meat!"

"Yes, thinking meat! Conscious meat! Loving meat. Dreaming meat. The meat is the whole deal! Are you beginning to get the picture or do I have to start all over?"

"Omigod. You're serious then. They're made out of meat."

"Thank you. Finally. Yes. They are indeed made out of meat. And they've been trying to get in touch with us for almost a hundred of their years."

"Omigod. So, what does this meat have in mind?"

"First it wants to talk to us. Then I imagine it wants to explore the Universe, contact other sentiences, swap ideas and information. The usual."

"We're supposed to talk to meat." "That's the idea. That's the message they're sending out by radio. 'Hello. Anyone out there? Anybody home?' That sort of thing."

"They actually do talk, then. They use words, ideas, concepts?"

"Oh, yes. Except they do it with meat."

"I thought you just told me they used radio."

"They do, but what do you think is on the radio? Meat sounds. You know how when you slap or flap meat, it makes a noise? They talk by flapping their meat at each other. They can even sing by squirting air through their meat."

"Omigod. Singing meat. This is altogether too much. So what do you advise?"

"Officially or unofficially?"

"Both."

"Officially, we are required to contact, welcome, and log in any and all sentient races or multibeings in this quadrant of the Universe, without prejudice, fear, or favor. Unofficially, I advise that we erase the records and forget the whole thing."

"I was hoping you would say that."

"It seems harsh, but there is a limit. Do we really want to make contact with meat?"

"I agree one hundred percent. What's there to say? 'Hello, meat. How's it going?' But will this work? How many planets are we dealing with here?"

"Just one. They can travel to other planets in special meat containers, but they can't live on them. And being meat, they can only travel through C space. Which limits them to the speed of light and makes the possibility of their ever making contact pretty slim. Infinitesimal, in fact."

"So, we just pretend there's no one home in the Universe."

"That's it."

"Cruel. But you said it yourself, who wants to meet meat? And the ones who have been aboard our vessels, the ones you probed? You're sure they won't remember?"

"They'll be considered crackpots if they do. We went into their heads and smoothed out their meat so that we're just a dream to them."

"A dream to meat! How strangely appropriate, that we should be meat's dream."

"And we marked the entire sector unoccupied."

"Good. Agreed, officially and unofficially. Case closed. Any others? Anyone interesting on that side of the galaxy?"

"Yes, a rather shy but sweet hydrogen-core cluster intelligence in a class-nine star in G445 zone was in contact two galactic rotations ago, wants to be friendly again."

"They always come around."

"And why not? Imagine how unbearably, how unutterably cold the Universe would be if one were all alone . . ."

CHAPTER 2.

Story 1. JANUS by Ann Beattie



THE BOWL WAS PERFECT. Perhaps it was not what you'd select if you faced a shelf of bowls, and not the sort of thing that would inevitably attract a lot of attention at a crafts fair, yet it had real presence. It was as predictably admired as a mutt who has no reason to suspect he might be funny. Just such a dog, in fact, was often brought out (and in) along with the bowl.

Andrea was a real estate agent, and when she thought that some prospective buyers might be dog lovers, she would drop off her dog at the same time she placed the bowl in the house that was up for sale. She would put a dish of water in the kitchen for Mondo, take his squeaking plastic frog out of her purse and drop it on the floor. He would pounce delightedly, just as he did every day at home, batting around his favorite toy. The bowl usually sat on a coffee table, though recently she had displayed it on top of a pine blanket chest and on a lacquered table. It was once placed on a cherry table beneath a Bonnard still life, where it held its own.

Everyone who has purchased a house or who has wanted to sell a house must be familiar with some of the tricks used to convince a buyer that the house is quite special: a fire in the fireplace in early evening; jonquils in a pitcher on the kitchen counter, where no one ordinarily has space to put flowers; perhaps the slight aroma of spring, made by a single drop of scent vaporizing from a lamp bulb.

The wonderful thing about the bowl, Andrea thought, was that it was both subtle and noticeable — a paradox of a bowl. Its glaze was the color of cream and seemed to glow no matter what light it was placed in. There were a few bits of color in it — tiny geometric flashes — and some of these were tinged with flecks of silver. They were as mysterious as cells seen under a microscope; it was difficult not to study them, because they shimmered, flashing for a split second, and then resumed their shape. Something about the colors and their random placement suggested motion. People who liked country furniture always commented on the bowl, but then it turned out that people who felt comfortable with Biedermeier loved it just as much. But the bowl was not at all ostentatious, or even so noticeable that anyone would suspect that it had been put in place deliberately. They might notice the height of the ceiling on first entering a room, and only when their eye moved down from that, or away from the refraction of sunlight on a pale wall, would they see the bowl. Then they would go immediately to it and comment. Yet they always faltered when they tried to say something. Perhaps it was because they were in the house for a serious reason, not to notice some object.

Once, Andrea got a call from a woman who had not put in an offer on a house she had shown her. That bowl, she said — would it be possible to find out where the owners had bought that beautiful bowl? Andrea pretended that she did not know what

the woman was referring to. A bowl, somewhere in the house? Oh, on a table under the window. Yes, she would ask, of course. She let a couple of days pass, then called back to say that the bowl had been a present and the people did not know where it had been purchased.

When the bowl was not being taken from house to house, it sat on Andrea's coffee table at home. She didn't keep it carefully wrapped (although she transported it that way, in a box); she kept it on the table, because she liked to see it. It was large enough so that it didn't seem fragile, or particularly vulnerable if anyone sideswiped the table or Mondo blundered into it at play. She had asked her husband to please not drop his house key in it. It was meant to be empty.

When her husband first noticed the bowl, he had peered into it and smiled briefly. He always urged her to buy things she liked. In recent years, both of them had acquired many things to make up for all the lean years when they were graduate students, but now that they had been comfortable for quite a while, the pleasure of new possessions dwindled. Her husband had pronounced the bowl "pretty," and he had turned away without picking it up to examine it. He had no more interest in the bowl than she had in his new Leica.

She was sure that the bowl brought her luck. Bids were often put in on houses where she had displayed the bowl. Sometimes the owners, who were always asked to be away or to step outside when the house was being shown, didn't even know that the bowl had been in their house. Once — she could not imagine how — she left it behind, and then she was so afraid that something might have happened to it that she rushed back to the house and sighed with relief when the woman owner opened the door. The bowl, Andrea explained — she had purchased a bowl and set it on the chest for safekeeping while she toured the house with the prospective buyers, and she ... She felt like rushing past the frowning woman and seizing her bowl. The owner stepped aside, and it was only when Andrea ran to the chest that the lady glanced at her a little strangely. In the few seconds before Andrea picked up the bowl, she realized that the owner must have just seen that it had been perfectly placed, that the sunlight struck the bluer part of it. Her pitcher had been moved to the far side of the chest, and the bowl predominated. All the way home, Andrea wondered how she could have left the bowl behind. It was like leaving a friend at an outing — just walking off. Sometimes there were stories in the paper about families forgetting a child somewhere and driving to the next city. Andrea had only gone a mile down the road before she remembered.

In time, she dreamed of the bowl. Twice, in a waking dream — early in the morning, between sleep and a last nap before rising — she had a clear vision of it. It came into sharp focus and startled her for a moment — the same bowl she looked at every day.

She had a very profitable year selling real estate. Word spread, and she had more clients than she felt comfortable with. She had the foolish thought that if only the bowl were an animate object she could thank it. There were times when she wanted to talk

to her husband about the bowl. He was a stockbroker, and sometimes told people that he was fortunate to be married to a woman who had such a fine aesthetic sense and yet could also function in the real world. They were a lot alike, really — they had agreed on that. They were both quiet people — reflective, slow to make value judgments, but almost intractable once they had come to a conclusion. They both liked details, but while ironies attracted her, he was more impatient and dismissive when matters became many sided or unclear. But they both knew this; it was the kind of thing they could talk about when they were alone in the car together, coming home from a party or after a weekend with friends. But she never talked to him about the bowl. When they were at dinner, exchanging their news of the day, or while they lay in bed at night listening to the stereo and murmuring sleepy disconnections, she was often tempted to come right out and say that she thought that the bowl in the living room, the cream-colored bowl, was responsible for her success. But she didn't say it. She couldn't begin to explain it. Sometimes in the morning, she would look at him and feel guilty that she had such a constant secret.

Could it be that she had some deeper connection with the bowl — a relationship of some kind? She corrected her thinking: how could she imagine such a thing, when she was a human being and it was a bowl? It was ridiculous. Just think of how people lived together and loved each other . . . But was that always so clear, always a relationship? She was confused by these thoughts, but they remained in her mind. There was something within her now, something real, that she never talked about.

The bowl was a mystery, even to her. It was frustrating, because her involvement with the bowl contained a steady sense of unrequited good fortune; it would have been easier to respond if some sort of demand were made in return. But that only happened in fairy tales. The bowl was just a bowl. She did not believe that for one second. What she believed was that it was something she loved.

In the past, she had sometimes talked to her husband about a new property she was about to buy or sell — confiding some clever strategy she had devised to persuade owners who seemed ready to sell. Now she stopped doing that, for all her strategies involved the bowl. She became more deliberate with the bowl, and more possessive. She put it in houses only when no one was there, and removed it when she left the house. Instead of just moving a pitcher or a dish, she would remove all the other objects from a table. She had to force herself to handle them carefully, because she didn't really care about them. She just wanted them out of sight.

She wondered how the situation would end. As with a lover, there was no exact scenario of how matters would come to a close. Anxiety became the operative force. It would be irrelevant if the lover rushed into someone else's arms, or wrote her a note and departed to another city. The horror was the possibility of the disappearance. That was what mattered.

She would get up at night and look at the bowl. It never occurred to her that she might break it. She washed and dried it without anxiety, and she moved it often, from coffee

table to mahogany corner table or wherever, without fearing an accident. It was clear that she would not be the one who would do anything to the bowl. The bowl was only handled by her, set safely on one surface or another; it was not very likely that anyone would break it. A bowl was a poor conductor of electricity: it would not be hit by lightning. Yet the idea of damage persisted. She did not think beyond that — to what her life would be without the bowl. She only continued to fear that some accident would happen. Why not, in a world where people set plants where they did not belong, so that visitors touring a house would be fooled into thinking that dark corners got sunlight — a world full of tricks?

She had first seen the bowl several years earlier, at a crafts fair she had visited half in secret, with her lover. He had urged her to buy the bowl. She didn't need any more things, she told him. But she had been drawn to the bowl, and they had lingered near it. Then she went on to the next booth, and he came up behind her, tapping the rim against her shoulder as she ran her fingers over a wood carving. "You're still insisting that I buy that?" she said. "No," he said. "I bought it for you." He had bought her other things before this — things she liked more, at first — the child's ebony-and-turquoise ring that fitted her little finger; the wooden box, long and thin, beautifully dovetailed, that she used to hold paper clips; the soft gray sweater with a pouch pocket. It was his idea that when he could not be there to hold her hand she could hold her own — clasp her hands inside the lone pocket that stretched across the front. But in time she became more attached to the bowl than to any of his other presents. She tried to talk herself out of it. She owned other things that were more striking or valuable. It wasn't an object whose beauty jumped out at you; a lot of people must have passed it by before the two of them saw it that day.

Her lover had said that she was always too slow to know what she really loved. Why continue with her life the way it was? Why be twofaced, he asked her. He had made the first move toward her. When she would not decide in his favor, would not change her life and come to him, he asked her what made her think she could have it both ways. And then he made the last move and left. It was a decision meant to break her will, to shatter her intransigent ideas about honoring previous commitments. Time passed. Alone in the living room at night, she often looked at the bowl sitting on the table, still and safe, unilluminated. In its way, it was perfect: the world cut in half, deep and smoothly empty. Near the rim, even in dim light, the eye moved toward one small flash of blue, a vanishing point on the horizon.

Story 2. THE VELDT by Ray Bradbury



"George, I wish you'd look at the nursery."

"What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, then."

"I just want you to look at it, is all, or call a psychologist in to look at it."

"What would a psychologist want with a nursery?"

"You know very well what he'd want."

His wife paused in the middle of the kitchen and watched the stove busy humming to itself, making supper for four.

"It's just that the nursery is different now than it was."

"All right, let's have a look."

They walked down the hall of their soundproofed Happy life Home, which had cost them thirty thousand dollars installed, this house which clothed and fed and rocked them to sleep and played and sang and was good to them. Their approach sensitized a switch somewhere and the nursery light flicked on when they came within ten feet of it. Similarly, behind them, in the halls, lights went on and off as they left them behind, with a soft automaticity.

"Well," said George Hadley.

They stood on the thatched floor of the nursery. It was forty feet across by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house.

"But nothing's too good for our children," George had said.

The nursery was silent. It was empty as a jungle glade at hot high noon. The walls were blank and two dimensional. Now, as George and Lydia Hadley stood in the center of the room, the walls began to purr and recede into crystalline distance, it seemed, and presently an African veldt appeared, in three dimensions, on all sides, in color reproduced to the final pebble and bit of straw. The ceiling above them became a deep sky with a hot yellow sun. George Hadley felt the perspiration start on his brow.

"Let's get out of this sun," he said. "This is a little too real. But I don't see anything wrong."

"Wait a moment, you'll see," said his wife.

Now the hidden odorophonics were beginning to blow a wind of odor at the two people in the middle of the baked veldtland . The hot straw smell of liongrass, the cool green smell of the hidden water hole, the great rusty smell of animals, the smell of dust like a red paprika in the hot air. And now the sounds: the thump of distant antelope feet on grassy sod, the papery rustling of vultures. A shadow passed through the sky. The shadow flickered on George Hadley's upturned, sweating face.

"Filthy creatures," he heard his wife say.

"The vultures."

"You see, there are the lions, far over, that way. Now they're on their way to the water hole. They've just been eating," said Lydia . "I don't know what."

"Some animal."

George Hadley put his hand up to shield off the burning light from his squinted eyes.

"A zebra or a baby giraffe, maybe."

"Are you sure?" His wife sounded peculiarly tense.

"No, it's a little late to be sure," he said, amused. "Nothing over there I can see but cleaned bone, and the vultures dropping for what's left."

"Did you bear that scream?" she asked.

"No."

"About a minute ago?"

"Sorry, no."

The lions were coming. And again George Hadley was filled with admiration for the mechanical genius who had conceived this room. A miracle of efficiency selling for an absurdly low price. Every home should have one. Oh, occasionally they frightened you with their clinical accuracy, they startled you, gave you a twinge, but most of the time what fun for everyone, not only your own son and daughter, but for yourself when you felt like a quick jaunt to a foreign land, a quick change of scenery. Well, here it was! And here were the lions now, fifteen feet away, so real, so feverishly and startlingly real that you could feel the prickling fur on your hand, and your mouth was stuffed with the dusty upholstery smell of their heated pelts, and the yellow of them was in your eyes like the yellow of an exquisite French tapestry, the yellows of lions and summer grass, and the sound of the matted lion lungs exhaling on the silent noontide, and the smell of meat from the panting, dripping mouths. The lions stood looking at George and Lydia Hadley with terrible green-yelloweyes.

"Watch out!" screamed Lydia.

The lions came running at them. Lydia bolted and ran. Instinctively, George sprang after her. Outside, in the hall, with the door slammed he was laughing and she was crying, and they both stood appalled at the other's reaction.

"George!"

"Lydia! , my dear poor sweet Lydia!"

"They almost got us!"

"Walls, Lydia, remember; crystal walls , that's all they are. Oh, they look real, I must admit -Africa in your parlor - but it's all dimensional, superreactionary, supersensitive color film and mental tape film behind glass screens. It's all odorophonics and sonics, Lydia. Here's my handkerchief."

"I'm afraid." She came to him and put her body against him and cried steadily.

"Did you see? Did you feel? It's too real."

"Now, Lydia ..."

"You've got to tell Wendy and Peter not to read any more on Africa ."

"Of course - of course." He patted her.

"Promise?"

"Sure."

"And lock the nursery for a few days until I get my nerves settled."

"You know how difficult Peter is about that. When I punished him a month ago by locking the nursery for even a few hours - the tantrum he threw! And Wendy too. They live for the nursery."

"It's got to be locked, that's all there is to it."

"All right."

Reluctantly he locked the huge door. "You've been working too hard. You need a rest."

"I don't know - I don't know," she said, blowing her nose, sitting down in a chair that immediately began to rock and comfort her. "Maybe I don't have enough to do. Maybe I have time to think too much. Why don't we shut the whole house off for a few days and take a vacation?"

"You mean you want to fry my eggs for me?"

"Yes." She nodded.

"And darn my socks?"

"Yes." A frantic, watery-eyed nodding.

"And sweep the house?"

"Yes, yes - oh, yes!"

"But I thought that's why we bought this house, so we wouldn't have to do anything?"

"That's just it. I feel like I don't belong here. The house is wife and mother now, and nursemaid. Can I compete with an African veldt? Can I give a bath and scrub the children as efficiently or quickly as the automatic scrub bath can? I cannot. And it isn't just me. It's you. You've been awfully nervous lately."

"I suppose I have been smoking too much."

"You look as if you didn't know what to do with yourself in this house, either. You smoke a little more every morning and drink a little more every afternoon and need a little more sedative every night. You're beginning to feel unnecessary too."

"Am I?" He paused and tried to feel into himself to see what was really there.

"Oh, George!" She looked beyond him, at the nursery door. "Those lions can't get out of there, can they?" He looked at the door and saw it tremble as if something had jumped against it from the other side.

"Of course not," he said.

At dinner they ate alone, for Wendy and Peter were at a special plastic carnival across town and had televised home to say they'd be late, to go ahead eating. So George Hadley, bemused, sat watching the dining-room table produce warm dishes of food from its mechanical interior.

"We forgot the ketchup," he said.

"Sorry," said a small voice within the table, and ketchup appeared.

As for the nursery, thought George Hadley, it won't hurt for the children to be locked out of it awhile. Too much of anything isn't good for anyone. And it was clearly indicated that the children had been spending a little too much time on Africa. That sun. He could feel it on his neck, still, like a hot paw. And the lions. And the smell of blood. Remarkable how the nursery caught the telepathic emanations of the children's minds and created life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there were lions. The children thought zebras, and there were zebras. Sun - sun. Giraffes - giraffes. Death and death. That last. He chewed tastelessly on the meat that the table had cut for him. Death thoughts. They were awfully young, Wendy and Peter, for death thoughts. Or, no, you were never too young, really. Long before you knew what death was you were wishing it on someone else. When you were two years old you were shooting people with cap pistols. But this - the long, hot African veldt-the awful death in the jaws of a lion. And repeated again and again.

"Where are you going?"

He didn't answer Lydia . Preoccupied, he let the lights glow softly on ahead of him, extinguish behind him as he padded to the nursery door. He listened against it. Far away, a lion roared. He unlocked the door and opened it. Just before he stepped inside, he heard a faraway scream. And then another roar from the lions, which subsided quickly. He stepped into Africa .How many times in the last year had he opened this door and found Wonderland, Alice, the Mock Turtle, or Aladdin and his Magical Lamp, or Jack Pumpkinhead of Oz, or Dr. Doolittle, or the cow jumping over a very real-appearing moon-all the delightful contraptions of a make-believe world. How often had he seen Pegasus flying in the sky ceiling, or seen fountains of red fireworks, or heard angel voices singing. But now, is yellow hot Africa , this bake oven with murder in the heat. Perhaps Lydia was right. Perhaps they needed a little vacation from the fantasy which was growing a bit too real for ten-year-old children. It was all right to exercise one's mind with gymnastic fantasies, but when the lively child mind settled on one pattern... ?

It seemed that, at a distance, for the past month, he had heard lions roaring, and smelled their strong odor seeping as faraway as his study door. But, being busy, he had paid it no attention. George Hadley stood on the African grassland alone. The lions looked up from their feeding, watching him. The only flaw to the illusion was the open door through which he could see his wife, far down the dark hall, like a framed picture, eating her dinner abstractedly.

"Go away," he said to the lions. They did not go. He knew the principle of the room exactly. You sent out your thoughts. Whatever you thought would appear.

"Let's have Aladdin and his lamp," he snapped. The veldtland remained; the lions remained.

"Come on, room! I demand Aladin !" he said. Nothing happened. The lions mumbled in their baked pelts. " Aladin!" He went back to dinner.

"The fool room's out of order," he said. "It won't respond." "Or--" "Or what?"

"Or it can't respond," said Lydia , "because the children have thought about Africa and lions and killing so many days that the room's in a rut."

"Could be."

"Or Peter's set it to remain that way."

"Set it?"

"He may have got into the machinery and fixed something."

"Peter doesn't know machinery."

"He's a wise one for ten. That I.Q. of his -"

"Nevertheless -"

"Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad."

The Hadleys turned. Wendy and Peter were coming in the front door, cheeks like peppermint candy, eyes like bright blue agate marbles, a smell of ozone on their jumpers from their trip in the helicopter.

"You're just in time for supper," said both parents.

"We're full of strawberry ice cream and hot dogs," said the children, holding hands.

"But we'll sit and watch."

"Yes, come tell us about the nursery," said George Hadley.

The brother and sister blinked at him and then at each other.

"Nursery?" "All about Africa and everything," said the father with false joviality.

"I don't understand," said Peter.

"Your mother and I were just traveling through Africa with rod and reel; Tom Swift and his Electric Lion," said George Hadley.

"There's no Africa in the nursery," said Peter simply.

"Oh, come now, Peter. We know better."

"I don't remember any Africa," said Peter to Wendy. "Do you?"

"No."

"Run see and come tell." She obeyed.

"Wendy, come back here!" said George Hadley, but she was gone.

The house lights followed her like a flock of fireflies. Too late, he realized he had forgotten to lock the nursery door after his last inspection.

"Wendy'll look and come tell us," said Peter.

"She doesn't have to tell me. I've seen it."

"I'm sure you're mistaken, Father."

"I'm not, Peter. Come along now." But Wendy was back.

"It's not Africa," she said breathlessly.

"We'll see about this," said George Hadley, and they all walked down the hall together and opened the nursery door.

There was a green, lovely forest, a lovely river, a purple mountain, high voices singing, and Rima, lovely and mysterious, lurking in the trees with colorful flights of butterflies, like animated bouquets, lingering in her long hair. The African veldtland

was gone. The lions were gone. Only Rima was here now, singing a song so beautiful that it brought tears to your eyes. George Hadley looked in at the changed scene.

"Go to bed," he said to the children. They opened their mouths.

"You heard me," he said.

They went off to the air closet, where a wind sucked them like brown leaves up the flue to their slumber rooms. George Hadley walked through the singing glade and picked up something that lay in the corner near where the lions had been. He walked slowly back to his wife.

"What is that?" she asked.

"An old wallet of mine," he said. He showed it to her. The smell of hot grass was on it and the smell of a lion. There were drops of saliva on it, it had been chewed, and there were blood smears on both sides. He closed the nursery door and locked it, tight. In the middle of the night, he was still awake and he knew his wife was awake.

"Do you think Wendy changed it?" she said at last, in the dark room.

"Of course."

"Made it from a veldt into a forest and put Rima there instead of lions?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But it's staying locked until I find out."

"How did your wallet get there?"

"I don't know anything," he said, "except that I'm beginning to be sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are neurotic at all, a room like that -"

"It's supposed to help them work off their neuroses in a healthful way."

"I'm starting to wonder." He stared at the ceiling. "We've given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our reward-secrecy, disobedience?" "Who was it said, 'Children are carpets, they should be stepped on occasionally'? We've never lifted a hand. They're insufferable - let's admit. They come and go when they like; they treat us as if we were offspring. They're spoiled and we're spoiled."

"They've been acting funny ever since you forbade them to take the rocket to New York a few months ago."

"They're not old enough to do that alone, I explained."

"Nevertheless, I've noticed they've been decidedly cool toward us since."

"I think I'll have David McClean come tomorrow morning to have a look at Africa."

"But it's not Africa now, it's Green Mansions country and Rima."

"I have a feeling it'll be Africa again before then."

A moment later they heard the screams. Two screams. Two people screaming from downstairs. And then a roar of lions.

"Wendy and Peter aren't in their rooms," said his wife.

He lay in his bed with his beating heart.

"No," he said.

"They've broken into the nursery."

"Those screams - they sound familiar."

"Do they?"

"Yes, awfully."

And although their beds tried very hard, the two adults couldn't be rocked to sleep for another hour. A smell of cats was in the night air.

"Father?" said Peter.

"Yes."

Peter looked at his shoes. He never looked at his father any more, nor at his mother.

"You aren't going to lock up the nursery for good, are you?"

"That all depends."

"On what?" snapped Peter.

"On you and your sister. If you intersperse this Africa with a little variety- oh, Sweden perhaps, or Denmark or China -"

"I thought we were free to play as we wished."

"You are, within reasonable bounds."

"What's wrong with Africa, Father?"

"Oh, so now you admit you have been conjuring up Africa, do you?"

"I wouldn't want the nursery locked up," said Peter coldly. "Ever."

"Matter of fact, we're thinking of turning the whole house off for about a month. Live sort of a carefree one-for-all existence."

"That sounds dreadful! Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of letting the shoemaker do it? And brush my own teeth and comb my hair and give myself a bath?"

"It would be fun for a change, don't you think?"

"No, it would be horrid. I didn't like it when you took out the picture painter last month."

"That's because I wanted you to learn to paint all by yourself, son."

"I don't want to do anything but look and listen and smell ; what else is there to do?"

"All right, go play in Africa."

"Will you shut off the house sometime soon?"

"We're considering it."

"I don't think you'd better consider it any more, Father."

"I won't have any threats from my son!"

"Very well." And Peter strolled off to the nursery.

"Am I on time?" said David McClean .

"Breakfast?" asked George Hadley.

"Thanks, had some. What's the trouble?"

"David, you're a psychologist."

"I should hope so."

"Well, then, have a look at our nursery. You saw it a year ago when you dropped by; did you notice anything peculiar about it then?"

"Can't say I did; the usual violences , a tendency toward a slight paranoia here or there, usual in children because they feel persecuted by parents constantly, but, oh, really nothing."

They walked down the hall.

"I locked the nursery up," explained the father, "and the children broke back into it during the night. I let them stay so they could form the patterns for you to see."

There was a terrible screaming from the nursery.

"There it is," said George Hadley.

"See what you make of it."

They walked in on the children without rapping. The screams had faded. The lions were feeding.

"Run outside a moment, children," said George Hadley.

"No, don't change the mental combination. Leave the walls as they are. Get!" With the children gone, the two men stood studying the lions clustered at a distance, eating with great relish whatever it was they had caught.

"I wish I knew what it was," said George Hadley. "Sometimes I can almost see. Do you think if I brought high-powered binoculars here and -" David McClean laughed dryly.

"Hardly." turned to study all four walls. "How long has this been going on?"

"A little over a month."

"It certainly doesn't feel good."

"I want facts, not feelings."

"My dear George, a psychologist never saw a fact in his life. He only hears about feelings; vague things. This doesn't feel good, I tell you. Trust my hunches and my instincts. I have a nose for something bad. This is very bad. My advice to you is to have the whole damn room torn down and your children brought to me every day during the next year for treatment."

"Is it that bad?"

"I'm afraid so. One of the original uses of these nurseries was so that we could study the patterns left on the walls by the child's mind, study at our leisure, and help the child. In this case, however, the room has become a channel toward-destructive thoughts, instead of a release away from them."

"Didn't you sense this before?"

"I sensed only that you had spoiled your children more than most. And now you're letting them down in some way. What way?"

"I wouldn't let them go to New York."

"What else?"

"I've taken a few machines from the house and threatened them, a month ago, with closing up the nursery unless they did their homework. I did close it for a few days to show I meant business."

"Ah, ha!"

"Does that mean anything?"

"Everything. Where before they had a Santa Claus now, they have a Scrooge. Children prefer Santas. You've let this room and this house replace you and your wife in your children's affections. This room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents. And now you come along and want to shut it off. No wonder there's hatred here. You can feel it coming out of the sky. Feel that sun. George, you'll have to change your life. Like too many others, you've built it around creature comforts. Why, you'd starve tomorrow if something went wrong in your kitchen. You wouldn't know how to tap an egg. Nevertheless, turn everything off. Start new. It'll take time. But we'll make good children out of bad in a year, wait and see."

"But won't the shock be too much for the children, shutting the room up abruptly, for good?"

"I don't want them going any deeper into this, that's all."

The lions were finished with their red feast. The lions were standing on the edge of the clearing watching the two men.

"Now I'm feeling persecuted," said McClean. "Let's get out of here. I never have cared for these damned rooms. Make me nervous."

"The lions look real, don't they?" said George Hadley. I don't suppose there's any way _"

"What?" "- that they could become real?"

"Not that I know."

"Some flaw in the machinery, a tampering or something?"

"No."

They went to the door.

"I don't imagine the room will like being turned off," said the father. "Nothing ever likes to die - even a room." "I wonder if it hates me for wanting to switch it off? "

"Paranoia is thick around here today," said David McClean . "You can follow it like a spoor. Hello." He bent and picked up a bloody scarf. "This yours?"

"No."

George Hadley's face was rigid. "It belongs to Lydia."

They went to the fuse box together and threw the switch that killed the nursery. The two children were in hysterics. They screamed and pranced and threw things. They yelled and sobbed and swore and jumped at the furniture.

"You can't do that to the nursery, you can't!"

"Now, children."

The children flung themselves onto a couch, weeping.

"George," said Lydia Hadley, "turn on the nursery, just for a few moments. You can't be so abrupt."

"No."

"You can't be so cruel..."

"Lydia, it's off, and it stays off. And the whole damn house dies as of here and now. The more I see of the mess we've put ourselves in, the more it sickens me. We've been contemplating our mechanical, electronic navels for too long. My God, how we need

a breath of honest air!" And he marched about the house turning off the voice clocks, the stoves, the heaters, the shoe shiners, the shoe lacers, the body scrubbers and swabbers and massagers, and every other machine he could put his hand to. The house was full of dead bodies, it seemed. It felt like a mechanical cemetery. So silent. None of the humming hidden energy of machines waiting to function at the tap of a button.

"Don't let them do it!" wailed Peter at the ceiling, as if he was talking to the house, the nursery. "Don't let Father kill everything." He turned to his father. "Oh, I hate you!"

"Insults won't get you anywhere."

"I wish you were dead!"

"We were, for a long while. Now we're going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we're going to live." Wendy was still crying and Peter joined her again.

"Just a moment, just one moment, just another moment of nursery," they wailed.

"Oh, George," said the wife, "it can't hurt."

"All right -all right, if they'll just shut up. One minute, mind you, and then off forever."

"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" sang the children, smiling with wet faces.

"And then we're going on a vacation. David McClean is coming back in half an hour to help us move out and get to the airport. I'm going to dress. You turn the nursery on for a minute, Lydia, just a minute, mind you."

And the three of them went babbling off while he let himself be vacuumed upstairs through the air flue and set about dressing himself. A minute later Lydia appeared.

"I'll be glad when we get away," she sighed.

"Did you leave them in the nursery?"

"I wanted to dress too. Oh, that horrid Africa. What can they see in it?"

"Well, in five minutes we'll be on our way to Iowa. Lord, how did we ever get in this house? What prompted us to buy a nightmare?"

"Pride, money, foolishness."

"I think we'd better get downstairs before those kids get engrossed with those damned beasts again." Just then they heard the children calling,

"Daddy, Mommy, come quick - quick!"

They went downstairs in the air flue and ran down the hall. The children were nowhere in sight.

"Wendy? Peter!" They ran into the nursery. The veldtland was empty save for the lions waiting, looking at them.

"Peter, Wendy?" The door slammed.

"Wendy, Peter!"

George Hadley and his wife whirled and ran back to the door.

"Open the door!" cried George Hadley, trying the knob.

"Why, they've locked it from the outside! Peter!" He beat at the door.

"Open up!"

He heard Peter's voice outside, against the door.

"Don't let them switch off the nursery and the house," he was saying.

Mr. and Mrs. George Hadley beat at the door.

"Now, don't be ridiculous, children. It's time to go. Mr. McClean'll be here in a minute and..."

And then they heard the sounds. The lions on three sides of them, in the yellow veldt grass, padding through the dry straw, rumbling and roaring in their throats. The lions. Mr. Hadley looked at his wife and they turned and looked back at the beasts edging slowly forward crouching, tails stiff. Mr. and Mrs. Hadley screamed. And suddenly they realized why those other screams had sounded familiar.

"Well, here I am," said David McClean in the nursery doorway, "Oh, hello." He stared at the two children seated in the center of the open glade eating a little picnic lunch. Beyond them was the water hole and the yellow veldtland; above was the hot sun. He began to perspire.

"Where are your father and mother?" The children looked up and smiled.

"Oh, they'll be here directly."

"Good, we must get going."

At a distance Mr. McClean saw the lions fighting and clawing and then quieting down to feed in silence under the shady trees. He squinted at the lions with his hand tip to his eyes. Now the lions were done feeding. They moved to the water hole to drink. A shadow flickered over Mr. McClean's hot face. Many shadows flickered. The vultures were dropping down the blazing sky.

"A cup of tea?" asked Wendy in the silence.

Story 3. WEEKEND by Fay Weldon



By seven-thirty they were ready to go. Martha had everything packed into the car and the three children appropriately dressed and in the back seat, complete with educational games and wholewheat biscuits. When everything was ready in the car Martin would switch off the television, come downstairs, lock up the house, front and back, and take the wheel.

Weekend! Only two hours' drive down to the cottage on Friday evenings: three hours' drive back on Sunday nights. The pleasures of greenery and guests in between. They reckoned themselves fortunate, how fortunate!

On Fridays Martha would get home on the bus at six-twelve and prepare tea and sandwiches for the family: then she would strip four beds and put the sheets and quilt covers in the washing machine for Monday: take the country bedding from the airing basket, plus the books and the games, plus the weekend food – acquired at intervals throughout the week, to lessen the load – plus her own folder of work from the office, plus Martin's drawing materials (she was a market researcher in an advertising agency, he a freelance designer) plus hairbrushes, jeans, spare T-shirts, Jolyon's antibiotics (he suffered from sore throats), Jenny's recorder, Jasper's cassette player and so on – ah, the so on! – and would pack them all, skillfully and quickly, into the boot. Very little could be left in the cottage during the week. ('An open invitation to burglars': Martin) Then Martha would run round the house tidying and wiping, doing this and that, finding the cat at one neighbour's and delivering it to another, while the others ate their tea; and would usually, proudly, have everything finished by the time they had eaten their fill. Martin would just catch the BBC 2 news, while Martha cleared away the tea table, and the children tossed up for the best positions in the car. 'Martha,' said Martin, tonight, 'you ought to get Mrs. Hodder to do more. She takes advantage of you.'

Mrs. Hodder came in twice a week to clean. She was over seventy. She charged two pounds an hour. Martha paid her out of her own wages: well, the running of the house was Martha's concern. If Martha chose to go out to work – as was her perfect right, Martin allowed, even though it wasn't the best thing for the children, but that must be Martha's moral responsibility – Martha must surely pay her domestic stand-in. An evident truth, heard loud and clear and frequent in Martin's mouth and Martha's heart.

'I expect you're right,' said Martha. She did not want to argue. Martin had had a long hard week, and now had to drive. Martha couldn't. Martha's license had been suspended four months back for drunken driving. Everyone agreed that the suspension was unfair; Martha seldom drank to excess: she was for one thing usually too busy pouring drinks for other people or washing other people's glasses to get much inside herself. But Martin had taken her out to dinner on her birthday,

as was his custom, and exhaustion and excitement mixed had made her imprudent, and before she knew where she was, why there she was, in the dock, with a distorted lamp-post to pay for and a new bonnet for the car and six months' suspension.

So now Martin had to drive her car down to the cottage, and he was always tired on Fridays, and hot and sleepy on Sundays, and every rattle and clank and bump in the engine she felt to be somehow her fault.

Martin had a little sports car for London and work: it could nip in and out of the traffic nicely: Martha's was an old estate car, with room for the children, picnic baskets, bedding, food, games, plants, drink, portable television and all the things required by the middle classes for weekends in the country. It lumbered rather than zipped and made Martin angry. He seldom spoke a harsh word, but Martha, after the fashion of wives, could detect his mood from what he did not say rather than what he did, and from the tilt of his head, and the way his crinkly, merry eyes seemed crinklier and merrier still – and of course from the way he addressed Martha's car.

'Come along, you old banger you! Can't you do better than that? You're too old, that's your trouble. Stop complaining. Always complaining, it's only a hill. You're too wide about the hips. You'll never get through there.'

Martha worried about her age, her tendency to complain, and the width of her hips. She took the remarks personally. Was she right to do so? The children noticed nothing: it was just funny lively laughing Daddy being witty about Mummy's car. Mummy, done for drunken driving. Mummy, with the roots of melancholy somewhere deep beneath the bustling, busy, everyday self. Busy: ah so busy!

Martin would only laugh if she said anything about the way he spoke to her car and warn her against paranoia. 'Don't get like your mother, darling.' Martha's mother had, towards the end, thought that people were plotting against her. Martha's mother had led a secluded, suspicious life, and made Martha's childhood a chilly and a lonely time. Life now, by comparison, was wonderful for Martha. People, children, houses, conversations, food, drink, theatres – even, now, a career. Martin standing between her and the hostility of the world – popular, easy, funny Martin, beckoning the rest of the world into earshot.

Ah, she was grateful: little earnest Martha, with her shy ways and her penchant for passing boring exams – how her life had blossomed out! Three children too – Jasper, Jenny and Jolyon – all with Martin's broad brow and open looks, and the confidence born of her love and care, and the work she had put into them since the dawning of their days.

Martin drives. Martha, for once, drowns.

The right food, the right words, the right play. Doctors for the tonsils: dentists for the molars. Confiscate guns: censor television: encourage creativity. Paints and paper

to hand: books on the shelves: meetings with teachers. Music teachers. Dancing lessons. Parties. Friends to tea. School plays. Open days. Junior orchestra.

Martha is jolted awake. Traffic lights. Martin doesn't like Martha to sleep while he drives.

Clothes. Oh, clothes! Can't wear this: must wear that. Dress shops. Piles of clothes in corners: duly washed, but waiting to be ironed, waiting to be put away.

Get the piles off the floor, into the laundry baskets. Martin doesn't like a mess. Creativity arises out of order, not chaos. Five years off work while the children were small: back to work with seniority lost. What, did you think something was for nothing? If you have children, mother, that is your reward. It lies not in the world.

Have you taken enough food? Always hard to judge.

Food. Oh, food! Shop in the lunch-hour. Lug it all home. Cook for the freezer on Wednesday evenings while Martin is at his car maintenance evening class, and isn't there to notice you being unrestful. Martin likes you to sit down in the evenings. Fruit, meat, vegetables, flour for home-made bread. Well, shop bread is full of pollutants. Frozen food, even your own, loses flavour. Martin often remarks on it. Condiments. Everyone loves mango chutney. But the expense!

London Airport to the left. Look, look, children! Concorde? No, idiot, of course it isn't Concorde.

Ah, to be all things to all people: children, husband, employer, friends! It can be done: yes, it can: super woman.

Drink. Home-made wine. Why not? Elderberries grown thick and rich in London: and at least you know what's in it. Store it in high cupboards: lots of room: up and down the step-ladder. Careful! Don't slip. Don't break anything.

No such thing as an accident. Accidents are Freudian slips: they are willful, bad-tempered things.

Martin can't bear bad temper. Martin likes slim ladies. Diet. Martin rather likes his secretary. Diet. Martin admires slim legs and big bosoms. How to achieve them both? Impossible. But try, oh try, to be what you ought to be, not what you are. Inside and out.

Martin brings back flowers and chocolates: whisks Martha off for holiday weekends. Wonderful! The best husband in the world: look into his crinkly, merry, gentle eyes; see it there. So, the mouth slopes away into something of a pout. Never mind. Gaze into the eyes. Love. It must be love. You married him. You. Surely you deserve true love?

Salisbury Plain. Stonehenge. Look, children, look! Mother, we've seen Stonehenge a hundred times. Go back to sleep.

Cook! Ah cook. People love to come to Martin and Martha's dinners. Work it out in your head in the lunch-hour. If you get in at six twelve, you can seal the meat while you beat the egg white while you feed the cat while you lay the table while you string the beans while you set out the cheese, goat's cheese, Martin loves goat's cheese, Martha tries to like goat's cheese – oh, bed, sleep, peace, quiet.

Nearly there, children. Nearly in paradise, nearly at the cottage. Have another biscuit.

Real roses round the door. Roses. Prune, weed, spray, feed, pick. Avoid thorns. One of Martin's few harsh words.

'Martha, you can't not want roses! What kind of person am I married to? An anti-rose personality?'

Green grass. Oh, God, grass. Grass must be mown. Restful lawns, daisies bobbing, buttercups glowing. Roses and grass and books. Books.

Please, Martin, do we have to have the two hundred books, mostly twenties' first editions, bought at Christie's book sale on one of your afternoons off? Books need dusting.

Roars of laughter from Martin, Jasper, Jenny and Jolyon. Mummy says we shouldn't have the books: books need dusting!

Roses, green grass, books and peace.

Martha woke up with a start when they got to the cottage, and gave a little shriek which made them all laugh. Mummy's waking shriek, they called it.

Then there was the car to unpack and the beds to make up, and the electricity to connect, and the supper to make, and the cobwebs to remove, while Martin made the fire. Then supper – pork chops in sweet and sour sauce ('Pork is such a dull meat if you don't cook it properly': Martin), green salad from the garden, or such green salad as the rabbits had left ('Martha, did you really net them properly? Be honest now!': Martin) and sauté potatoes. Mash is so stodgy and ordinary, and instant mash unthinkable. The children studied the night sky with the aid of their star map. Wonderful, rewarding children!

Then clear up the supper: set the dough to prove for the bread: Martin already in bed: exhausted by the drive and lighting the fire. ('Martha, we really ought to get the logs stacked properly. Get the children to do it, will you?': Martin) Sweep and tidy: get the TV aerial right. Turn up Jasper's jeans where he has trodden the hem undone. ('He can't go around like that, Martha. Not even Jasper': Martin)

Midnight. Good night. Weekend guests arriving in the morning. Seven for lunch and dinner on Saturday. Seven for Sunday breakfast, nine for Sunday lunch. ('Don't fuss, darling. You always make such a fuss': Martin) Oh, God, forgotten the garlic squeezer. That means ten minutes with the back of a spoon and salt. Well, who wants lumps of garlic? No one. Not Martin's guests. Martin said so. Sleep.

Colin and Katie. Colin is Martin's oldest friend. Katie is his new young wife. Janet, Colin's other, earlier wife, was Martha's friend.

Janet was rather like Martha, quieter and duller than her husband. A nag and a drag, Martin rather thought, and said, and of course she'd let herself go, everyone agreed. No one exactly excused Colin for walking out, but you could see the temptation.

Katie versus Janet.

Katie was languid, beautiful and elegant. She drawled when she spoke. Her hands were expressive: her feet were little and female. She had no children.

Janet plodded round on very flat, rather large feet. There was something wrong with them. They turned out slightly when she walked. She had two children. She was, frankly, boring. But Martha liked her: when Janet came down to the cottage she would wash up. Not in the way that most guests washed up – washing dutifully and setting everything out on the draining board, but actually drying and putting away too. And Janet would wash the bath and get the children all sat down, with chairs for everyone, even the littlest, and keep them quiet and satisfied so the grown-ups – well, the men – could get on with their conversation and their jokes and their love of country weekends, while Janet stared into space, as if grateful for the rest, quite happy.

Janet would garden, too. Weed the strawberries, while the men went for their walk; her great feet standing firm and square and sometimes crushing a plant or so, but never mind, oh never mind. Lovely Janet; who understood.

Now Janet was gone and here was Katie.

Katie talked with the men and went for walks with the men, and moved her ashtray rather impatiently when Martha tried to clear the drinks round it.

Dishes were boring, Katie implied by her manner, and domesticity was boring, and anyone who bothered with that kind of thing was a fool. Like Martha. Ash should be allowed to stay where it was, even if it was in the butter, and conversations should never be interrupted.

Knock, knock. Katie and Colin arrived at one-fifteen on Saturday morning, just after Martha had got to bed. 'You don't mind? It was the moonlight. We couldn't resist it. You should have seen Stonehenge! We didn't disturb you? Such early birds!'

Martha rustled up a quick meal of omelettes. Saturday nights' eggs. ('Martha makes a lovely omelette': Martin) ('Honey, make one of your mushroom omelettes: cook the mushrooms separately, remember, with lemon. Otherwise, the water from the mushrooms gets into the egg, and spoils everything.') Sunday supper mushrooms. But ungracious to say anything.

Martin had revived wonderfully at the sight of Colin and Katie. He brought out the whisky bottle. Glasses. Ice. Jug for water. Wait. Wash up another sinkful, when they're finished. 2 a.m.

‘Don’t do it tonight, darling.’

‘It’ll only take a sec.’ Bright smile, not a hint of self-pity. Self-pity can spoil everyone’s weekend.

Martha knows that if breakfast for seven is to be manageable the sink must be cleared of dishes. A tricky meal, breakfast. Especially if bacon, eggs, and tomatoes must all be cooked in separate pans. (‘Separate pans mean separate flavours!’: Martin)

She is running around in her nightie. Now if that had been Katie – but there’s something so practical about Martha. Reassuring, mind; but the skimpy nightie and the broad rump and the thirty-eight years are all rather embarrassing. Martha can see it in Colin and Katie’s eyes. Martin’s too. Martha wishes she did not see so much in other people’s eyes. Her mother did, too. Dear, dead mother. Did I misjudge you?

This was the second weekend Katie had been down with Colin but without Janet. Colin was a photographer: Katie had been his accessorizer. First Colin and Janet: then Colin, Janet and Katie: now Colin and Katie!

Katie weeded with rubber gloves on and pulled out pansies in mistake for weeds and laughed and laughed along with everyone when her mistake was pointed out to her, but the pansies died. Well, Colin had become with the years fairly rich and fairly famous, and what does a fairly rich and famous man want with a wife like Janet when Katie is at hand?

On the first of the Colin/Janet/Katie weekends Katie had appeared out of the bathroom. ‘I say,’ said Katie, holding out a damp towel with evident distaste, ‘I can only find this. No hope of a dry one?’ And Martha had run to fetch a dry towel and amazingly found one, and handed it to Katie who flashed her a brilliant smile and said, ‘I can’t bear damp towels. Anything in the world but damp towels,’ as if speaking to a servant in a time of shortage of staff, and took all the water so there was none left for Martha to wash up.

The trouble, of course, was drying anything at all in the cottage. There were no facilities for doing so, and Martin had a horror of clothes lines which might spoil the view. He toiled and moiled all week in the city simply to get a country view at the weekend. Ridiculous to spoil it by draping it with wet towels! But now Martha had bought more towels, so perhaps everyone could be satisfied. She would take nine damp towels back on Sunday evenings in a plastic bag and see to them in London.

On this Saturday morning, straight after breakfast, Katie went out to the car – she and Colin had a new Lamborghini; hard to imagine Katie in anything duller – and came back waving a new Yves St Laurent towel. ‘See! I brought my own, darlings.’

They’d brought nothing else. No fruit, no meat, no vegetables, not even bread, certainly not a box of chocolates. They’d gone off to bed with alacrity, the night before, and the spare room rocked and heaved: well, who’d want to do washing-up when you

could do that, but what about the children? Would they get confused? First Colin and Janet, now Colin and Katie?

Martha murmured something of her thoughts to Martin, who looked quite shocked. 'Colin's my best friend. I don't expect him to bring anything,' and Martha felt mean. 'And good heavens, you can't protect the kids from sex for ever: don't be so prudish,' so that Martha felt stupid as well. Mean, complaining, and stupid.

Janet had rung Martha during the week. The house had been sold over her head, and she and the children had been moved into a small flat. Katie was trying to persuade Colin to cut down on her allowance, Janet said.

'It does one no good to be materialistic,' Katie confided. 'I have nothing. No home, no family, no ties, no possessions. Look at me! Only me and a suitcase of clothes.' But Katie seemed highly satisfied with the me, and the clothes were stupendous. Katie drank a great deal and became funny. Everyone laughed, including Martha. Katie had been married twice. Martha marveled at how someone could arrive in their mid-thirties with nothing at all to their name, neither husband, nor children, nor property and not mind.

Mind you, Martha could see the power of such helplessness. If Colin was all Katie had in the world, how could Colin abandon her? And to what? Where would she go? How would she live? Oh, clever Katie.

'My teacup's dirty,' said Katie, and Martha ran to clean it, apologizing, and Martin raised his eyebrows, at Martha, not Katie.

'I wish you'd wear scent,' said Martin to Martha, reproachfully. Katie wore lots. Martha never seemed to have time to put any on, though Martin bought her bottle after bottle. Martha leapt out of bed each morning to meet some emergency – miaowing cat, coughing child, faulty alarm clock, postman's knock – when was Martha to put on scent? It annoyed Martin all the same. She ought to do more to charm him.

Colin looked handsome and harrowed and younger than Martin, though they were much the same age. 'Youth's catching,' said Martin in bed that night. 'It's since he found Katie.' Found, like some treasure. Discovered; something exciting and wonderful, in the dreary world of established spouses.

On Saturday morning Jasper trod on a piece of wood ('Martha, why isn't he wearing shoes? It's too bad': Martin) and Martha took him into the hospital to have a nasty splinter removed. She left the cottage at ten and arrived back at one, and they were still sitting in the sun, drinking, empty bottles glinting in the long grass. The grass hadn't been cut. Don't forget the bottles. Broken glass means more mornings at the hospital. Oh, don't fuss. Enjoy yourself. Like other people. Try.

But no potatoes peeled, no breakfast cleared, nothing. Cigarette ends still amongst old toast, bacon rind and marmalade. 'You could have done the potatoes,' Martha burst out. Oh, bad temper! Prime sin. They looked at her in amazement and dislike. Martin too.

'Goodness,' said Katie. 'Are we doing the whole Sunday lunch bit on Saturday? Potatoes? Ages since I've eaten potatoes. Wonderful!'

'The children expect it,' said Martha.

So, they did. Saturday and Sunday lunch shone like reassuring beacons in their lives. Saturday lunch: family lunch: fish and chips. ('So much better cooked at home than bought': Martin) Sunday. Usually roast beef, potatoes, peas, apple pie. Oh, of course. Yorkshire pudding. Always a problem with oven temperatures. When the beef's going slowly, the Yorkshire should be going fast. How to achieve that? Like big bosom and little hips.

'Just relax,' said Martin. 'I'll cook dinner, all in good time. Splinters always work their own way out: no need to have taken him to hospital. Let life drift over you, my love. Flow with the waves, that's the way.'

And Martin flashed Martha a distant, spiritual smile. His hand lay on Katie's slim brown arm, with its many gold bands.

'Anyway, you do too much for the children,' said Martin. 'It isn't good for them. Have a drink.'

So, Martha perched uneasily on the step and had a glass of cider, and wondered how, if lunch was going to be late, she would get cleared up and the meat out of the marinade for the rather formal dinner that would be expected that evening. The marinated lamb ought to cook for at least four hours in a low oven; and the cottage oven was very small, and you couldn't use that and the grill at the same time and Martin liked his fish grilled, not fried. Less cholesterol.

She didn't say as much. Domestic details like this were very boring, and any mild complaint was registered by Martin as a scene. And to make a scene was so ungrateful.

This was the life. Well, wasn't it? Smart friends in large cars and country living and drinks before lunch and roses and bird song - 'Don't drink too much,' said Martin, and told them about Martha's suspended driving license.

The children were hungry so Martha opened them a can of beans and sausages and heated that up. ('Martha, do they have to eat that crap? Can't they wait?': Martin)

Katie was hungry: she said so, to keep the children in face. She was lovely with children - most children. She did not particularly like Colin and Janet's children. She said so, and he accepted it. He only saw them once a month now, not once a week.

'Let me make lunch,' Katie said to Martha. 'You do so much, poor thing!'

And she pulled out of the fridge all the things Martha had put away for the next day's picnic lunch party – Camembert cheese and salad and salami and made a wonderful tomato salad in two minutes and opened the white wine – 'not very cold, darling. Shouldn't it be chilling?' – and had it all on the table in five amazing competent minutes. 'That's all we need, darling,' said Martin. 'You are funny with your fish-and-chip Saturdays! What could be nicer than this? Or simpler?'

Nothing, except there was Sunday's buffet lunch for nine gone, in place of Saturday's fish for six, and would the fish stretch? No. Katie had had quite a lot to drink. She pecked Martha on the forehead. 'Funny little Martha,' she said. 'She reminds me of Janet. I really do like Janet.' Colin did not want to be reminded of Janet, and said so. 'Darling, Janet's a fact of life,' said Katie. 'If you'd only think about her more, you might manage to pay her less.' And she yawned and stretched her lean, childless body and smiled at Colin with her inviting, naughty little girl eyes, and Martin watched her in admiration.

Martha got up and left them and took a paint pot and put a coat of white gloss on the bathroom wall. The white surface pleased her. She was good at painting. She produced a smooth, even surface. Her legs throbbed. She feared she might be getting varicose veins.

Outside in the garden the children played badminton. They were bad-tempered, but relieved to be able to look up and see their mother working, as usual: making their lives forever better and nicer: organizing, planning, thinking ahead, side-stepping disaster, making preparations, like a mother hen, fussing and irritating: part of the natural boring scenery of the world.

On Saturday night Katie went to bed early: she rose from her chair and stretched and yawned and poked her head into the kitchen where Martha was washing saucepans. Colin had cleared the table and Katie had folded the napkins into pretty creases, while Martin blew at the fire, to make it bright. 'Good night,' said Katie.

Katie appeared three minutes later, reproachfully holding out her Yves St Laurent towel, sopping wet. 'Oh dear,' cried Martha. 'Jenny must have washed her hair!' And Martha was obliged to rout Jenny out of bed to rebuke her, publicly, if only to demonstrate that she knew what was right and proper. That meant Jenny would sulk all weekend, and that meant a treat or an outing mid-week, or else by the following week she'd be having an asthma attack. 'You fuss the children too much,' said Martin. 'That's why Jenny has asthma.' Jenny was pleasant enough to look at, but not stunning. Perhaps she was a disappointment to her father? Martin would never say so, but Martha feared he thought so.

An egg and an orange each child, each day. Then nothing too bad would go wrong. And it hadn't. The asthma was very mild. A calm, tranquil environment, the doctor said. Ah, smile, Martha smile. Domestic happiness depends on you. 21 × 52 oranges a year. Each one to be purchased, carried, peeled and washed up after. And what about

potatoes. 12 × 52 pounds a year? Martin liked his potatoes carefully peeled. He couldn't bear to find little cores of black in the mouthful. ('Well, it isn't very nice, is it?': Martin).

Martha dreamt she was eating coal, by handfuls, and liking it.

Saturday night. Martin made love to Martha three times. Three times? How virile he was, and clearly turned on by the sounds from the spare room. Martin said he loved her. Martin always did. He was a courteous lover; he knew the importance of foreplay. So did Martha. Three times.

Ah, sleep. Jolyon had a nightmare. Jenny was woken by a moth. Martin slept through everything. Martha pottered about the house in the night. There was a moon. She sat at the window and stared out into the summer night for five minutes, and was at peace, and then went back to bed because she ought to be fresh for the morning.

But she wasn't. She slept late. The others went out for a walk. They'd left a note, a considerate note: 'Didn't wake you. You looked tired. Had a cold breakfast so as not to make too much mess. Leave everything 'til we get back.' But it was ten o'clock, and guests were coming at noon, so she cleared away the bread, the butter, the crumbs, the smears, the jam, the spoons, the spilt sugar, the cereal, the milk (sour by now) and the dirty plates, and swept the floors, and tidied up quickly, and grabbed a cup of coffee, and prepared to make a rice and fish dish, and a chocolate mousse and sat down in the middle to eat a lot of bread and jam herself. Broad hips. She remembered the office work in her file and knew she wouldn't be able to do it. Martin anyway thought it was ridiculous for her to bring work back at the weekends. 'It's your holiday,' he'd say. 'Why should they impose?' Martha loved her work. She didn't have to smile at it. She just did it.

Katie came back upset and crying. She sat in the kitchen while Martha worked and drank glass after glass of gin and bitter lemon. Katie liked ice and lemon in gin. Martha paid for all the drink out of her wages. It was part of the deal between her and Martin – the contract by which she went out to work. All things to cheer the spirit, otherwise depressed by a working wife and mother, were to be paid for by Martha. Drink, holidays, petrol, outings, puddings, electricity, heating: it was quite a joke between them. It didn't really make any difference: it was their joint money, after all. Amazing how Martha's wages were creeping up, almost to the level of Martin's. One day they would overtake. Then what?

Work, honestly, was a piece of cake.

Anyway, poor Katie was crying. Colin, she'd discovered, kept a photograph of Janet and the children in his wallet. 'He's not free of her. He pretends he is, but he isn't. She has him by a stranglehold. It's the kids. His bloody kids. Moaning Mary and that little creep Joanna. It's all he thinks about. I'm nobody.'

But Katie didn't believe it. She knew she was somebody all right. Colin came in, in a fury. He took out the photograph and set fire to it, bitterly, with a match. Up in smoke they went. Mary and Joanna and Janet. The ashes fell on the floor. (Martha swept them up when Colin and Katie had gone. It hardly seemed polite to do so when they were still there.) 'Go back to her,' Katie said. 'Go back to her. I don't care. Honestly, I'd rather be on my own. You're a nice old-fashioned thing. Run along then. Do your thing, I'll do mine. Who cares?'

'Christ, Katie, the fuss! She only just happens to be in the photograph. She's not there on purpose to annoy. And I do feel bad about her. She's been having a hard time.'

'And haven't you, Colin? She twists a pretty knife, I can tell you. Don't you have rights too? Not to mention me. Is a little loyalty too much to expect?'

They were reconciled before lunch, up in the spare room. Harry and Beryl Elder arrived at twelve-thirty. Harry didn't like to hurry on Sundays; Beryl was flustered with apologies for their lateness. They'd brought artichokes from their garden. 'Wonderful,' cried Martin. 'Fruits of the earth? Let's have a wonderful soup!'

Don't fret, Martha. I'll do it.' 'Don't fret.' Martha clearly hadn't been smiling enough. She was in danger, Martin implied, of ruining everyone's weekend. There was an emergency in the garden very shortly – an elm tree which had probably got Dutch elm disease – and Martha finished the artichokes. The lid flew off the blender and there was artichoke purée everywhere. 'Let's have lunch outside,' said Colin. 'Less work for Martha.'

Martin frowned at Martha: he thought the appearance of martyrdom in the face of guests to be an unforgivable offence.

Everyone happily joined in taking the furniture out, but it was Martha's experience that nobody ever helped to bring it in again. Jolyon was stung by a wasp. Jasper sneezed and sneezed from hay fever and couldn't find the tissues and he wouldn't use loo paper. ('Surely you remembered the tissues, darling?': Martin)

Beryl Elder was nice. 'Wonderful to eat out,' she said, fetching the cream for her pudding, while Martha fished a fly from the liquefying Brie ('You shouldn't have bought it so ripe, Martha': Martin) – 'except it's just some other woman has to do it. But at least it isn't me.' Beryl worked too, as a secretary, to send the boys to boarding school, where she'd rather they weren't. But her husband was from a rather grand family, and she'd been only a typist when he married her, so her life was a mass of amends, one way or another. Harry had lately opted out of the stockbroking rat race and become an artist, choosing integrity rather than money, but that choice was his alone and couldn't of course be inflicted on the boys.

Katie found the fish and rice dish rather strange, toyed at it with her fork, and talked about Italian restaurants she knew. Martin lay back soaking in the sun: crying, 'Oh, this is the life.' He made coffee, nobly, and the lid flew off the grinder and there were

coffee beans all over the kitchen especially in amongst the row of cookery books which Martin gave Martha Christmas by Christmas. At least they didn't have to be brought back every weekend. ('The burglars won't have the sense to steal those': Martin)

Beryl fell asleep and Katie watched her, quizzically. Beryl's mouth was open and she had a lot of fillings, and her ankles were thick and her waist was going, and she didn't look after herself. 'I love women,' sighed Katie. 'They look so wonderful asleep. I wish I could be an earth mother.'

Beryl woke with a start and nagged her husband into going home, which he clearly didn't want to do, so didn't. Beryl thought she had to get back because his mother was coming round later. Nonsense! Then Beryl tried to stop Harry drinking more home-made wine and was laughed at by everyone. He was driving, Beryl couldn't, and he did have a nasty scar on his temple from a previous road accident. Never mind.

'She does come on strong, poor soul,' laughed Katie when they'd finally gone. 'I'm never going to get married,' - and Colin looked at her yearningly because he wanted to marry her more than anything in the world, and Martha cleared the coffee cups.

'Oh, don't do that,' said Katie, 'do just sit down, Martha, you make us all feel bad,' and Martin glared at Martha who sat down and Jenny called out for her and Martha went upstairs and Jenny had started her first period and Martha cried and cried and knew she must stop because this must be a joyous occasion for Jenny or her whole future would be blighted, but for once, Martha couldn't.

Her daughter Jenny: wife, mother, friend.

CHAPTER 3.

Story 1. SILENT SNOW, SECRET SNOW by Conrad Aiken



I.

Just why it should have happened, or why it should have happened just when it did, he could not, of course, possibly have said; nor perhaps would it even have occurred to him to ask. The thing was above all a secret, something to be preciously concealed from Mother and Father; and to that very fact it owed an enormous part of its deliciousness. It was like a peculiarly beautiful trinket to be carried unmentioned in one's trouser pocket—a rare stamp, an old coin, a few tiny gold links found trodden out of shape on the path in the park, a pebble of carnelian, a seashell distinguishable from all others by an unusual spot or stripe —and, as if it were any one of these, he carried around with him everywhere a warm and persistent and increasingly beautiful sense of possession. Nor was it only a sense of possession—it was also a sense of protection. It was as if, in some delightful way, his secret gave him a fortress, a wall behind which he could retreat into heavenly seclusion. This was almost the first thing he had noticed about it—apart from the oddness of the thing itself—and it was this that now again, for the fiftieth time, occurred to him, as he sat in the little schoolroom. It was the half-hour for geography. Miss Buell was revolving with one finger, slowly, a huge terrestrial globe which had been placed on her desk. The green and yellow continents passed and repassed, questions were asked and answered, and now the little girl in front of him, Deirdre, who had a funny little constellation of freckles on the back of her neck, exactly like the Big Dipper, was standing up and telling Miss Buell that the equator was the line that ran round the middle.

Miss Buell's face, which was old and grayish and kindly, with gray stiff curls beside the cheeks, and eyes that swam very brightly, like little minnows, behind thick glasses, wrinkled itself into a complication of amusements.

"Ah! I see. The earth is wearing a belt, or a sash. Or someone drew a line round it!"

"Oh no — not that — I mean —"

In the general laughter, he did not share, or only a very little. He was thinking about the Arctic and Antarctic regions, which of course, on the globe, were white. Miss Buell was now telling them about the tropics, the jungles, the steamy heat of equatorial swamps, where the birds and butterflies, and even the snakes, were like living jewels. As he listened to these things, he was already, with a pleasant sense of half-effort, putting his secret between himself and the words. Was it really an effort at all? For effort implied something voluntary, and perhaps even something one did not especially want; whereas this was distinctly pleasant, and came almost of its own accord. All he needed to do was to think of that morning, the first one, and then of all the others —

But it was all so absurdly simple! It had amounted to so little. It was nothing, just an idea—and just why it should have become so wonderful, so permanent, was a mystery—a very pleasant one, to be sure, but also, in an amusing way, foolish. However, without ceasing to listen to Miss Buell, who had now moved up to the north temperate zones, he deliberately invited his memory of the first morning. It was only a moment or two after he had waked up—or perhaps the moment itself. But was there, to be exact, an exact moment? Was one awake all at once? or was it gradual? Anyway, it was after he had stretched a lazy hand up toward the headrail, and yawned, and then relaxed again among his warm covers, all the more grateful on a December morning, that the thing had happened. Suddenly, for no reason, he had thought of the postman, he remembered the postman. Perhaps there was nothing so odd in that. After all, he heard the postman almost every morning in his life—his heavy boots could be heard clumping round the corner at the top of the little cobbled hill-street, and then, progressively nearer, progressively louder, the double knock at each door, the crossings and re-crossings of the street, till finally the clumsy steps came stumbling across to the very door, and the tremendous knock came which shook the house itself.

(Miss Buell was saying, “Vast wheat-growing areas in North America and Siberia.”)

Deirdre had for the moment placed her left hand across the back of her neck.)

But on this particular morning, the first morning, as he lay there with his eyes closed, he had for some reason waited for the postman. He wanted to hear him come round the corner. And that was precisely the joke—he never did. He never came. He never had come—round the corner—again. For when at last the steps were heard, they had already, he was quite sure, come a little down the hill, to the first house; and even so, the steps were curiously different—they were softer, they had a new secrecy about them, they were muffled and indistinct; and while the rhythm of them was the same, it now said a new thing—it said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold, it said sleep. And he had understood the situation at once—nothing could have seemed simpler—there had been snow in the night, such as all winter, he had been longing for; and it was this which had rendered the postman’s first footsteps inaudible, and the later ones faint. Of course! How lovely! And even now it must be snowing—it was going to be a snowy day—the long white ragged lines were drifting and sifting across the street, across the faces of the old houses, whispering and hushing, making little triangles of white in the corners between cobblestones, seething a little when the wind blew them over the ground to a drifted corner; and so, it would be all day, getting deeper and deeper and silenter and silenter.

(Miss Buell was saying, “Land of perpetual snow.”)

All this time, of course (while he lay in bed), he had kept his eyes closed, listening to the nearer progress of the postman, the muffled footsteps thumping and slipping on the snow-sheathed cobbles; and all the other sounds—the double knocks, a frosty far-off voice or two, a bell ringing thinly and softly as if under a sheet of ice—had the same slightly abstracted quality, as if removed by one degree from actuality—as if

everything in the world had been insulated by snow. But when at last, pleased, he opened his eyes, and turned them toward the window, to see for himself this long-desired and now so clearly imagined miracle—what he saw instead was brilliant sunlight on a roof; and when, astonished, he jumped out of bed and stared down into the street, expecting to see the cobbles obliterated by the snow, he saw nothing but the bare bright cobbles themselves.

Queer, the effect this extraordinary surprise had had upon him—all the following morning he had kept with him a sense as of snow falling about him, a secret screen of new snow between himself and the world. If he had not dreamed such a thing—and how could he have dreamed it while awake?—how else could one explain it? In any case, the delusion had been so vivid as to affect his entire behavior. He could not now remember whether it was on the first or the second morning—or was it even the third?—that his mother had drawn attention to some oddness in his manner. “But my darling”—she had said at the breakfast table—“what has come over you? You don’t seem to be listening....”

And how often that very thing had happened since!

(Miss Buell was now asking if anyone knew the difference between the North Pole and the Magnetic Pole. Deirdre was holding up her flickering brown hand, and he could see the four white dimples that marked the knuckles.)

Perhaps it hadn’t been either the second or third morning—or even the fourth or fifth. How could he be sure? How could he be sure just when the delicious progress had become clear? Just when it had really begun? The intervals weren’t very precise.... All he now knew was, that at some point or other—perhaps the second day, perhaps the sixth—he had noticed that the presence of the snow was a little more insistent, the sound of it clearer; and, conversely, the sound of the postman’s footsteps more indistinct. Not only could he not hear the steps come round the corner, he could not even hear them at the first house. It was below the first house that he heard them; and then, a few days later, it was below the second house that he heard them; and a few days later again, below the third. Gradually, gradually, the snow was becoming heavier, the sound of its seething louder, the cobblestones more and more muffled. When he found, each morning, ongoing to the window, after the ritual of listening, that the roofs and cobbles were as bare as ever, it made no difference. This was, after all, only what he had expected. It was even what pleased him, what rewarded him: the thing was his own, belonged to no one else. No one else knew about it, not even his mother and father. There, outside, were the bare cobbles; and here, inside, was the snow. Snow growing heavier each day, muffling the world, hiding the ugly, and deadening increasingly—above all—the steps of the postman.

“But, my darling”—she had said at the luncheon table—“what has come over you? You don’t seem to listen when people speak to you. That’s the third time I’ve asked you to pass your plate....”

How was one to explain this to Mother? or to Father? There was, of course, nothing to be done about it: nothing. All one could do was to laugh embarrassedly, pretend to be a little ashamed, apologize, and take a sudden and somewhat disingenuous interest in what was being done or said. The cat had stayed out all night. He had a curious swelling on his left cheek – perhaps somebody had kicked him, or a stone had struck him. Mrs. Kempton was or was not coming to tea. The house was going to be housecleaned, or “turned out,” on Wednesday instead of Friday. A new lamp was provided for his evening work – perhaps it was eyestrain which accounted for this new and so peculiar vagueness of his – Mother was looking at him with amusement as she said this, but with something else as well. A new lamp? A new lamp. Yes, Mother, No, Mother, Yes, Mother. School is going very well. The geometry is very easy. The history is very dull. The geography is very interesting – particularly when it takes one to the North Pole. Why the North Pole? Oh, well, it would be fun to be an explorer. Another Peary or Scott or Shackleton. And then abruptly he found his interest in the talk at an end, stared at the pudding on his plate, listened, waited, and began once more – ah, how heavenly, too, the first beginnings – to hear or feel – for could he actually hear it? – the silent snow, the secret snow.

(Miss Buell was telling them about the search for the Northwest Passage, about Hendrik Hudson, the Half Moon.)

This had been, indeed, the only distressing feature of the new experience; the fact that it so increasingly had brought him into a kind of mute misunderstanding, or even conflict, with his father and mother. It was as if he were trying to lead a double life. On the one hand, he had to be Paul Hasleman, and keep up the appearance of being that person – dress, wash, and answer intelligently when spoken to –; on the other, he had to explore this new world which had been opened to him. Nor could there be the slightest doubt – not the slightest – that the new world was the profounder and more wonderful of the two. It was irresistible. It was miraculous. Its beauty was simply beyond anything – beyond speech as beyond thought – utterly incommunicable. But how then, between the two worlds, of which he was thus constantly aware, was he to keep a balance? One must get up, one must go to breakfast, one must talk with Mother, go to school, do one’s lessons – and, in all this, try not to appear too much of a fool. But if all the while one was also trying to extract the full deliciousness of another and quite separate existence, one which could not easily (if at all) be spoken of – how was one to manage? How was one to explain? Would it be safe to explain? Would it be absurd? Would it merely mean that he would get into some obscure kind of trouble?

These thoughts came and went, came and went, as softly and secretly as the snow; they were not precisely a disturbance, perhaps they were even a pleasure; he liked to have them; their presence was something almost palpable, something he could stroke with his hand, without closing his eyes, and without ceasing to see Miss Buell and the schoolroom and the globe and the freckles on Deirdre’s neck; nevertheless he did in a sense cease to see, or to see the obvious external world, and substituted for this vision the vision of snow, the sound of snow, and the slow, almost soundless, approach

of the postman. Yesterday, it had been only at the sixth house that the postman had become audible; the snow was much deeper now, it was falling more swiftly and heavily, the sound of its seething was more distinct, more soothing, more persistent. And this morning, it had been — as nearly as he could figure — just above the seventh house — perhaps only a step or two above; at most, he had heard two or three footsteps before the knock had sounded.... And with each such narrowing of the sphere, each nearer approach of the limit at which the postman was first audible, it was odd how sharply was increased the amount of illusion which had to be carried into the ordinary business of daily life. Each day, it was harder to get out of bed, to go to the window, to look out at the — as always — perfectly empty and snowless street. Each day it was more difficult to go through the perfunctory motions of greeting Mother and Father at breakfast, to reply to their questions, to put his books together and go to school. And at school, how extraordinarily hard to conduct with success simultaneously the public life and the life that was secret! There were times when he longed — positively ached — to tell everyone about it — to burst out with it — only to be checked almost at once by a far-off feeling as of some faint absurdity which was inherent in it — but was it absurd? — and more importantly by a sense of mysterious power in his very secrecy. Yes; it must be kept secret. That, more and more, became clear. At whatever cost to himself, whatever pain to others —

(Miss Buell looked straight at him, smiling, and said, “Perhaps we’ll ask Paul. I’m sure Paul will come out of his daydream long enough to be able to tell us. Won’t you, Paul?” He rose slowly from his chair, resting one hand on the brightly varnished desk, and deliberately stared through the snow toward the blackboard. It was an effort, but it was amusing to make it. “Yes,” he said slowly, “it was what we now call the Hudson River. This he thought to be the Northwest Passage. He was disappointed.” He sat down again, and as he did so Deirdre half turned in her chair and gave him a shy smile, of approval and admiration.)

At whatever pain to others.

This part of it was very puzzling, very puzzling. Mother was very nice, and so was Father. Yes, that was all true enough. He wanted to be nice to them, to tell them everything — and yet, was it really wrong of him to want to have a secret place of his own?

At bed-time, the night before, Mother had said, “If this goes on, my lad, we’ll have to see a doctor, we will! We can’t have our boy —” But what was it she had said? “Live in another world”? “Live so far away”? The word “far” had been in it, he was sure, and then Mother had taken up a magazine again and laughed a little, but with an expression which wasn’t mirthful. He had felt sorry for her....

The bell rang for dismissal. The sound came to him through long curved parallels of falling snow. He saw Deirdre rise, and had himself risen almost as soon — but not quite as soon — as she.

II.

On the walk homeward, which was timeless, it pleased him to see through the accompaniment, or counterpoint, of snow, the items of mere externality on his way. There were many kinds of brick in the sidewalks, and laid in many kinds of pattern. The garden walls, too, were various, some of wooden palings, some of plaster, some of stone. Twigs of bushes leaned over the walls: the little hard green winter-buds of lilac, on gray stems, sheathed and fat; other branches very thin and fine and black and desiccated. Dirty sparrows huddled in the bushes, as dull in color as dead fruit left in leafless trees. A single starling creaked on a weather vane. In the gutter, beside a drain, was a scrap of torn and dirty newspaper, caught in a little delta of filth; the word ECZEMA appeared in large capitals, and below it was a letter from Mrs. Amelia D. Cravath, 2100 Pine Street, Fort Worth, Texas, to the effect that after being a sufferer for years she had been cured by Caley's Ointment. In the little delta, beside the fan-shaped and deeply runneled continent of brown mud, were lost twigs, descended from their parent trees, dead matches, a rusty horse-chestnut burr, a small concentration of eggshell, a streak of yellow sawdust which had been wet and now was dry and congealed, a brown pebble, and a broken feather. Farther on was a cement sidewalk, ruled into geometrical parallelograms, with a brass inlay at one end commemorating the contractors who had laid it, and, halfway across, an irregular and random series of dog-tracks, immortalized in synthetic stone. He knew these well, and always stepped on them; to cover the little hollows with his own foot had always been a queer pleasure; today he did it once more, but perfunctorily and detachedly, all the while thinking of something else. That was a dog, a long time ago, who had made a mistake and walked on the cement while it was still wet. He had probably wagged his tail, but that hadn't been recorded. Now, Paul Hasleman, aged twelve, on his way home from school, crossed the same river, which in the meantime had frozen into rock. Homeward through the snow, the snow falling in bright sunshine. Homeward?

Then came the gateway with the two posts surmounted by egg-shaped stones which had been cunningly balanced on their ends, as if by Columbus, and mortared in the very act of balance; a source of perpetual wonder. On the brick wall just beyond, the letter H had been stenciled, presumably for some purpose. H? H.

The green hydrant, with a little green-painted chain attached to the brass screw-cap.

The elm tree, with the great gray wound in the bark, kidney-shaped, into which he always put his hand—to feel the cold but living wood. The injury, he had been sure, was due to the gnawings of a tethered horse. But now it deserved only a passing palm, a merely tolerant eye. There were more important things. Miracles. Beyond the thoughts of trees, mere elms. Beyond the thoughts of sidewalks, mere stone, mere brick, mere cement. Beyond the thoughts even of his own shoes, which trod these sidewalks obediently, bearing a burden—far above—of elaborate mystery. He watched them. They were not very well polished; he had neglected them, for a very good reason: they were one of the many parts of the increasing difficulty of the daily

return to daily life, the morning struggle. To get up, having at last opened one's eyes, to go to the window, and discover no snow, to wash, to dress, to descend the curving stairs to breakfast —

At whatever pain to others, nevertheless, one must persevere in severance, since the incommunicability of the experience demanded it. It was desirable, of course, to be kind to Mother and Father, especially as they seemed to be worried, but it was also desirable to be resolute. If they should decide — as appeared likely — to consult the doctor, Doctor Howells, and have Paul inspected, his heart listened to through a kind of dictaphone, his lungs, his stomach — well, that was all right. He would go through with it. He would give them answer for question, too — perhaps such answers as they hadn't expected? No. That would never do. For the secret world must, at all costs, be preserved.

The bird-house in the apple tree was empty — it was the wrong time of year for wrens. The little round black door had lost its pleasure. The wrens were enjoying other houses, other nests, remoter trees. But this too was a notion which he only vaguely and grazingly entertained — as if, for the moment, he merely touched an edge of it; there was something further on, which was already assuming a sharper importance; something which already teased at the corners of his eyes, teasing also at the corner of his mind. It was funny to think that he so wanted this, so awaited it — and yet found himself enjoying this momentary dalliance with the bird-house, as if for a quite deliberate postponement and enhancement of the approaching pleasure. He was aware of his delay, of his smiling and detached and now almost uncomprehending gaze at the little bird-house; he knew what he was going to look at next: it was his own little cobbled hill-street, his own house, the little river at the bottom of the hill, the grocer's shop with the cardboard man in the window — and now, thinking of all this, he turned his head, still smiling, and looking quickly right and left through the snow-laden sunlight.

And the mist of snow, as he had foreseen, was still on it — a ghost of snow falling in the bright sunlight, softly and steadily floating and turning and pausing, soundlessly meeting the snow that covered, as with a transparent mirage, the bare bright cobbles. He loved it — he stood still and loved it. Its beauty was paralyzing — beyond all words, all experience, all dream. No fairy story he had ever read could be compared with it — none had ever given him this extraordinary combination of ethereal loveliness with a something else, unnameable, which was just faintly and deliciously terrifying. What was this thing? As he thought of it, he looked upward toward his own bedroom window, which was open — and it was as if he looked straight into the room and saw himself lying half-awake in his bed. There he was — at this very instant he was still perhaps actually there — more truly there than standing here at the edge of the cobbled hill-street, with one hand lifted to shade his eyes against the snowsun. Had he indeed ever left his room, in all this time? since that very first morning? Was the whole progress still being enacted there, was it still the same morning, and himself not yet wholly awake? And even now, had the postman not yet come round the corner?...

This idea amused him, and automatically, as he thought of it, he turned his head and looked toward the top of the hill. There was, of course, nothing there — nothing and no one. The street was empty and quiet. And all the more because of its emptiness it occurred to him to count the houses — a thing which, oddly enough, he hadn't before thought of doing. Of course, he had known there weren't many — many, that is, on his own side of the street, which were the ones that figured in the postman's progress — but nevertheless it came as something of a shock to find that there were precisely six, above his own house — his own house was the seventh.

Six!

Astonished, he looked at his own house — looked at the door, on which was the number thirteen — and then realized that the whole thing was exactly and logically and absurdly what he ought to have known. Just the same, the realization gave him abruptly, and even a little frighteningly, a sense of hurry. He was being hurried — he was being rushed. For — he knit his brow — he couldn't be mistaken — it was just above the seventh house, his own house, that the postman had first been audible this very morning. But in that case — in that case — did it mean that tomorrow he would hear nothing? The knock he had heard must have been the knock of their own door. Did it mean — and this was an idea which gave him a really extraordinary feeling of surprise — that he would never hear the postman again? — that tomorrow morning the postman would already have passed the house, in a snow so deep as to render his footsteps completely inaudible? That he would have made his approach down the snow filled street so soundlessly, so secretly, that he, Paul Hasleman, there lying in bed, would not have waked in time, or waking, would have heard nothing?

But how could that be? Unless even the knocker should be muffled in the snow — frozen tight, perhaps?... But in that case —

A vague feeling of disappointment came over him; a vague sadness as if he felt himself deprived of something which he had long looked forward to, something much prized. After all this, all this beautiful progress, the slow delicious advance of the postman through the silent and secret snow, the knock creeping closer each day, and the footsteps nearer, the audible compass of the world thus daily narrowed, narrowed, narrowed, as the snow soothingly and beautifully encroached and deepened, after all this, was he to be defrauded of the one thing he had so wanted — to be able to count, as it were, the last two or three solemn footsteps, as they finally approached his own door? Was it all going to happen, at the end, so suddenly? or indeed, had it already happened? with no slow and subtle gradations of menace, in which he could luxuriate?

He gazed upward again, toward his own window which flashed in the sun; and this time almost with a feeling that it would be better if he were still in bed, in that room; for in that case this must still be the first morning, and there would be six more mornings to come — or, for that matter, seven or eight or nine — how could he be sure? — or even more.

III.

After supper, the inquisition began. He stood before the doctor, under the lamp, and submitted silently to the usual thumpings and tappings.

"Now will you please say 'Ah!'"

"Ah!"

"Now again, please, if you don't mind."

"Ah."

"Say it slowly, and hold it if you can —"

"Ah-h-h-h-h-h —"

"Good."

How silly all this was. As if it had anything to do with his throat! Or his heart, or lungs!

Relaxing his mouth, of which the corners, after all this absurd stretching, felt uncomfortable, he avoided the doctor's eyes, and stared toward the fireplace, past his mother's feet (in gray slippers) which projected from the green chair, and his father's feet (in brown slippers) which stood neatly side by side on the hearth rug.

"Hm. There is certainly nothing wrong there ...?"

He felt the doctor's eyes fixed upon him, and, as if merely to be polite, returned the look, but with a feeling of justifiable evasiveness.

"Now, young man, tell me — do you feel all right?"

"Yes, sir, quite all right."

"No headaches? no dizziness?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Let me see. Let's get a book, if you don't mind — yes, thank you, that will do splendidly — and now, Paul, if you'll just read it, holding it as you would normally hold it —"

He took the book and read:

"And another praise have I to tell for this the city our mother, the gift of a great god, a glory of the land most high; the might of horses, the might of young horses, the might of the sea.... For thou, son of Cronus, our lord Poseidon, hath throned herein this pride, since in these roads first thou didst show forth the curb that cures the rage of steeds. And the shapely oar, apt to men's hands, hath a wondrous speed on the brine, following the hundred-footed Nereids.... O land that art praised above all lands, now is it for thee to make those bright praises seen in deeds."

He stopped, tentatively, and lowered the heavy book.

"No – as I thought – there is certainly no superficial sign of eyestrain.

" Silence thronged the room, and he was aware of the focused scrutiny of the three people who confronted him....

"We could have his eyes examined – but I believe it is something else."

"What could it be?" That was his father's voice.

"It's only this curious absent-mindedness –" This was his mother's voice.

In the presence of the doctor, they both seemed irritatingly apologetic.

"I believe it is something else. Now Paul—I would like very much to ask you a question or two. You will answer them, won't you – you know I'm an old, old friend of yours, eh? That's right!..."

His back was thumped twice by the doctor's fat fist – then the doctor was grinning at him with false amiability, while with one fingernail he was scratching the top button of his waistcoat. Beyond the doctor's shoulder was the fire, the fingers of flame making light prestidigitation against the sooty fire back, the soft sound of their random flutter the only sound.

"I would like to know – is there anything that worries you?"

The doctor was again smiling, his eyelids low against the little black pupils, in each of which was a tiny white bead of light. Why answer him? why answer him at all? "At whatever pain to others" – but it was all a nuisance, this necessity for resistance, this necessity for attention; it was as if one had been stood up on a brilliantly lighted stage, under a great round blaze of spotlight; as if one were merely a trained seal, or a performing dog, or a fish, dipped out of an aquarium and held up by the tail. It would serve them right if he were merely to bark or growl. And meanwhile, to miss these last few precious hours, these hours of which each minute was more beautiful than the last, more menacing – ! He still looked, as if from a great distance, at the beads of light in the doctor's eyes, at the fixed false smile, and then, beyond, once more at his mother's slippers, his father's slippers, the soft flutter of the fire. Even here, even amongst these hostile presences, and in this arranged light, he could see the snow, he could hear it – it was in the corners of the room, where the shadow was deepest, under the sofa, behind the half-opened door which led to the dining room. It was gentler here, softer, its seethe the quietest of whispers, as if, in deference to a drawing room, it had quite deliberately put on its "manners"; it kept itself out of sight, obliterated itself, but distinctly with an air of saying, "Ah, but just wait! Wait till we are alone together! Then I will begin to tell you something new! Something white! something cold! something sleepy! something of cease, and peace, and the long bright curve of space! Tell them to go away. Banish them. Refuse to speak. Leave them, go upstairs to your room, turn out the light and get into bed – I will go with you, I will

be waiting for you, I will tell you a better story than Little Kay of the Skates, or The Snow Ghost—I will surround your bed, I will close the windows, pile a deep drift against the door, so that none will ever again be able to enter. Speak to them!...” It seemed as if the little hissing voice came from a slow white spiral of falling flakes in the corner by the front window—but he could not be sure. He felt himself smiling, then, and said to the doctor, but without looking at him, looking beyond him still—

“Oh no, I think not—”

“But are you sure, my boy?”

His father’s voice came softly and coldly then—the familiar voice of silken warning.

“You needn’t answer at once, Paul—remember we’re trying to help you—think it over and be quite sure, won’t you?”

He felt himself smiling again, at the notion of being quite sure. What a joke! As if he weren’t so sure that reassurance was no longer necessary, and all this cross-examination a ridiculous farce, a grotesque parody! What could they know about it? these gross intelligences, these humdrum minds so bound to the usual, the ordinary? Impossible to tell them about it! Why, even now, even now, with the proof so abundant, so formidable, so imminent, so appallingly present here in this very room, could they believe it?—could even his mother believe it? No—it was only too plain that if anything were said about it, the merest hint given, they would be incredulous—they would laugh—they would say “Absurd!”—think things about him which weren’t true....

“Why no, I’m not worried—why should I be?”

He looked then straight at the doctor’s low-lidded eyes, looked from one of them to the other, from one bead of light to the other, and gave a little laugh.

The doctor seemed to be disconcerted by this. He drew back in his chair, resting a fat white hand on either knee. The smile faded slowly from his face.

“Well, Paul!” he said, and paused gravely, “I’m afraid you don’t take this quite seriously enough. I think you perhaps don’t quite realize—don’t quite realize”—He took a deep quick breath and turned, as if helplessly, at a loss for words, to the others. But Mother and Father were both silent—no help was forthcoming.

“You must surely know, be aware, that you have not been quite yourself, of late? Don’t you know that?...”

It was amusing to watch the doctor’s renewed attempt at a smile, a queer disorganized look, as of confidential embarrassment.

“I feel all right, sir,” he said, and again gave the little laugh.

“And we’re trying to help you.” The doctor’s tone sharpened.

"Yes, sir, I know. But why? I'm all right. I'm just thinking, that's all."

His mother made a quick movement forward, resting a hand on the back of the doctor's chair.

"Thinking?" she said. "But my dear, about what?"

This was a direct challenge – and would have to be directly met. But before he met it, he looked again into the corner by the door, as if for reassurance. He smiled again at what he saw, at what he heard. The little spiral was still there, still softly whirling, like the ghost of a white kitten chasing the ghost of a white tail, and making as it did so the faintest of whispers. It was all right! If only he could remain firm, everything was going to be all right.

"Oh, about anything, about nothing – you know the way you do!"

"You mean – daydreaming?"

"Oh, no – thinking!"

"But thinking about what?"

"Anything."

He laughed a third time – but this time, happening to glance upward toward his mother's face, he was appalled at the effect his laughter seemed to have upon her. Her mouth had opened in an expression of horror.... This was too bad! Unfortunate! He had known it would cause pain, of course – but he hadn't expected it to be quite so bad as this. Perhaps – perhaps if he just gave them a tiny gleaming hint – ?

"About the snow," he said.

"What on earth?" This was his father's voice. The brown slippers came a step nearer on the hearth-rug.

"But my dear, what do you mean?" This was his mother's voice.

The doctor merely stared.

"Just snow, that's all. I like to think about it."

"Tell us about it, my boy." "But that's all it is. There's nothing to tell. You know what snow is?" This he said almost angrily, for he felt that they were trying to corner him. He turned sideways so as no longer to face the doctor, and the better to see the inch of blackness between the window-sill and the lowered curtain – the cold inch of beckoning and delicious night. At once he felt better, more assured.

"Mother – can I go to bed, now, please? I've got a headache."

"But I thought you said –"

"It's just come. It's all these questions – ! Can I, mother?"

"You can go as soon as the doctor has finished."

"Don't you think this thing ought to be gone into thoroughly, and now?" This was Father's voice. The brown slippers again came a step nearer, the voice was the well-known "punishment" voice, resonant and cruel.

"Oh, what's the use, Norman —"

Quite suddenly, everyone was silent. And without precisely facing them, nevertheless he was aware that all three of them were watching him with an extraordinary intensity — staring hard at him — as if he had done something monstrous, or was himself some kind of monster. He could hear the soft irregular flutter of the flames; the cluck-click-cluck-click of the clock; far and faint, two sudden spurts of laughter from the kitchen, as quickly cut off as begun; a murmur of water in the pipes; and then, the silence seemed to deepen, to spread out, to become world-long and world-wide, to become timeless and shapeless, and to center inevitably and rightly, with a slow and sleepy but enormous concentration of all power, on the beginning of a new sound. What this new sound was going to be, he knew perfectly well. It might begin with a hiss, but it would end with a roar — there was no time to lose — he must escape. It mustn't happen here —

Without another word, he turned and ran up the stairs.

IV.

Not a moment too soon. The darkness was coming in long white waves. A prolonged sibilance filled the night — a great seamless seethe of wild influence went abruptly across it — a cold low humming shook the windows. He shut the door and flung off his clothes in the dark. The bare black floor was like a little raft tossed in waves of snow, almost overwhelmed, washed under whitely, up again, smothered in curled billows of feather. The snow was laughing; it spoke from all sides at once; it pressed closer to him as he ran and jumped exulting into his bed.

"Listen to us!" it said. "Listen! We have come to tell you the story we told you about. You remember? Lie down. Shut your eyes, now — you will no longer see much — in this white darkness who could see, or want to see? We will take the place of everything.... Listen —"

A beautiful varying dance of snow began at the front of the room, came forward and then retreated, flattened out toward the floor, then rose fountain-like to the ceiling, swayed, recruited itself from a new stream of flakes which poured laughing in through the humming window, advanced again, lifted long white arms. It said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold — it said —

But then a gash of horrible light fell brutally across the room from the opening door — the snow drew back hissing — something alien had come into the room — something hostile. This thing rushed at him, clutched at him, shook him — and he was not merely horrified, he was filled with such a loathing as he had never known. What was this?

this cruel disturbance? this act of anger and hate? It was as if he had to reach up a hand toward another world for any understanding of it —an effort of which he was only barely capable. But of that other world he still remembered just enough to know the exorcising words. They tore themselves from his other life suddenly —

“Mother! Mother! Go away! I hate you!”

And with that effort, everything was solved, everything became all right: the seamless hiss advanced once more, the long white wavering lines rose and fell like enormous whispering sea-waves, the whisper becoming louder, the laughter more numerous.

“Listen!” it said. “We’ll tell you the last, the most beautiful and secret story — shut your eyes — it is a very small story — a story that gets smaller and smaller — it comes inward instead of opening like a flower — it is a flower becoming a seed — a little cold seed — do you hear? we are leaning closer to you —”

The hiss was now becoming a roar — the whole world was a vast moving screen of snow — but even now it said peace, it said remoteness, it said cold, it said sleep.

Story 2. DEATH BY LANDSCAPE by Margaret Atwood



Now that the boys are grown up and Rob is dead, Lois has moved to a condominium apartment in one of the newer waterfront developments. She is relieved not to have to worry about the lawn, or about the ivy pushing its muscular little suckers into the brickwork, or the squirrels gnawing their way into the attic and eating the insulation off the wiring, or about strange noises. This building has a security system, and the only plant life is in pots in the solarium.

Lois is glad she's been able to find an apartment big enough for her pictures. They are more crowded together than they were in the house, but this arrangement gives the walls a European look: blocks of pictures, above and beside one another, rather than one over the chesterfield, one over the fireplace, one in the front hall, in the old acceptable manner of sprinkling art around so it does not get too intrusive. This way has more of an impact. You know it's not supposed to be furniture.

None of the pictures is very large, which doesn't mean they aren't valuable.

They are paintings, or sketches and drawings, by artists who were not nearly as well known when Lois began to buy them as they are now. Their work later turned up on stamps, or as silk-screen reproductions hung in the principals' offices of high schools, or as jigsaw puzzles, or on beautifully printed calendars sent out by corporations as Christmas gifts, to their less important clients. These artists painted mostly in the twenties and thirties and forties; they painted landscapes. Lois has two Tom Thomsons, three A. Y. Jacksons, a Lawren Harris. She has an Arthur Lismer, she has a J. E. H. MacDonald. She has a David Milne. They are pictures of convoluted tree trunks on an island of pink wave-smoothed stone, with more islands behind; of a lake with rough, bright, sparsely wooded cliffs; of a vivid river shore with a tangle of bush and two beached canoes, one red, one gray; of a yellow autumn woods with the ice-blue gleam of a pond half-seen through the interlaced branches.

It was Lois who'd chosen them. Rob had no interest in art, although he could see the necessity of having something on the walls. He left all the decorating decisions to her, while providing the money, of course. Because of this collection of hers, Lois's friends — especially the men — have given her the reputation of having a good nose for art investments.

But this is not why she bought the pictures, way back then. She bought them because she wanted them. She wanted something that was in them, although she could not have said at the time what it was. It was not peace: she does not find them peaceful in the least. Looking at them fills her with a wordless unease. Despite the fact that there are no people in them or even animals, it's as if there is something, or someone, looking back out.

When she was thirteen, Lois went on a canoe trip. She'd only been on overnights before. This was to be a long one, into the trackless wilderness, as Cappie put it. It was Lois's first canoe trip, and her last.

Cappie was the head of the summer camp to which Lois had been sent ever since she was nine. Camp Manitou, it was called; it was one of the better ones, for girls, though not the best. Girls of her age whose parents could afford it were routinely packed off to such camps, which bore a generic resemblance to one another. They favored Indian names and had hearty, energetic leaders, who were called Cappie or Skip or Scottie. At these camps you learned to swim well and sail, and paddle a canoe, and perhaps ride a horse or play tennis. When you weren't doing these things, you could do Arts and Crafts and turn out dingy, lumpish clay ashtrays for your mother — mothers smoked more, then — or bracelets made of colored braided string.

Cheerfulness was required at all times, even at breakfast. Loud shouting and the banging of spoons on the tables were allowed, and even encouraged, at ritual intervals. Chocolate bars were rationed, to control tooth decay and pimples. At night, after supper, in the dining hall or outside around a mosquito-infested campfire ring for special treats, there were singsongs. Lois can still remember all the words to "My Darling Clementine," and to "My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean," with acting-out gestures: a rippling of the hands for "the ocean," two hands together under the cheek for "lies." She will never be able to forget them, which is a sad thought.

Lois thinks she can recognize women who went to these camps, and were good at it. They have a hardness to their handshakes, even now; a way of standing, legs planted firmly and farther apart than usual; a way of sizing you up, to see if you'd be any good in a canoe — the front, not the back. They themselves would be in the back. They would call it the stern.

She knows that such camps still exist, although Camp Manitou does not. They are one of the few things that haven't changed much. They now offer copper enameling, and functionless pieces of stained glass baked in electric ovens, though judging from the productions of her friends' grandchildren the artistic standards have not improved.

To Lois, encountering it in the first year after the war, Camp Manitou seemed ancient. Its log-sided buildings with the white cement in between the half-logs, its flagpole ringed with whitewashed stones, its weathered gray dock jutting out into Lake Prospect, with its woven rope bumpers and its rusty rings for tying up, its prim round flowerbed of petunias near the office door, must surely have been there always. In truth it dated only from the first decade of the century; it had been founded by Cappie's parents, who'd thought of camping as bracing to the character, like cold showers, and had been passed along to her as an inheritance, and an obligation.

Lois realized, later, that it must have been a struggle for Cappie to keep Camp Manitou going, during the Depression and then the war, when money did not flow freely. If it had been a camp for the very rich, instead of the merely well off, there would have

been fewer problems. But there must have been enough Old Girls, ones with daughters, to keep the thing in operation, though not entirely shipshape: furniture was battered, painted trim was peeling, roofs leaked. There were dim photographs of these Old Girls dotted around the dining hall, wearing ample woolen bathing suits and showing their fat, dimpled legs, or standing, arms twined, in odd tennis outfits with baggy skirts.

In the dining hall, over the stone fireplace that was never used, there was a huge molting stuffed moose head, which looked somehow carnivorous. It was a sort of mascot; its name was Monty Manitou. The older campers spread the story that it was haunted, and came to life in the dark, when the feeble and undependable lights had been turned off or, due to yet another generator failure, had gone out. Lois was afraid of it at first, but not after she got used to it.

Cappie was the same: you had to get used to her. Possibly she was forty, or thirty-five, or fifty. She had fawn-colored hair that looked as if it was cut with a bowl. Her head jutted forward, jigging like a chicken as she strode around the camp, clutching notebooks and checking things off in them. She was like their minister in church: both of them smiled a lot and were anxious because they wanted things to go well; they both had the same overwashed skins and stringy necks. But all this disappeared when Cappie was leading a singsong, or otherwise leading. Then she was happy, sure of herself, her plain face almost luminous. She wanted to cause joy. At these times she was loved, at others merely trusted.

There were many things Lois didn't like about Camp Manitou, at first. She hated the noisy chaos and spoon-banging of the dining hall, the rowdy singsongs at which you were expected to yell in order to show that you were enjoying yourself. Hers was not a household that encouraged yelling. She hated the necessity of having to write dutiful letters to her parents claiming she was having fun. She could not complain, because camp cost so much money.

She didn't much like having to undress in a roomful of other girls, even in the dim light, although nobody paid any attention, or sleeping in a cabin with seven other girls, some of whom snored because they had adenoids or colds, some of whom had nightmares, or wet their beds and cried about it. Bottom bunks made her feel closed in, and she was afraid of falling out of top ones; she was afraid of heights. She got homesick, and suspected her parents of having a better time when she wasn't there than when she was, although her mother wrote to her every week saying how much they missed her. All this was when she was nine. By the time she was thirteen she liked it. She was an old hand by then.

Lucy was her best friend at camp. Lois had other friends in winter, when there was school and itchy woolen clothing and darkness in the afternoons, but Lucy was her summer friend.

She turned up the second year, when Lois was ten, and a Bluejay. (Chickadees, Bluejays, Ravens, and Kingfishers – these were the names Camp Manitou assigned to the different age groups, a sort of totemic clan system. In those days, thinks Lois, it was birds for girls, animals for boys: wolves, and so forth. Though some animals and birds were suitable and some were not. Never vultures, for instance; never skunks, or rats.)

Lois helped Lucy to unpack her tin trunk and place the folded clothes on the wooden shelves, and to make up her bed. She put her in the top bunk right above her, where she could keep an eye on her. Already she knew that Lucy was an exception, to a good many rules; already she felt proprietorial.

Lucy was from the United States, where the comic books came from, and the movies. She wasn't from New York or Hollywood or Buffalo, the only American cities Lois knew the names of, but from Chicago. Her house was on the lake shore and had gates to it, and grounds. They had a maid, all of the time. Lois's family only had a cleaning lady twice a week.

The only reason Lucy was being sent to this camp (she cast a look of minor scorn around the cabin, diminishing it and also offending Lois, while at the same time daunting her) was that her mother had been a camper here. Her mother had been a Canadian once, but had married her father, who had a patch over one eye, like a pirate. She showed Lois the picture of him in her wallet. He got the patch in the war. "Shrapnel," said Lucy. Lois, who was unsure about shrapnel, was so impressed she could only grunt. Her own two-eyed, unwounded father was tame by comparison.

"My father plays golf," she ventured at last.

"Everyone plays golf," said Lucy. "My mother plays golf."

Lois's mother did not. Lois took Lucy to see the outhouses and the swimming dock and the dining hall with Monty Manitou's baleful head, knowing in advance they would not measure up.

This was a bad beginning; but Lucy was good-natured, and accepted Camp Manitou with the same casual shrug with which she seemed to accept everything. She would make the best of it, without letting Lois forget that this was what she was doing.

However, there were things Lois knew that Lucy did not. Lucy scratched the tops off all her mosquito bites and had to be taken to the infirmary to be daubed with Ozonol. She took her T-shirt off while sailing, and although the counselor spotted her after a while and made her put it back on, she burnt spectacularly, bright red, with the X of her bathing-suit straps standing out in alarming white; she let Lois peel the sheets of whispery-thin burned skin off her shoulders. When they sang "Alouette" around the campfire, she did not know any of the French words. The difference was that Lucy did not care about the things she didn't know, whereas Lois did.

During the next winter, and subsequent winters, Lucy and Lois wrote to each other. They were both only children, at a time when this was thought to be a disadvantage,

so in their letters they pretended to be sisters, or even twins. Lois had to strain a little over this, because Lucy was so blond, with translucent skin and large blue eyes like a doll's, and Lois was nothing out of the ordinary — just a tallish, thinnish, brownish person with freckles. They signed their letters LL, with the L's entwined together like the monograms on a towel. (Lois and Lucy, thinks Lois. How our names date us. Lois Lane, Superman's girlfriend, enterprising female reporter; "I Love Lucy." Now we are obsolete, and it's little Jennifers, little Emilys, little Alexandras and Carolines and Tiffanys.)

They were more effusive in their letters than they ever were in person.

They bordered their pages with X's and O's, but when they met again in the summers it was always a shock. They had changed so much, or Lucy had. It was like watching someone grow up in jolts. At first it would be hard to think up things to say.

But Lucy always had a surprise or two, something to show, some marvel to reveal. The first year she had a picture of herself in a tutu, her hair in a ballerina's knot on the top of her head; she pirouetted around the swimming dock, to show Lois how it was done, and almost fell off. The next year she had given that up and was taking horseback riding. (Camp Manitou did not have horses.) The next year her mother and father had been divorced, and she had a new stepfather, one with both eyes, and a new house, although the maid was the same. The next year, when they had graduated from Bluejays and entered Ravens, she got her period, right in the first week of camp. The two of them snatched some matches from their counselor, who smoked illegally, and made a small fire out behind the farthest outhouse, at dusk, using their flashlights. They could set all kinds of fires by now; they had learned how in Campcraft. On this fire they burned one of Lucy's used sanitary napkins. Lois is not sure why they did this, or whose idea it was. But she can remember the feeling of deep satisfaction it gave her as the white fluff singed and the blood sizzled, as if some wordless ritual had been fulfilled.

They did not get caught, but then they rarely got caught at any of their camp transgressions. Lucy had such large eyes, and was such an accomplished liar.

This year Lucy is different again: slower, more languorous. She is no longer interested in sneaking around after dark, purloining cigarettes from the counselor, dealing in black-market candy bars. She is pensive, and hard to wake in the mornings. She doesn't like her stepfather, but she doesn't want to live with her real father either, who has a new wife. She thinks her mother may be having a love affair with a doctor; she doesn't know for sure, but she's seen them smooching in his car, out on the driveway, when her stepfather wasn't there. It serves him right. She hates her private school. She has a boyfriend, who is sixteen and works as a gardener's assistant. This is how she met him: in the garden. She describes to Lois what it is like when he kisses her — rubbery at first, but then your knees go limp. She has been forbidden to see him, and threatened with boarding school. She wants to run away from home.

Lois has little to offer in return. Her own life is placid and satisfactory, but there is nothing much that can be said about happiness. "You're so lucky," Lucy tells her, a little smugly. She might as well say boring because this is how it makes Lois feel.

Lucy is apathetic about the canoe trip, so Lois has to disguise her own excitement. The evening before they are to leave, she slouches into the campfire ring as if coerced, and sits down with a sigh of endurance, just as Lucy does.

Every canoe trip that went out of camp was given a special send-off by Cappie and the section leader and counselors, with the whole section in attendance. Cappie painted three streaks of red across each of her cheeks with a lipstick. They looked like three-fingered claw marks. She put a blue circle on her forehead with fountain-pen ink, and tied a twisted bandanna around her head and stuck a row of frazzle-ended feathers around it, and wrapped herself in a red-and-black Hudson's Bay blanket. The counselors, also in blankets but with only two streaks of red, beat on tom-toms made of round wooden cheese boxes with leather stretched over the top and nailed in place. Cappie was Chief Cappeesota. They all had to say "How!" when she walked into the circle and stood there with one hand raised.

Looking back on this, Lois finds it disquieting. She knows too much about Indians: this is why. She knows, for instance, that they should not even be called Indians, and that they have enough worries without other people taking their names and dressing up as them. It has all been a form of stealing.

But she remembers, too, that she was once ignorant of this. Once she loved the campfire, the flickering of light on the ring of faces, the sound of the fake tom-toms, heavy and fast like a scared heartbeat; she loved Cappie in a red blanket and feathers, solemn, as a chief should be, raising her hand and saying, "Greetings, my Ravens." It was not funny, it was not making fun. She wanted to be an Indian. She wanted to be adventurous and pure, and aboriginal.

"You go on big water," says Cappie. This is her idea — all their ideas — of how Indians talk. "You go where no man has ever trod. You go many moons." This is not true. They are only going for a week, not many moons. The canoe route is clearly marked, they have gone over it on a map, and there are prepared campsites with names which are used year after year. But when Cappie says this — and despite the way Lucy rolls up her eyes — Lois can feel the water stretching out, with the shores twisting away on either side, immense and a little frightening.

"You bring back much wampum," says Cappie. "Do good in war, my braves, and capture many scalps." This is another of her pretenses: that they are boys, and bloodthirsty. But such a game cannot be played by substituting the word "squaw." It would not work at all.

Each of them has to stand up and step forward and have a red line drawn across her cheeks by Cappie. She tells them they must follow in the paths of their ancestors (who most certainly, thinks Lois, looking out the window of her apartment and

remembering the family stash of daguerreotypes and sepia-colored portraits on her mother's dressing table, the stiff-shirted, black-coated, grim-faced men and the beflounged women with their severe hair and their corseted respectability, would never have considered heading off onto an open lake, in a canoe, just for fun).

At the end of the ceremony, they all stood and held hands around the circle, and sang taps. This did not sound very Indian, thinks Lois. It sounded like a bugle call at a military post, in a movie. But Cappie was never one to be much concerned with consistency, or with archeology.

After breakfast the next morning they set out from the main dock, in four canoes, three in each. The lipstick stripes have not come off completely, and still show faintly pink, like healing burns. They wear their white denim sailing hats, because of the sun, and thin-striped T-shirts, and pale baggy shorts with the cuffs rolled up. The middle one kneels, propping her rear end against the rolled sleeping bags. The counselors going with them are Pat and Kip. Kip is no-nonsense; Pat is easier to wheedle, or fool.

There are white puffy clouds and a small breeze. Glints come from the little waves. Lois is in the bow of Kip's canoe. She still can't do a J-stroke very well, and she will have to be in the bow or the middle for the whole trip. Lucy is behind her; her own J-stroke is even worse. She splashes Lois with her paddle, quite a big splash.

"I'll get you back," says Lois.

"There was a stable fly on your shoulder," Lucy says.

Lois turns to look at her, to see if she's grinning. They're in the habit of splashing each other. Back there, the camp has vanished behind the first long point of rock and rough trees. Lois feels as if an invisible rope has broken. They're floating free, on their own, cut loose. Beneath the canoe the lake goes down, deeper and colder than it was a minute before.

"No horsing around in the canoe," says Kip. She's rolled her T-shirt sleeves up to the shoulder; her arms are brown and sinewy, her jaw determined, her stroke perfect. She looks as if she knows exactly what she is doing.

The four canoes keep close together. They sing, raucously and with defiance; they sing "The Quartermaster's Store," and "Clementine," and "Alou-ette." It is more like bellowing than singing.

After that the wind grows stronger, blowing slantwise against the bows, and they have to put all their energy into shoving themselves through the water.

Was there anything important, anything that would provide some sort of reason or clue to what happened next? Lois can remember everything, every detail; but it does her no good.

They stopped at noon for a swim and lunch, and went on in the afternoon. At last, they reached Little Birch, which was the first campsite for overnight. Lois and Lucy made

the fire, while the others pitched the heavy canvas tents. The fireplace was already there, flat stones piled into a U. A burned tin can and a beer bottle had been left in it. Their fire went out, and they had to restart it. "Hustle your bustle," said Kip. "Were starving."

The sun went down, and in the pink sunset light they brushed their teeth and spat the toothpaste froth into the lake. Kip and Pat put all the food that wasn't in cans into a packsack and slung it into a tree, in case of bears.

Lois and Lucy weren't sleeping in a tent. They'd begged to be allowed to sleep out; that way they could talk without the others hearing. If it rained, they told Kip, they promised not to crawl dripping into the tent over everyone's legs: they would get under the canoes. So, they were out on the point.

Lois tried to get comfortable inside her sleeping bag, which smelled of musty storage and of earlier campers, a stale salty sweetness. She curled herself up, with her sweater rolled up under her head for a pillow and her flashlight inside her sleeping bag so it wouldn't roll away. The muscles of her sore arms were making small pings, like rubber bands breaking.

Beside her Lucy was rustling around. Lois could see the glimmering oval of her white face.

"I've got a rock poking into my back," said Lucy.

"So do I," said Lois. "You want to go into the tent?" She herself didn't, but it was right to ask.

"No," said Lucy. She subsided into her sleeping bag. After a moment she said, "It would be nice not to go back."

"To camp?" said Lois.

"To Chicago," said Lucy. "I hate it there."

"What about your boyfriend?" said Lois. Lucy didn't answer. She was either asleep or pretending to be.

There was a moon, and a movement of the trees. In the sky there were stars, layers of stars that went down and down. Kip said that when the stars were bright like that instead of hazy it meant bad weather later on. Out on the lake there were two loons, calling to each other in their insane, mournful voices. At the time it did not sound like grief. It was just background.

The lake in the morning was flat calm. They skimmed along over the glassy surface, leaving V-shaped trails behind them; it felt like flying. As the sun rose higher it got hot, almost too hot. There were stable flies in the canoes, landing on a bare arm or leg for a quick sting. Lois hoped for wind.

They stopped for lunch at the next of the named campsites, Lookout Point. It was called this because, although the site itself was down near the water on a flat shelf of rock, there was a sheer cliff nearby and a trail that led up to the top. The top was the lookout, although what you were supposed to see from there was not clear. Kip said it was just a view.

Lois and Lucy decided to make the climb anyway. They didn't want to hang around waiting for lunch. It wasn't their turn to cook, though they hadn't avoided much by not doing it, because cooking lunch was no big deal, it was just unwrapping the cheese and getting out the bread and peanut butter, but Pat and Kip always had to do their woodsy act and boil up a billy tin for their own tea.

They told Kip where they were going. You had to tell Kip where you were going, even if it was only a little way into the woods to get dry twigs for kindling. You could never go anywhere without a buddy.

"Sure," said Kip, who was crouching over the fire, feeding driftwood into it. "Fifteen minutes to lunch."

"Where are they off to?" said Pat. She was bringing their billy tin of water from the lake.

"Lookout," said Kip.

"Be careful," said Pat. She said it as an afterthought, because it was what she always said.

"They're old hands," Kip said.

Lois looks at her watch: it's ten to twelve. She is the watch-minder; Lucy is careless of time. They walk up the path, which is dry earth and rocks, big rounded pinky-gray boulders or split-open ones with jagged edges. Spindly balsam and spruce trees grow to either side, the lake is blue fragments to the left. The sun is right overhead; there are no shadows anywhere. The heat comes up at them as well as down. The forest is dry and crackly.

It isn't far, but it's a steep climb and they're sweating when they reach the top. They wipe their faces with their bare arms, sit gingerly down on a scorching-hot rock, five feet from the edge but too close for Lois. It's a lookout all right, a sheer drop to the lake and a long view over the water, back the way they've come. It's amazing to Lois that they've traveled so far, over all that water, with nothing to propel them but their own arms. It makes her feel strong. There are all kinds of things she is capable of doing.

"It would be quite a dive off here," says Lucy.

"You'd have to be nuts," says Lois.

"Why?" says Lucy. "It's really deep. It goes straight down." She stands up and takes a step nearer the edge. Lois gets a stab in her midriff, the kind she gets when a car goes too fast over a bump. "Don't," she says.

"Don't what?" says Lucy, glancing around at her mischievously. She knows how Lois feels about heights. But she turns back. "I really have to pee," she says.

"You have toilet paper?" says Lois, who is never without it. She digs in her shorts pocket.

"Thanks," says Lucy.

They are both adept at peeing in the woods: doing it fast so the mosquitoes don't get you, the underwear pulled up between the knees, the squat with the feet apart so you don't wet your legs, facing downhill. The exposed feeling of your bum, as if someone is looking at you from behind. The etiquette when you're with someone else is not to look. Lois stands up and starts to walk back down the path, to be out of sight.

"Wait for me?" says Lucy.

Lois climbed down, over and around the boulders, until she could not see Lucy; she waited. She could hear the voices of the others, talking and laughing, down near the shore. One voice was yelling, "Ants! Ants!" Someone must have sat on an ant hill. Off to the side, in the woods, a raven was croaking, a hoarse single note.

She looked at her watch: it was noon. This is when she heard the shout.

She has gone over and over it in her mind since, so many times that the first, real shout has been obliterated, like a footprint trampled by other footprints. But she is sure (she is almost positive, she is nearly certain) that it was not a shout of fear. Not a scream. More like a cry of surprise, cut off too soon. Short, like a dog's bark.

"Lucy?" Lois said. Then she called "Lucy!" By now she was clambering back up, over the stones of the path. Lucy was not up there. Or she was not in sight.

"Stop fooling around," Lois said. "It's lunchtime." But Lucy did not rise from behind a rock or step out, smiling, from behind a tree. The sunlight was all around; the rocks looked white. "This isn't funny!" Lois said, and it wasn't, panic was rising in her, the panic of a small child who does not know where the bigger ones are hidden. She could hear her own heart. She looked quickly around; she lay down on the ground and looked over the edge of the cliff. It made her feel cold. There was nothing.

She went back down the path, stumbling; she was breathing too quickly; she was too frightened to cry. She felt terrible – guilty and dismayed, as if she had done something very bad, by mistake. Something that could never be repaired. "Lucy's gone," she told Kip.

Kip looked up from her fire, annoyed. The water in the billy can was boiling. "What do you mean, gone?" she said. "Where did she go?"

"I don't know," said Lois. "She's just gone."

No one had heard the shout, but then no one had heard Lois calling, either. They had been talking among themselves, by the water.

Kip and Pat went up to the lookout and searched and called, and blew their whistles. Nothing answered.

Then they came back down, and Lois had to tell exactly what had happened. The other girls all sat in a circle and listened to her. Nobody said anything. They all looked frightened, especially Pat and Kip. They were the leaders. You did not just lose a camper like this, for no reason at all.

"Why did you leave her alone?" said Kip.

"I was just down the path," said Lois. "I told you. She had to go to the bathroom." She did not say pee in front of people older than herself.

Kip looked disgusted. "Maybe she just walked off into the woods and got turned around," said one of the girls.

"Maybe she's doing it on purpose," said another.

Nobody believed either of these theories.

They took the canoes and searched around the base of the cliff, and peered down into the water. But there had been no sound of falling rock; there had been no splash. There was no clue, nothing at all. Lucy had simply vanished.

That was the end of the canoe trip. It took them the same two days to go back that it had taken coming in, even though they were short a paddler. They did not sing.

After that, the police went in a motorboat, with dogs; they were the Mounties and the dogs were German shepherds, trained to follow trails in the woods. But it had rained since, and they could find nothing.

Lois is sitting in Cappie's office. Her face is bloated with crying, she's seen that in the mirror. By now she feels numbed; she feels as if she has drowned. She can't stay here. It has been too much of a shock. Tomorrow her parents are coming to take her away. Several of the other girls who were on the canoe trip are also being collected. The others will have to stay, because their parents are in Europe, or cannot be reached.

Cappie is grim. They've tried to hush it up, but of course everyone in camp knows. Soon the papers will know too. You can't keep it quiet, but what can be said? What can be said that makes any sense? "Girl vanishes in broad daylight, without a trace." It can't be believed. Other things, worse things, will be suspected. Negligence, at the very least. But they have always taken such care. Bad luck will gather around Camp Manitou like a fog; parents will avoid it, in favor of other, luckier places. Lois can see Cappie thinking all this, even through her numbness. It's what anyone would think.

Lois sits on the hard wooden chair in Cappie's office, beside the old wooden desk, over which hangs the thumbtacked bulletin board of normal camp routine, and gazes at Cappie through her puffy eyelids. Cappie is now smiling what is supposed to be a reassuring smile. Her manner is too casual: she's after something. Lois has seen this look on Cappie's face when she's been sniffing out contraband chocolate bars, hunting down those rumored to have snuck out of their cabins at night.

"Tell me again," says Cappie, "from the beginning."

Lois has told her story so many times by now, to Pat and Kip, to Cappie, to the police, that she knows it word for word. She knows it, but she no longer believes it. It has become a story. "I told you," she said. "She wanted to go to the bathroom. I gave her my toilet paper. I went down the path, I waited for her. I heard this kind of shout..."

"Yes," says Cappie, smiling confidently, "but before that. What did you say to one another?"

Lois thinks. Nobody has asked her this before. "She said you could dive off there. She said it went straight down."

"And what did you say?"

"I said you'd have to be nuts."

"Were you mad at Lucy?" says Cappie, in an encouraging voice.

"No," says Lois. "Why would I be mad at Lucy? I wasn't ever mad at Lucy." She feels like crying again. The times when she has in fact been mad at Lucy have been erased already. Lucy was always perfect.

"Sometimes we're angry when we don't know we're angry," says Cappie, as if to herself. "Sometimes we get really mad and we don't even know it. Sometimes we might do a thing without meaning to, or without knowing what will happen. We lose our tempers."

Lois is only thirteen, but it doesn't take her long to figure out that Cappie is not including herself in any of this. By we she means Lois. She is accusing Lois of pushing Lucy off the cliff. The unfairness of this hits her like a slap. "I didn't!" she says.

"Didn't what?" says Cappie softly. "Didn't what, Lois?"

Lois does the worst thing, she begins to cry. Cappie gives her a look like a pounce. She's got what she wanted.

Later, when she was grown up, Lois was able to understand what this interview had been about. She could see Cappie's desperation, her need for a story, a real story with a reason in it; anything but the senseless vacancy Lucy had left for her to deal with. Cappie wanted Lois to supply the reason, to be the reason. It wasn't even for the newspapers or the parents, because she could never make such an accusation without proof. It was for herself: something to explain the loss of Camp Manitou and

of all she had worked for, the years of entertaining spoiled children and buttering up parents and making a fool of herself with feathers stuck in her hair. Camp Manitou was in fact lost. It did not survive.

Lois worked all this out, twenty years later. But it was far too late. It was too late even ten minutes afterwards, when she'd left Cappie's office and was walking slowly back to her cabin to pack. Lucy's clothes were still there, folded on the shelves, as if waiting. She felt the other girls in the cabin watching her with speculation in their eyes. Could she have done it? She must have done it. For the rest of her life, she has caught people watching her in this way. Maybe they weren't thinking this.

Maybe they were merely sorry for her. But she felt she had been tried and sentenced, and this is what has stayed with her: the knowledge that she had been singled out, condemned for something that was not her fault.

Lois sits in the living room of her apartment, drinking a cup of tea. Through the knee-to-ceiling window she has a wide view of Lake Ontario, with its skin of wrinkled blue-gray light, and of the willows of Centre Island shaken by a wind, which is silent at this distance, and on this side of the glass. When there isn't too much pollution she can see the far shore, the foreign shore; though today it is obscured.

Possibly she could go out, go downstairs, do some shopping; there isn't much in the refrigerator. The boys say she doesn't get out enough. But she isn't hungry, and moving, stirring from this space, is increasingly an effort.

She can hardly remember, now, having her two boys in the hospital, nursing them as babies; she can hardly remember getting married, or what Rob looked like. Even at the time she never felt she was paying full attention. She was tired a lot, as if she was living not one life but two: her own, and another, shadowy life that hovered around her and would not let itself be realized – the life of what would have happened if Lucy had not stepped sideways, and disappeared from time. She would never go up north, to Rob's family cottage or to any place with wild lakes and wild trees and the calls of loons.

She would never go anywhere near. Still, it was as if she was always listening for another voice, the voice of a person who should have been there but was not. An echo.

While Rob was alive, while the boys were growing up, she could pretend she didn't hear it, this empty space in sound. But now there is nothing much left to distract her.

She turns away from the window and looks at her pictures. There is the pinkish island, in the lake, with the intertwined trees. It's the same landscape they paddled through, that distant summer. She's seen travelogues of this country, aerial photographs; it looks different from above, bigger, more hopeless: lake after lake, random blue puddles in dark green bush, the trees like bristles.

How could you ever find anything there, once it was lost? Maybe if they cut it all down, drained it all away, they might find Lucy's bones, some time, wherever they are hidden. A few bones, some buttons, the buckle from her shorts.

But a dead person is a body; a body occupies space, it exists somewhere. You can see it; you put it in a box and bury it in the ground, and then it's in a box in the ground. But Lucy is not in a box, or in the ground. Because she is nowhere definite, she could be anywhere.

And these paintings are not landscape paintings. Because there aren't any landscapes up there, not in the old, tidy European sense, with a gentle hill, a curving river, a cottage, a mountain in the background, a golden evening sky. Instead, there's a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path. There are no backgrounds in any of these paintings, no vistas; only a great deal of foreground that goes back and back, endlessly, involving you in its twists and turns of tree and branch and rock. No matter how far back in you go, there will be more. And the trees themselves are hardly trees; they are currents of energy, charged with violent color.

Who knows how many trees there were on the cliff just before Lucy disappeared? Who counted? Maybe there was one more, afterwards.

Lois sits in her chair and does not move. Her hand with the cup is raised halfway to her mouth. She hears something, almost hears it: a shout of recognition, or of joy.

She looks at the paintings, she looks into them. Every one of them is a picture of Lucy. You can't see her exactly, but she's there, in behind the pink stone island or the one behind that. In the picture of the cliff, she is hidden by the clutch of fallen rocks towards the bottom, in the one of the river shore she is crouching beneath the overturned canoe. In the yellow autumn woods she's behind the tree that cannot be seen because of the other trees, over beside the blue sliver of pond; but if you walked into the picture and found the tree, it would be the wrong one, because the right one would be further on.

Everyone has to be somewhere, and this is where Lucy is. She is in Lois's apartment, in the holes that open inwards on the wall, not like windows but like doors. She is here. She is entirely alive.

Story 3. THE MISLETOE BRIDE by Jeanette Winterson



It's the custom in these parts to play Hide and Seek on Christmas Eve. My new husband wishes to prolong the chase. I am his caught thing, but he has not had me yet. He says that after dinner, when we have eaten our fill, and before supper, when we shall sit round and tell a wintry tale, all the ladies present shall hide, and all the gentlemen present shall seek them.

It is a moment for a stolen kiss. It is a moment outside of time. We wear our masks. We hide.

It is my wedding night. The custom of these parts is for the new bride to marry on Christmas Eve. It is an holy time, but glowing with strange lights. It is not yet Christ's day; it is still the day of unexpected visits and mummary.

My dress is white, with a tiny red stain; stain of berries, stain of robin red breast, stain of my maidenhead. My husband chooses where the stain shall be. Mine is over my heart.

I come from wild country though I am gentle born. My husband is double my age at thirty-four. He tells me I am as near an animal as humankind can be. He means it well, thinking only that I travel without trace and fall without a mark. I am light-boned.

He loves my waist, slender as a rope. He says my hands and feet are as delicate as a web. He calls me his spun thing, and one morning he gently unwound my hair and kissed me.

I am my father's youngest daughter, and had been warned of a convent life. My dowry is small, but my husband is rich, and cares nothing for his wife's jewels. He would rather I shine beside him, than glint dully behind the Church walls.

I was glad to travel this way, though I came on horseback and not by coach. The land is white- covered, bedded down under the snow. My horse's bridle was traced with frost.

My breath was thick from the riding; it steamed the air in evaporating cones. I fancied I could read sentences in the white breath of my mouth. It was as though I was talking to myself in a vaporous language no one else understood. My breath formed words – LOVE.

BEWARE. The game amused me through the long icicle of our journey. As we rode, my husband stood up in his stirrups, and cut a low bunch of mistletoe from an oak tree, as we passed through the Bowland forest. He fashioned it into a crown and hung it on the pommel of his saddle. He said it was for me, when we married. He called me his mistletoe bride.

I looked sideways at him, so confident and happy. I was shy and gentle, and I liked his certainties and his easy manners. He made me feel safe, though I am nervous by nature.

Nervous as a hare after harvest. I need cover. My husband said he would cover me. All his men laughed and I blushed. But he is not unkind.

As we rode, my childhood self rode with me for part of the way. Then at a crossroads, she turned her horse, and waved goodbye. I had thought of my life at home, and nothing else, for miles and miles. I knew that I was leaving a house and a family, but I was leaving myself too. I wept a little when she had gone, and my maid thought I was tired, and held my hand.

There were other selves who disappeared on that bleak road: My free, careless, unconsidered self – the one I am when alone, could not come with me, though she tried.

The more my soon-husband talked amiably of my duties as his lady, the more I felt myself caught in a long day of orders to give, and visits to receive. It would not be fitting for the Lord's wife to throw a cloak over her shoulders and run out into the rain.

But this was growing up, and surely nothing to fear. A new self was waiting to meet me. The person I would become was standing at the castle gate.

Is that her – looking older, graver, darker? She nodded to me as I rode over the tongue of the drawbridge. She did not smile.

I loved the music and the dancing. My new husband held my hand and whispered to me that he would always find me, wherever I hid, he told me he could scent me. He said he was my gentle hunter. He said I should have run of the house where I pleased. It was my house. No harm could fall to me there.

Then the music stopped and he clapped his hands. Laughing, the men covered their faces and began to count out loud, while we ladies ran giggling and chattering down corridors long as sleep.

I did not know any of the ways. The heavy candles in the mullions stood like servants, but they hardly lit the dark stone. I chased alongside a girl of my own age, who seemed to map every twist and stair. We came to a quiet landing, where a pair of doors was stood open onto a deep room. I hesitated and looked in. She called me, but still I hesitated and looked in.

The bed was carved and turned back. There were petals thrown over the pillow, the last of the roses, kept white and fresh for tonight. On the identical tables at each side of the bed, was a copper holder and a fresh taper. The tapers were not lit, only the light of the fire showed me the scene.

I walked in shyly, on tiptoe, because I knew without knowing, that this was the bridal chamber. This is where he would bring me when he found me. This was where we could begin our life together.

Laid on the turned back sheets, like sleeping knights, were two garments, both white, though his had embroidery of leopards and hinds. It made me smile to see us already at peace and asleep, and I wondered how many years we would lie side by side, until time claimed us. On the pillow, resting on my shift, was the circle of mistletoe – mysterious, poisonous, white as death, green as hope.

Impulsively, I took the pendant from my neck – it had been my father's gift as I left his house. I put the pendant on my husband's garment, and kissed it before I turned away.

I was trying to tell him that I was his. There would be no need for him to claim me.

Full of happiness, I ran out of the room, quick as a shadow. No one was nearby, but I felt that if he came anywhere, he would come here. I would hide in a cupboard or a chest, not far away.

There was an old oak trunk at the end of the passage. I had to struggle to lift the lid, I could barely see what I was doing, then, as if to help me, the moon slanted through the mullion, as pale as my skin, as clear as my happiness.

I looked out. The strange figure was still at the tongue of the drawbridge. I saw the fast-moving clouds and the frozen smile of the moat. This was my home. I would never leave.

As I stood, I heard voices spiralling towards me. Someone was coming round and round the turret stair. With all my strength I heaved open the lid and jumped in. It was deeper than I thought, almost three feet down, and I could sit quite comfortably while I waited.

Yes, it was husband's voice. He was talking to a woman, but I did not recognise her tones. He said 'No, not in there,' and I guessed he must have searched for me in our chamber. With a note of peevishness, she said 'Where then? Where? Haven't we come far enough?' There were footsteps coming towards me. Soon he would lift the lid.

'Here' he said. 'Here, out of the light.'

There was silence, or something like silence, if kisses and touches are silence. I pushed as hard and as quietly as I could and put my eyes to the slit, I made under the lid of the chest. The moon showed me everything.

My husband had his hands on the breasts of a lady I had seen at the feast. He was pressing them, and lowering his head to kiss the nipples. Her hands were round his thighs, anxiously, eagerly, unbuttoning him to where he sprang.

I wanted to stop looking. I had seen this before, in daylight and in my dreams. I had seen the rough hands of grooms on the soft bodies of our servants. I watched him and I wanted him. He was my husband, I was in the second of throwing back the lid and confronting them, when he turned her round and pushed her front-down onto the box. My hands flew away, and I heard a click, and then the sound of him above me.

The heavy box withstood the assault. I put my hand up, right under her belly. I ran my hand along the lid to the place where he must have entered her. I breathed with them both, and waited.

This was my wedding night.

I was beginning to feel hot and faint. There was too little air. I had to get out. I heard them moving away, and I turned on all fours and pushed up at the lid with my back.

Nothing happened.

My body sweated in terror. I took a deep breath of what air was left, air as dry and old as my happiness had become, and then I painfully rolled over and used both my feet to attack the lid.

It was yielding, it was yielding, but it wouldn't give. The little click I had heard, so innocent and brief, had been the lock, unused for who knows how many years?

I started to shout. Surely, he would hear me? Surely someone would come? But why would he come to his bridal chamber without his bride? I remembered what he said – that he would always find me. Always could wait until tomorrow. I needed him now.

I must have fainted, because when I woke, I was sitting with my dolls in the schoolroom at home, and I hadn't lost my childhood self at all, I had become her. I was singing a little song about the sun rising over the river, and suddenly I realised, with a terror I had never known, that I would never see the sun rising again. Behind my eyes was a glowing red ball, and my body was like mist evaporating.

LOVE. BEWARE. The words filled the smaller and smaller space of the chest, the smaller and smaller space of my chest. With my last breath I ... With my last breath I...

Didn't die. I do not know what final power aided me. I hardly know what happened, but the lid opened for me like an Aladdin, and I crawled out and lay on the dark stone.

When I found my strength, a single purpose filled me; to get away. I unfastened my wedding dress, and threw it into the chest and closed the lid tight. I went into the bridal chamber, where our effigies still slept, and took warm clothes of my husband's from his closet.

The clothes were too big, but my body was my own. I dressed quickly, and stole some precious gold and silver stuff, and a necklace, to sell. Some instinct took me back down the passage past my emptied coffin, and I found a narrow staircase, leading down, and down.

This staircase brought me down the side of the castle to an underground route that led beyond the drawbridge. As I came out into the light, I saw the dark and hooded figure turn to me. I shook my head. Not here, not you, not death. They say that no one can choose the day of their death, but perhaps there is a day when we can choose life. In the white, still frost, that hardened the stars and brightened the ground, I wanted to live at least one more day. Cold or hunger might kill me, but I would not die of suffocation. I would have suffocated in his bed as surely as in his box.

There was a star straight above me. I followed it in a swoon of cold, until the dawn bells rang Christmas Day.

Years later I heard the story. I had become a legend. Yes, me, the Brewer at the Convent of the First Miracle. It is my work to turn water into wine.

The nuns took me in, washed me and dressed me, and called me their Christmas gift.

Every year, they said, there is some mystery that cannot be explained. They asked for no explanation, and I gave none.

I am happy here, not enclosed at all, because if my daily round is limited, my spirit roams where it will.

Then one snowy day, just at the shortest day of the year, a man came by to wheel and deal for barrels of my winter Meade. While he was eating with me, he mentioned that the Lord of the Hall was to be married, after three years of mourning for his lost bride.

She is often to be seen on a frosty night, haunting the battlements of the castle where she fell. She fell into the moat, and the cold covered her over again, before anyone could find the place.

Then he leaned forward confidentially, and whispered to me that there was another story too, told by servants, amongst themselves. Her wedding dress had been found in an old chest; her body utterly decayed. 'When they lifted out the dress, her body was nothing but dust. Dust!' As he was going on his way, I asked him to deliver a gift from the nuns to the Lord, in honour of his wedding day. It was a barrel of my best wine, but before he took it, I went out into the woods and cut down a mistletoe bough.

Carefully, I pinned it to the barrel. Let the Lord of the Hall make of it what he will. Mistletoe – the ancient plant of winter life. The green amongst the white. Green as hope, white as death. Mysterious. Poisonous. Self-renewing.

In a few days it would be Christmas; the day of birth and beginning. I had lost one life and found another.

Nothing is as it seems. That had been bitter to me once. But isn't it the meaning of the story of a stable and a star?

In the cry of a baby, in the course of a star, in the trust of strangers, in the telling of a tale, there is hope.

Like others, I had found it.

FOR NOTES

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