

FOR THE
IB DIPLOMA

English Literature

Nic Amy
Carolyn P. Henly
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Introduction

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To understand the role of this coursebook in the English Literature for the IB Diploma course
- ▶ To introduce the three areas of exploration and define them
- ▶ To introduce the seven course concepts and define them
- ▶ To introduce the concept of global issues and to give examples
- ▶ To define inquiry-based learning

English Literature for the IB Diploma

You have probably been reading for just about as long as you can remember. Much of the reading you have done in your early life and through primary or elementary school was likely to have been quite easy to understand. Maybe you are familiar with this very famous poem:

Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

5 When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.

Then the traveller in the dark
10 Thanks you for your tiny spark,
How could he see where to go,
If you did not twinkle so?

In the dark blue sky you keep,
Often through my curtains peep,
15 For you never shut your eye,
Till the sun is in the sky.

As your bright and tiny spark
Lights the traveller in the dark,
Though I know not what you are,
20 Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

(Jane Taylor)

Even if you have not encountered this poem by Jane Taylor before, you can read this work very easily. Originally entitled ‘The Star’, ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star’ has been read for more than 200 years since it was originally published in 1806 (‘First Publication of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star”’), even though the ideas are simple and the language is easy to understand.

As you get older, however, reading gets more and more difficult and, for some people, less and less fun. Compare this next poem with the one on the previous page:

Sonnet 44

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
 Injurious distance should not stop my way;
 For then despite of space I would be brought,
 From limits far remote where thou dost stay.
 5 No matter then although my foot did stand
 Upon the farthest earth removed from thee;
 For nimble thought can jump both sea and land
 As soon as think the place where he would be.
 But ah! thought kills me that I am not thought,
 10 To leap large lengths of miles when thou art gone,
 But that so much of earth and water wrought
 I must attend time's leisure with my moan,
 Receiving nought by elements so slow
 But heavy tears, badges of either's woe.

(William Shakespeare)

Obviously, this poem is much harder to read and understand than the first one. The sentence structure is unfamiliar, as is some of the vocabulary. Some of the words may be completely new to some readers; others will be familiar but used in unfamiliar ways. The content, too, is difficult, because it deals with sophisticated ideas. Like the first poem, however, it has stayed with us for hundreds of years and is still read and appreciated today.

The poem is William Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 44', the first half of a pair of sonnets that explore an idea about how the speaker's physical body is a barrier to his ability to be with the person he loves. The two sonnets explore scientific ideas that were common in Shakespeare's day and which proposed that all matter was made up of four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. In these two sonnets, Shakespeare takes that belief and posits the imaginative alternative that thought is a fifth type of substance. He wishes they were made of the same substance from which thoughts are made, because thoughts can be wherever they want instantaneously.

The content is actually quite intriguing. The idea that we might be able to transport through time and space as if we had no body appeals to anyone who would like to travel all around the world without needing time or transport. That idea is a staple of **science fiction**, from *Star Trek* to the 2017 novel *The Punch Escrow* by Tal M. Klein. If we can read the more difficult poem, then, it gives our imaginations more with which to connect and explore than poems like 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star'.

But first we have to be able to read it! Your English Literature for the IB Diploma course is all about learning to read the adult literature of the world: the stories, poems and plays that explore provocative and challenging ideas about what it means to be human, both in a physical and in a psychological sense. The course will instruct you on how to engage with any piece of literature as an independent work using your own skills as a reader. It will also teach you to explore the relationship of works to the time and place in which they were written, so that you can understand how the culture of a writer and the historical development of literary works within that culture contribute to the style, form and content of future works. Finally, the English Literature for the IB

Diploma course will help you to explore the relationships between and among literary works, so that you can recognize the ways in which new works build from and dovetail with the ideas in other works, and how works from different times and places deal with similar themes.

The more skilled you become as a reader, the more you will get out of any given work of literature, and the more fun your reading will be.

Several elements of the course curriculum identify and guide you through such complexities – both of literature and your learning to interpret it. These elements are:

- areas of exploration
- concepts
- global issues.

This introductory chapter will take you through each of these elements, define them and explain their role in the course. Before you begin your studies, you will need to understand the nature and terminology of all the required elements of the course.

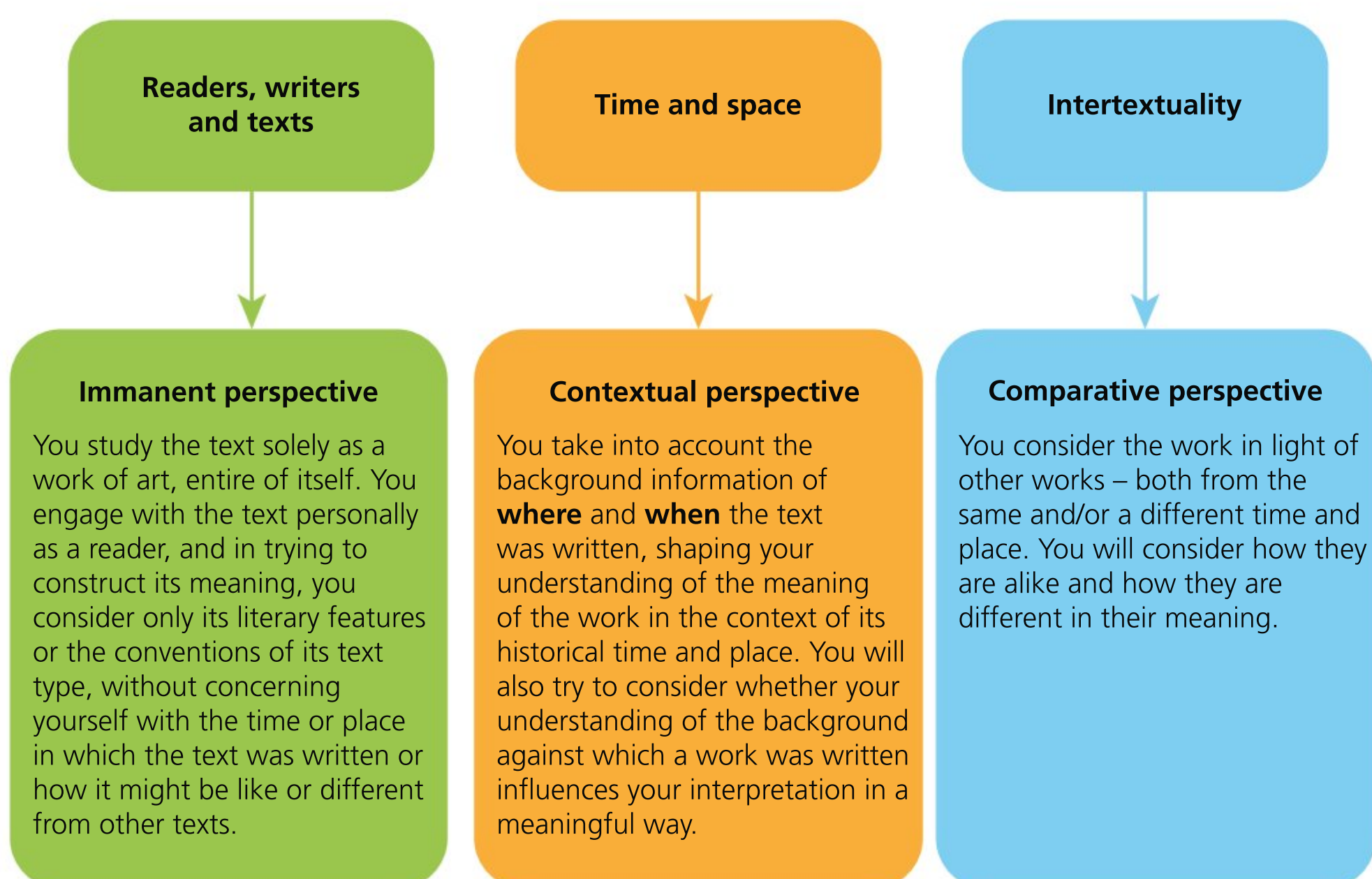
Areas of exploration

The areas of exploration are broad topics, each one of which helps you to consider how to interpret literature from a different **perspective**. The three areas of exploration for the English Literature IB Diploma course are:

- readers, writers and texts
- time and space
- intertextuality: connecting texts.

This book contains one section on each area, and each area will be explored in detail.

The aim of these three areas is for you to consider your reading from the perspective of the **immanent**, the **contextual**, and the **comparative**. **Readers, writers and texts** relies on the immanent perspective, **time and space** relies on the contextual perspective, and **intertextuality** relies on the comparative perspective. Within each area of exploration, we will make connections to the other two important structural elements of the course: concepts and global issues.



Course concepts

The word ‘concept’ comes from the study of cognition and how people come to understand the world. There is some disagreement among psychologists about the proper way to define ‘concept’ but, for our purposes, we can think of it as an idea that gets formed by generalizing from experience, and people form concepts all the time to help them to organize that experience (Spitzer 36). The concepts included in your literature course are ideas that help to describe important aspects of the way in which readers create meanings from literary works. Here we will outline the seven concepts you are required to investigate during your IB English Literature course. This section is intended as a reference to which you can return over and over, as needed, while you read the rest of the text and throughout your course. You may wish to read it through now to familiarize yourself with the ideas, but there is no need to try to learn everything right now. Bookmark this page, and then you can return here whenever you find a concept connection and need a refresher about what the concept means in detail.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

Concepts will be inside these feature boxes, so look out for this colour.

You will find the detailed concept definitions on the following pages:

- Identity: page 5
- Culture: page 7
- Creativity: page 8
- Communication: page 10
- Perspective: page 11
- Transformation: page 12
- Representation: page 14

■ Identity

One of the great joys of reading literature is the discovery of the mind behind it. When you read a book and experience those moments of great insight about the world, or the realization that someone – the author – shares a world view with you, or feels passionately about something that you feel passionately about, or thinks the way you do about the way the world ought to be, you hopefully experience great satisfaction. These are the books you are most likely to love and remember and re-read. That connection comes from the connection to the author.

In order to experience that kind of connection to an author, you must, of course, build a conception of the author’s **identity** – an understanding of what the author is like, at least as represented by that particular literary work. The concept of identity, then, is about the ways in which a reader develops an understanding of an author’s identity through reading the work; it serves as the evidence available to the reader for learning about that author.

The process of discovering the author’s identity through the work, however, is tricky. It is tempting to think that we can tell what the author thinks just by reading the work and accepting



at face value the idea that the work directly represents what the author thinks, feels, and believes; however, this is seldom – if ever – the case. Authors create not just characters and situations, but also narrators (the voices that tell the story in a narrative) or speakers (the voices which speak poems, some of which are also narrative).

Because all of these ‘people’ are inventions, we have to be open to the fact that authors can represent people with very different ideas and values from their own. Authors can create characters ranging from the virtuous and exemplary to the immoral and the downright wicked. They can create characters who represent people who are, in the author’s view, exemplary human beings, or they can create characters who, in the author’s view, are perfect examples of how not to live and behave. You cannot read a work of literature with a character who exhibits bad behaviour and values and attribute those values to the author. The author expects you to understand that the character deserves none of our admiration. Conversely, if you come across an admirable character or narrator, you don’t assume that the character or narrator is the author; however, you can assume that a good character or narrator represents the author’s idea of a good person. The process of interpretation, although complex, does still give us insight into the author’s identity.

In *The Book Thief*, for example, Markus Zusak gives us Death as a narrator. Clearly Death, the narrator, is a creation. Death does not exist as a person walking around in the world, while Zusak himself is an award-winning writer from Australia. We know, therefore, that we cannot figure out anything about Zusak’s identity by assuming that Death, the narrator, somehow **personifies** Zusak. Instead, we will have to see what we can work out indirectly. As you read *The Book Thief*, you will discover that this Death has been presented as a fairly sympathetic character who cares about the people he has to collect at the ends of their lives and who empathizes with them. From this idea, we can get a glimmer of insight into the kind of person Zusak might be, since he has chosen this version of Death rather than a more typical scary, vengeful hunter. Zusak, then, might be someone who sees death as inevitable, but not inevitably cruel or meaningless. Of course, this is one tiny idea out of the whole complex vision of the world and human experience that will reflect Zusak’s identity when we read his novel.

Your understanding of the author’s identity, then, is indirect. You can consider the characters and subsequently infer the author’s ideas and attitudes. It will always be important for you to realize that whatever your understanding of who ‘the author’ is that you generate from your reading, it is a construct, and not the actual author. You create the **identity** from your interpretation, and your understanding will inevitably fail to match the real person for many reasons – for one thing, what you can understand from one work will necessarily be limited. You might come closer to reality if you read everything that a particular author has written, but, just as your backyard looks different when viewed through a frosted window, your vision of the author will be different to the vision you could get if you knew him or her personally for many years.

When we accept the idea of our understanding of an author as a construct, we can appreciate that authors often serve as their own narrators. The communication is still indirect, though, and no single work can provide you with a fully realized portrait of the complex person that the author is in real life.

The primary reason that your understanding of the author must be deemed a construct is that *you* constructed it. One of the most important facts about trying to create meaning from any literary work is that every individual reader approaches the work through the filter of his or her own identity. Returning to *The Book Thief*, for example, if you were a person who could not, because of experiences you had in your life, bring yourself to see Death as a sympathetic and, at times, humorous character, you would not interpret Death’s role as the narrator, or what that

role suggests about the author's identity, in the same way that a different reader, who could easily accept Death in this way, would. This kind of understanding is what we mean by **interpretation**. You would not be wrong, nor would the other reader be wrong. You would simply be interpreting the work differently.

■ Culture

All works are written in a cultural context. The values and beliefs of that culture will have influenced the author in terms of how they see the world, what he or she wants to write, and the words, images, **metaphors** and **symbols** that he or she will use to express their ideas. The more you learn about the culture in which the literary work was created, the better you will understand some of the nuances of that work.

A twenty-first-century student studying *Cyrano de Bergerac*, by Edmond Rostand, for example, might be quite perplexed at some of the behaviours they read about. To fully appreciate this play, which was written in 1897 but set in the seventeenth century, one must understand first that Cyrano de Bergerac chose to adhere to a code of chivalry which was the guideline of behaviour expected by a knight primarily in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. To the twenty-first-century student, the ideas that honour is more important than love, and self-sacrifice more important than happiness, seem incomprehensible – maybe even a little mad. To appreciate Cyrano's behaviour and to see him as a sympathetic and admirable character, we have to apply the standards of his time – not ours – and of the middle ages, when knights were seen as the shining examples of virtuous behaviour. To fully appreciate Cyrano's **tragedy**, we must further understand that in his day, in the mid-seventeenth century, Cyrano was already something of an **anachronism**. The values he spent his life upholding would have seemed strange to his contemporaries. We can fully appreciate Rostand's purpose if we can both empathize with Cyrano and feel the pathos of the fact that the people around him, including his beloved Roxane, would have wished fervently that he had not tried to live by those values. We have to understand both the culture of Cyrano's idealized world view and of the society in which he lived to be able to feel what Rostand wanted us to feel.

Another aspect of this concept of culture is the fact that all works of literature are written at a particular moment in that geographical place. Knowing the literary tradition of a particular time and place can help you, as the reader, to understand the ways in which a particular work of literature continues or breaks with a tradition. Students frequently want to know why Shakespeare wrote his plays in **iambic pentameter** and why he used such apparently convoluted sentence structures and strange vocabulary. Most English teachers have been asked whether people in Shakespeare's day talked the way so many characters in his plays talk, but of course they did not. Shakespeare was both adhering to and breaking the conventions of his day.

Shakespeare was writing plays mostly in **blank verse**, which means that the predominant **meter** was iambic pentameter (lines of 10 syllables with a stress on every other syllable) but without a set rhyming pattern. The use of **blank verse** and of verse in general pre-dated Shakespeare by a long way, even back to the ancient Greeks. Here, for instance, are the opening lines of *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, written in the fifth century BCE:



Oedipus Rex

My children, latest born to Cadmus old,
 Why sit ye here as suppliants, in your hands
 Branches of olive filleted with wool?
 What means this reek of incense everywhere,
 5 And everywhere laments and litanies?
 Children, it were not meet that I should learn
 From others, and am hither come, myself,
 I, Oedipus, your world-renowned king.

(Sophocles)

This play has been translated from the original Greek, of course, but you can see that the translator has retained the verse form. Just as a quick check, you can count the syllables in every line; you will see that there are ten.

Blank verse was a standard form for plays for many hundreds of years. Blank verse was introduced into English playwriting in the sixteenth century. Shakespeare joined his contemporaries Thomas Sackville, Thomas Norton, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton and Ben Jonson, who adopted the form. However, Shakespeare took that tradition and transformed it by developing a looser form of blank verse in which he varied the stresses and used enjambment (the connecting of lines together by running sentences from one line onto the next) and in doing so created a kind of blank verse that no other playwright had mastered ('Blank Verse'). So we can see that Shakespeare's accomplishments arose from the writing tradition – the writing culture – in which he was writing.

Authors do not generate whole new forms out of nowhere; they build on existing conventions, and the body of work in any given culture changes gradually over time. Understanding the tradition from which an author's work arises helps us to understand the particular contributions to style, form and content that an author made.

The concept of culture applies particularly to the second area of exploration, **time and space**, which will help you explore in great detail the effects of time and place on a work of literature. Culture also applies to **readers, writers and texts**, in that so many important literary strategies require specific cultural knowledge in order to be interpreted well. Culture also applies to **intertextuality**, as some of the most interesting comparisons and contrasts will come out of differences in the cultures in which the works you are comparing were written.

■ Creativity

Every literary work is the result of an act of creation: the author or poet or playwright created the work itself. If the work is **fiction**, the writer created the characters, the actions, the dialogue and the setting. If the work is **non-fiction**, the writer still had to create the shape and structure of the piece. He or she had to apply creativity in order to develop metaphors and symbols and other figures of speech. We talk about some writers or works as being particularly creative. JK Rowling, for instance, is renowned for her creativity in imagining the fictional world of the *Harry Potter* stories, including such features of setting as the Whomping Willow, magic spells such as *wingardium leviosa* and *expecto patronum*, and the characters, such as Professor McGonagall, who can transform into a cat. Colson Whitehead, in his novel *The Underground Railroad*, showed great creativity in making a living symbol – the railroad is an actual railroad that runs underground.

(For those who are not familiar with the term ‘underground railroad’, it is the name of the secret chain of people who helped slaves to escape from the American South to states where slavery was not legal.) Shakespeare is famous for the creativity of his language use. Consider, for example, some of his many insults:

- ‘Would thou wert clean enough to spit upon!’ (*Timon of Athens* Act 4 Scene 3, line 402)
- ‘The rankest compound of villainous smell that ever offended nostril’ (*Merry Wives of Windsor* Act 3 Scene 5, line 91)
- ‘Poisonous bunch-backed toad’ (*Richard III* Act 1 Scene 3, line 255)
- ‘I do desire that we may be better strangers’ (*As You Like It* Act 3 Scene 2, line 263)
- ‘There’s no more faith in thee than in a stewed prune’ (*Henry IV Part 1* Act 3 Scene 3, line 119)

All of these are more lively and more humorous than the narrow range of rather mean-spirited insults we tend to rely on in English today.

So we are quite used to the idea that authors are creative. Perhaps less familiar is the idea that readers have to be creative as well. You have to be creative when you read works of literature because they communicate indirectly. We will investigate this fact in detail in Section 1 of this coursebook. For now, you can understand that authors of literature do not say directly what they mean: they convey ideas through myriad literary strategies, many of which you are no doubt familiar with. Consider this sentence, from the first line of TS Eliot’s *The Waste Land*:

April is the cruelest month.

Such a claim seems a little odd. April is the beginning of springtime, and we associate it with blooming flowers and spring sunshine. For Christians, Easter, the holiday celebrating the rebirth of Jesus Christ into the world after his crucifixion, almost always occurs in April. April, it would seem, ought to be a happy month. And yet Eliot has called it not just cruel, but ‘the cruelest’ of all twelve months of the year. What are we to do with such a claim?

We could just dismiss the poet as something of a crackpot (that would be easiest – we wouldn’t have to do anything!) but, upon reflection, since this poet is TS Eliot, one of the giants of British literature, we have to accept that a great many people have appreciated his literary genius, so we probably have to also accept that he knew what he was doing when he gave us a claim about April that violates the stereotypical view. In turn, this means that we have to think creatively to imagine what he might have been thinking when he wrote that description.

Try it: before you read the next paragraph, imagine at least three possibilities for what Eliot could have meant with this **personification** of April and write them down.

Probably, once you thought about it, you realized that April, at least in the northern hemisphere where Eliot was writing, is an unpredictable month. Very often it is exactly what we think it is – the month that signifies rebirth. The soil warms, flowers bloom, trees blossom and birds build their nests. But, not infrequently, once that promise of warmth and approaching summer is delivered, snow and ice storms appear, killing the flowers and dragging us back into winter. The cruelty of April, then, lies in the fact that it so often breaks its promises, luring us into feeling hopeful and then smacking us with a powerful reminder that we cannot control nature or count on our expectations to be met.

This is the kind of creative thinking that you must do as a reader of any literary work. You must be alert for anything that might mean more than it seems, and then you must use your imagination to work on the possibilities.

● TOK Links: The nature of creativity

When you study personal knowledge-making in your Theory of Knowledge class, you may consider the ways in which our cognitive tools (the features of our minds which help us make knowledge) work together to create new ideas. We think of imagination as being the particular cognitive tool we use in order to think up something that we haven't thought before, or which hasn't been thought by anyone before; however, imagination is the result of the interaction of several different cognitive tools. Certainly we need to be able to generate images and thoughts of possibilities, but for any creative act to be effective, the thoughts and images we generate have to be bounded by reason. There's no point, for example, in imagining that we could flap our arms and fly to the moon, because such an act is a physical impossibility in our universe.

Imagination also relies equally on memory. It is almost impossible to imagine something that is completely out of your realm of experience. Try it now: imagine a creature from outer space that has no feature that you have ever seen or experienced before. It is extremely difficult! Your alien creature as a whole will be something you have never seen or experienced, but it will be made up entirely of shapes and colours and physical parts of people and creatures and objects that you have encountered sometime during your life.

Creative thinking in literature works the same way. You will find that you have to imagine possibilities for what things mean, but your interpretation will have to be based on what you have experienced and it will have to be bounded by reason.

■ Communication

The concept of communication relates to the concept of identity in that we are considering the communication between the reader and the author. As we have already noted, this communication is indirect. Rather than you and the author meeting and talking face to face, the communication is through the medium of the work. Even then, the work will not state directly what the author is thinking. Instead, the author will employ a wide range of tools to communicate to you through images, symbols, elements of settings and a variety of characters and actions, the meanings of which must be interpreted. In order for you to be able to receive the author's communication effectively, you must know how to use the technology, as it were. Imagine that the work is a machine and you have to learn how to run it, just as you learn how to run a computer, a cellphone or a car.

The literature that you will study in school has been chosen, in part, based on the assumption that you will not, at the beginning, be able to read it effectively by yourself. Your teachers understand that you need assistance in learning how to use the tools in these works; if you could read them on your own, you wouldn't need teaching. The most important thing you need to understand is that the knowledge and skills you lack when you begin studying a work of literature can be learned. You can take conscious steps to develop your abilities as a reader, and every work you study helps prepare you for the communication in the next work.

American poet Elizabeth Bishop wrote a poem called 'The Fish', which contains some **symbols** that many students around the world would not necessarily recognize. In Christianity, the fish is a symbol of Jesus. You can read the poem without knowing that, and it will make sense as a story about a fisherman reflecting on the significance of catching a fish that many others before had failed to catch. However, you will miss a great deal of the author's message. If you read the poem as nothing more than a poem about a fish, you might be somewhat confused by the mention, near the end, of a rainbow, which seems to be the thing which makes the fisherman decide to let

the fish go. The rainbow is another religious symbol from Christianity, and comes from the story of Noah's Ark, in which God destroyed all living creatures in a 40-day flood except those which were on the ark that God commanded Noah to build. When the rain dried up, God sent the rainbow as a promise that he would never again send such a flood.

For readers who know the story, Bishop's message about the need for everyday people to remember God's mercy and to show mercy in our turn will be accessible. If some readers do not know that story, however, they can learn it in order to increase their understanding of the poem. They can do some research on the symbolism of fish and of rainbows. Any time you read any literary work, be alert to anything that might be a symbol, and if you don't know what an object symbolizes, you can look it up. Symbolism is just one of the tools in a writer's toolbox; as you read more literary works, you will learn to recognize and interpret more and more tools. One of the great pleasures of studying literature is the satisfaction you feel when you have solved the puzzle of an author's strategy and, in so doing, broadened your own knowledge of the world.

You will be learning how to understand the author's communication throughout your IB English Literature course, and all sections of this coursebook will help you to develop that skill. You will find it helpful to remember, as you work through the course, that the purpose of your study is ultimately communication from the author to you, and that your work is aimed at closing the gap between your knowledge of the world, of literature and its features, and that of the author's.

■ Perspective

When discussing the concept of **identity**, we pointed out that one difficulty in interpreting an author's identity is the fact that the author creates characters, each with their own **perspective**, and those characters' perspectives may or may not line up with the author's. What this means for you as a reader is that you have to be aware, first of all, that multiple perspectives exist in every work and, secondly, that you must work to understand all of the perspectives and what they imply about what the author is trying to communicate. You must also work to be aware of your own perspective, and how your time and place and your personal knowledge influences what you are capable of understanding or how your assumptions and expectations might shape your interpretation of any given work.

A good example of a literary work with many different perspectives for which the modern reader might not be prepared is *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. The book, published in 1726, is a satire on human nature. One of the most famous episodes in the book is Gulliver's visit to the land of the Houyhnhnms. The Houyhnhnms are a species of giant horse which is significantly more intelligent and cultured than humans. In this land, humans are known as Yahoos – creatures without any ability to reason. Gulliver describes Yahoos this way:

... the Yahoos were a species of animals utterly incapable of amendment by precept or example ...

(Jonathan Swift ix)

As readers, we are not likely to be predisposed to accepting such a harsh judgment on human nature, so in order to understand Swift's perspective, we have to understand Gulliver's perspective, and we have to be open to the idea that human beings can sometimes behave in quite irrational ways, or even in ways which work against their own best interests.

In other words, one of the most important skills in interpreting literature is open-mindedness. We have to be ready for characters to have motivations and values we don't expect. We must be ready for authors to push against stereotypical expectations and against easy understanding in an effort to make us think more deeply about something. Most works of literature require us to consider perspectives that are different from our own and which are potentially difficult to appreciate or respect.

● TOK Links: Influence of perspective

The question of how your own perspective shapes your knowledge is an important one in your TOK class. Many factors shape your perspective, from the physical (do you have poor eyesight? Or extra sensitive hearing?) to the mental (what are your habits of mind? Are you quick to process or to jump to conclusions? Are you inclined to take in a lot of data and think slowly before you decide what it means?) to the cultural (do you live in a culture which admires and respects older people? Do you live in a culture in which independence is highly valued? Do you live in a culture which values the good of the community over the good of the individual?).

One famous example of the question of whether and how someone's perspective shaped their knowledge is the example of Werner Heisenberg, the physicist who developed the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. When Second World War broke out, Heisenberg chose to stay in Germany to work on Hitler's project to develop the atomic bomb. The Germans never did develop the bomb, and there has been speculation for many years about why not, given Heisenberg's undoubted genius as a physicist. Journalist Thomas Powers argued, in a 1993 book, that Heisenberg actually sabotaged the project so that Hitler would not build the bomb (Glanz). At the heart of the controversy is the question of Heisenberg's perspective. He was a German working for Germany during the war. He was also a scientist with full awareness of the implications of the power released by the split atom. People wonder whether Heisenberg's perspective as a scientist who might not want to give that power to any dictator was more important than his perspective as a German who would want to know whatever he needed to know in order to help his country.

■ Transformation

The concept of transformation refers to the variety of ways in which works are transformed from one thing into another. One widespread and important way in which this transformation takes place is in the development of **intertextuality**, the reference in one work to an earlier one. Sometimes that kind of intertextuality takes the shape of an **allusion**, an explicit reference to another work. Returning to Elizabeth Bishop's poem 'The Fish', for example, we saw an allusion to the Biblical story of Noah's Ark.

Another kind of intertextuality occurs when one work builds in a broader, deeper way on an earlier work. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a retelling of an earlier English poem written in 1562 called *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* by Arthur Brooke. Brooke's work in turn was based on a 1554 Italian novella by Matteo Bandello called *Giulietta e Romeo* (Mabillard). Each author transformed his source into something quite different. Brooke took a novella and transformed it into a poem, while Shakespeare took that poem and transformed it into a play. At each transformation, the story changed to reflect the author's ideas.

A familiar kind of transformation of a literary work is from written text to film. This kind of change tends to be fairly substantial. For one thing, films typically last about two hours, while it might take 10 hours or more to read the book version. Much has to be cut. Screenwriters and directors make decisions about which bits of the book will not be included in the film, and they might choose to cut things that the original author and/or the readers felt were essential to the effective representation of the book. Another point to consider is characters' appearance. When characters are described in books, readers form ideas in their minds of what those characters



are like. The movie version necessarily makes one choice out of many when the casting director chooses a particular actor. Such a choice will always disappoint – or even anger – some readers whose ideas are quite different to what the film portrays.

The 2013 film version of F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* caused a certain amount of controversy due to the music that the director, Baz Luhrmann, chose to include. The novel is set in the 1920s, an era when jazz was flourishing. Instead of filling the score with period music, however, Luhrmann chose to use modern music by hip-hop artists such as Jay-Z, Beyoncé, André 3000, and Kanye West. This choice displeased readers who felt that historical accuracy was closer to the spirit of Fitzgerald's book, but pleased readers who felt that the modern songs created the kind of effect that Fitzgerald was going for. The point is that because the film director has made an interpretation, the effect of this medium is quite different than that of reading a book, which requires the reader to do the interpreting. *The Great Gatsby* has been transformed. Whether the transformation is effective or not is a different question.

Think of some examples of films that you have seen which were made from books that you had read. Were you happy with the transformation? Why or why not? An important point to realize with regard to the concept of transformation is that the film version cannot be substituted for the reading of the book. As with Brooke rewriting Bandello and Shakespeare rewriting Brooke, the screenwriter transforms any novel or play into something new when he or she changes the form.

A final, very important kind of transformation is one that you will definitely encounter in your English Literature for the IB Diploma course: translation from one language to another. Translation presents many difficulties. Among the problems for the translator to wrestle with are:

- words that exist in the original language but do not exist in the language of translation
- words that exist but which have significantly different **connotations** in the two languages
- line length and stress patterns when trying to preserve **meter** in poetry or plays
- sentence word order that differs from language to language
- **symbols** that do not mean the same thing in different languages
- idioms which are different in different languages.

There are other problems, but these will give you an idea of what the translator faces. Every translator must, therefore, settle for compromises. They must decide what is more important: the use of an exact word or the retention of implications? The number of syllables in a line or the number of lines? The rhyme scheme or the word choice?

One example of why word length and line length matter is that of Boris Pasternak's translations of Shakespeare's plays into Russian. The average English word is 1.22 syllables long, while the average Russian word is 2.44 syllables long – double the length of an English word (France). That length difference matters when we consider that Shakespeare wrote predominantly in lines of 10 syllables. If Pasternak wished to retain the 10-syllable line, he would need roughly twice the number of lines for the same content. For *Hamlet*, that would have meant increasing the line length from just over 4000 lines (Open Source Shakespeare) to something over 8000 lines. Kenneth Branagh filmed a complete-text version of *Hamlet* in 1996; it runs 4 hours 2 minutes. That is already an extraordinary amount of time to expect an audience to sit still; imagine the effect of trying to stage an 8-hour performance.

The first line of Albert Camus' novel *L'Étranger* gives us an excellent example of the significance of the change in meaning that can occur when trying to translate the language of a literary work into English. Camus' novel was written in French, and the first line reads 'Aujourd'hui, Maman est morte' (Bloom). In 1946, Stuart Gilbert made the first translation into English, and he translated that line as 'Mother died today' (Bloom). In 1988, Matthew Ward's translation rendered the line 'Maman died today' (Ward 3). In a 2012 *New Yorker* article, Ryan Bloom provides a fascinating discussion of the difference. The word 'Mother', he argues, conveys a colder, more distant relationship than the French word 'Maman' does. He suggests that the English equivalent would be 'Mommy', but that this word is childish, and so conveys yet another kind of relationship between the son and the parent (Bloom). You can see that the decision about which version of this word to use, especially in the first sentence of the novel, will shape the reader's understanding of the main character and so will colour our attitude towards him throughout. Bloom provides a further detailed argument about how the change in word order that happened when Gilbert decided to begin with the idea of the mother instead of the idea of 'today' eliminates a critical understanding of the character's relationship to time. You can read Bloom's insightful article about the analysis of the effect of translation on a literary work in full via the QR code in the margin.



Whenever you are reading a work in translation, you must remember that what you are reading is a transformation of the original. If you have access to the original and can read it in that language, you may be able to make judgments for yourself about how much the translated version differs from the original. However, most students will not have that opportunity, and in this case, you should understand that what you are deriving from your study of the work is different to what you would get from the work in its original form. Furthermore, you should remember that the communication you are having with the author and the author's **identity** is transformed.

■ Representation

The concept of representation focuses your attention on the relationship of a literary work to reality. **Fiction**, by definition, is not 'true', in that the events described never actually happened. The obvious question, then, is how something that is not true can convey any truth. The answer, of course, is that some aspect of every literary work does indeed represent reality. At a minimum, the themes and ideas must convey some truth about human experience, human nature and/or human relationships. In fiction, the characters are not real people, but they **represent** real people. We can see in the behaviours and motivations of the characters in the work those that we believe could happen in the real world.

An interesting aspect of representation in literary works is that the degree of realism will vary wildly. Some works are highly realistic in their detail and descriptions. Consider, for example, this passage from the opening paragraph of *Middlemarch* by George Eliot:

Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible, – or from one of our elder poets, – in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper. She was usually spoken of as being remarkably clever, but with the addition that her sister Celia had more common-sense. Nevertheless, Celia wore scarcely more trimmings; and it was only to close observers that her dress differed from her sister's, and had a shade of coquetry in its arrangements; for Miss Brooke's plain dressing was due to mixed conditions, in most of which her sister shared. The pride of being ladies had something to do with it: the Brooke connections, though not exactly aristocratic, were unquestionably 'good': if you inquired backward for a generation or two, you would not find any yard-measuring or parcel-tying forefathers – anything lower than an admiral or a clergyman; and there was even an ancestor discernible as a Puritan gentleman who served under Cromwell, but afterwards conformed, and managed to come out of all political troubles as the proprietor of a respectable family estate. Young women of such birth, living in a quiet country-house, and attending a village church hardly larger than a parlor, naturally regarded frippery as the ambition of a huckster's daughter. Then there was well-bred economy, which in those days made show in dress the first item to be deducted from, when any margin was required for expenses more distinctive of rank. Such reasons would have been enough to account for plain dress, quite apart from religious feeling; but in Miss Brooke's case, religion alone would have determined it; and Celia mildly acquiesced in all her sister's sentiments, only infusing them with that common-sense which is able to accept momentous doctrines without any eccentric agitation.

(George Eliot 4)

This passage is highly realistic. Despite having been published in 1871, it mentions objects of culture which are familiar even today to people accustomed to Western culture: clothing with sleeves, Italian painters, the Virgin Mary, newspapers, parcels, clergymen and so on. The description of the young woman is detailed and believable. The setting – a quiet country house in a village – is also quite natural and realistic. This passage, then, is highly representational.

Other works of literature are much less realistic. The following description of the life of a different young woman, Persephone, from the Greek myth, comes from the Homeric 'Hymn to Demeter':

I begin to sing of rich-haired Demeter, awful goddess – of her and her trim-ankled daughter whom Aidoneus rapt away, given to him by all-seeing Zeus the loud-thunderer. Apart from Demeter, lady of the golden sword and glorious fruits, she was playing with the deep-bosomed daughters of Oceanus and gathering flowers over a soft meadow, roses and crocuses and beautiful violets, irises also and hyacinths and the narcissus, which Earth made to grow at the will of Zeus and to please the Host of Many, to be a snare for the bloom-like girl – a marvellous, radiant flower. It was a thing of awe whether for deathless gods or mortal men to see: from its root grew a hundred blooms and it smelled most sweetly, so that all wide heaven above and the whole earth and the sea's salt swell laughed for joy. And the girl was amazed and reached out with both hands to take the lovely toy; but the wide-pathed earth yawned there in the plain of Nysa, and the lord, Host of Many, with his immortal horses sprang out upon her – the Son of Cronos, He who has many names.

('Hymn 2 to Demeter')

Persephone is described in some realistic terms: she has trim ankles and she is capable of amazement. But much of the description is quite unrealistic. Her mother, Demeter, is described as being an ‘awful goddess’ and ‘lady of the golden sword and glorious fruits’. The Earth makes flowers ‘grow at the will of Zeus’. There is a flower with a hundred blooms that smells so sweet that it causes the earth and heaven and the sea to laugh. None of this is like what we see when we look out the window on a spring morning. We would say that this passage, unlike the passage from *Middlemarch*, is not very representational.

The lack of correspondence between the facts of a literary work and the real world we are used to can extend beyond the characters and setting. We have already seen in this chapter how unrealistic Shakespeare’s use of language was in terms of the degree to which it sounds like everyday spoken English. The sonnet we examined earlier is highly structured and the language formal and stylized. We have also seen, in the example of the *Harry Potter* books, that some stories contain actions which are not at all realistic in terms of whether they could actually happen in the real world.

One important thing for you to notice as you study the works in your IB English Literature course is the degree to which the authors use representational features in the work and, if they do not, even if the works are extremely unrealistic, how the authors nevertheless manage to convey some important idea about reality. Finally, you will be considering the author’s choice to make the literature more representational or less so, and what is gained by making that choice for a particular work.

● TOK Links: The relationship between art and realism

The arts as a whole, including all other media besides literature, span the whole range from highly realistic to extremely **abstract**. One of the central questions about how we make meaning in art revolves around the question of the function of realism. Early art is highly realistic, but as the centuries have passed, the boundaries for what constitutes acceptable art have expanded dramatically, so that we now accept works that are so far removed from depicting the world in a representational way they have virtually no connection at all. A good question for you to pursue is that of what we gain either from clear representational techniques or from the rejection of those techniques and the adopting of such modes as expressionism or cubism or abstract art.

Representation, then, is a concept which draws our attention to the relationship between literature and reality. In a broader sense, however, the concept of representation can be understood as helping us to explore the ways in which all ideas are represented in texts, and the techniques that authors use in order to achieve that representation. As you study the various works of literature that you read during your course, you will frequently be seeking to recognize the ways in which the authors have chosen to represent their ideas as well as the degree to which the work represents reality.

We will explore all of these concepts in all three sections of this book, so that you can see how various works of literature help you to see these processes at work, and how these processes help you to understand the various works of literature. You may find it helpful to refer back to this section whenever you come across a concept connection, to help you understand the ways that the concepts relate to the works that you read.

Global issues

GLOBAL ISSUES

Global issues and ideas for further reading will be inside these boxes throughout.

The seven concepts that we have just identified for your English Literature for the IB Diploma course are mandated by the IB curriculum. The global issues, on the other hand, are not as specifically defined. You are required to consider the literary works you read in terms of what they might reveal about global issues, and one of your assessments will require you to discuss two works in terms of a global issue. You will have some freedom as to what global issue you choose, and it does not have to be one of those suggested in the curriculum guide.

The curriculum guide stipulates three characteristics which define a global issue:

- It has significance on a wide/large scale.
- It is transnational.
- Its impact is felt in everyday local contexts.

For example, an **abstract** issue such as *primogeniture*, the practice of passing a monarchy along through the lines of sons, would not, therefore, count as a global issue. It might occur in several countries, but it is difficult to argue that this is a widespread problem, as it affects so few people, and it certainly does not affect everyday people in very significant ways.

The guide suggests the following examples of areas of inquiry from which you can formulate global issues:

- **Culture, identity and community:** this category might include investigation into the ways in which literary works depict gender, class, race, ethnicity or other cultural groups.
- **Beliefs, values and education:** this category could include consideration of how a work depicts the connection between education and values or beliefs, and the ways in which communities define and disseminate their beliefs and values.
- **Politics, power and justice:** this category includes all of the kinds of issues that arise in society – questions of equality, ruling classes, fair and unfair wielding of power, distribution of wealth, and the relationships between all of these. This category offers you the opportunity to think about what different societies consider to be the rights of citizens and how those rights are protected or undermined.
- **Art, creativity and the imagination:** this category provides you with the opportunity to consider what works themselves have to say about the role of art in people's lives. Art, in this case, is content, not medium. When you consider the course's core concepts, you are considering the works as works of art themselves. When you are considering a work in the context of the global issue of art, you are noticing that the work is about art.
- **Science, technology and the environment:** if a work explores questions of science and nature, you can consider it in the context of this global issue. Questions that might arise could be to do with the relationship between science and society or science and nature or nature and society. You could look at what the work suggests about the importance or effectiveness of scientific developments.

(International Baccalaureate 55–56)

In all of these categories, it would be useful to consider how different viewpoints come into **conflict** with each other.

As you consider your literary works in the context of global issues, you may notice that more than one global issue might be relevant to any given work. Within each of these general headings, you have quite a bit of freedom to choose what to discuss with regard to the works you study. The descriptions above are suggestions and should not be considered definitive.

You are also free to develop a different global issue that is more relevant to the works you study than these. You may find, also, that many other topics you might think of which meet all three requirements for defining a global issue already come under one of these five umbrella headings. Poverty can be seen as an issue of politics, power and justice, for example. Global warming could

come under the heading of science, technology and the environment. As long as you can clearly identify an issue as meeting all three of the requirements, you will be able to use that issue as the defining feature for your individual oral assessment.

Just as with the course concepts, this textbook will model connections between literary works and global issues in all three areas of exploration to help you see how the consideration of a work in the context of one or more global issues can give you new insights into the work.

How to use this book

This book has been structured around the three areas of exploration in the English Literature for the IB Diploma curriculum. The IB curriculum guide takes each one of those areas of exploration and breaks it down into six questions to help you consider that area in detail. The coursebook mirrors this structure: each section of the book focuses on one of the three areas of exploration, and within each section, there is one chapter on each of the six questions.

Each chapter provides you with examples of how to use particular tools and concepts to interpret literary works. Each chapter also provides you with some activities to do in order to practise using the tools yourself. There are notes on the activities at the end of the book, but you should remember that these commentaries do not provide ‘correct’ answers. A variety of answers is possible, so if you did not think of the particular interpretation the notes provide, that does not necessarily mean that your interpretation is wrong. If you can justify your response using lines from the work of literature as support, then you can feel confident about your interpretation of the example. If your interpretation seems to have been way off, however, and you cannot really justify it using the language from the passage in support, then that simply means that you will need to keep practising! Learning to read literature effectively is a skill that takes time to develop; do not expect that you will necessarily get everything right on your very first try. Activities marked as ‘Discussion’ or ‘Check for understanding’ can be done both individually or in pairs/groups and are designed for you to consolidate the learning you need to understand the guiding questions. These are more open-ended questions so may not have ‘answers’ at the end of the book.

ACTIVITY

Activities will be inside these boxes – look out for these to help you practise your skills.

Author profile

Extra information about the authors under discussion is provided in these boxes.

You should note that some of the works included in this coursebook include sensitive content and offensive or derogatory language. It is the nature of the IB’s prescribed reading list to include texts that will challenge you intellectually, personally and culturally, and to expose you to sensitive and mature topics. At times, you or your classmates may find these works a challenge, but as readers it is up to us to consider not just *how* such language is used, but *why*. We invite you to reflect critically on various **perspectives** offered, while bearing in mind the IB’s commitment to international-mindedness and intercultural respect.

In most cases, we have chosen to let the words remain as they originally appear, so you can consider for yourself the effects of how they are used. This is central to understanding the themes of **identity** and human behaviour at the heart of this book. Any works that include such content will be prefixed with a sensitive-content box.

You will find a useful glossary on page 414 of this book, which you can refer to throughout each chapter. Note that glossary terms are in purple the first time they appear in the text, so if you are unsure of the meaning of a word that is not in purple, it may be that it is a repetition of a word and is still in the glossary for you to look up.

SENSITIVE CONTENT

Caution: this book contains extracts that use offensive and derogatory language.

■ Using QR codes

Extra reading is recommended via the QR codes throughout the book. They are placed in the margin alongside the text for quick scanning, and look like the ones on the right.

To use the QR codes to access the weblinks you will need a QR code reader for your smartphone/tablet. There are many free readers available, depending on the device that you use. We have supplied some suggestions below, but this is not an exhaustive list and you should only download software compatible with your device and operating system. We do not endorse any of the third-party products listed below and downloading them is done at your own risk.

- For iPhone/iPad, Qrafter – <https://apple.co/2Lx9H5l>
- For Android, QR Droid – <https://bit.ly/JKbRP0>
- For Blackberry, QR Code Scanner – <https://blck.by/2DD51Jo>
- For Windows/Symbian, UpCode – <https://bit.ly/2UJe7dt>



Organization of the course

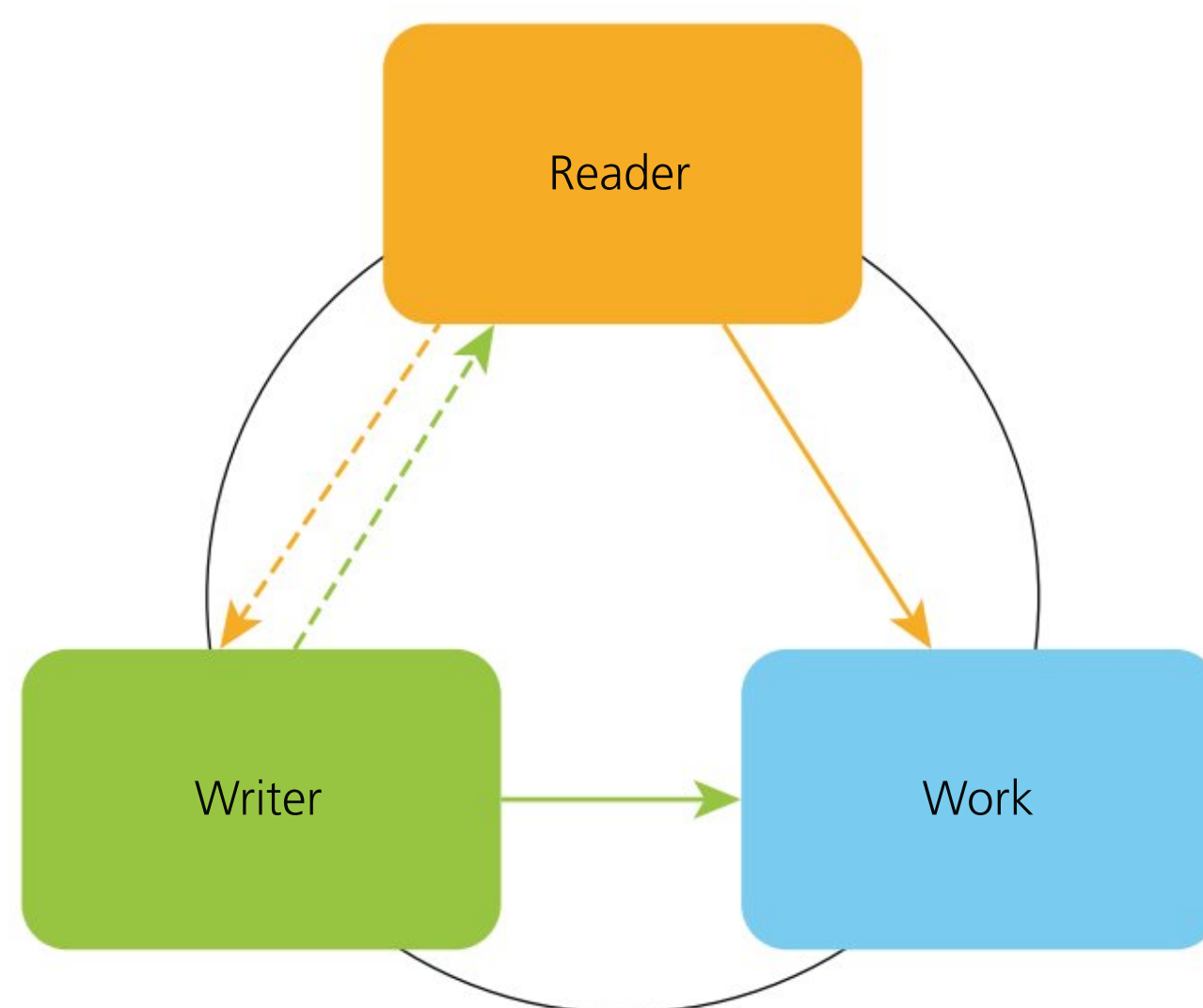
All three areas of exploration, along with the concepts and global issues, are required to be investigated over the course of your two-year programme, but the course curriculum does not dictate to teachers the order in which each element is to be presented. Since we cannot write a book and organize it in several different ways, we have chosen to use the three areas of exploration as a starting point. Your teachers, however, may not have chosen to organize the course using those areas of exploration, so it will be important for you to attend to your teacher's instructions about which chapters to read and in what order.

Even if your course is organized around the three areas of exploration, you will ideally be considering all of the literature you study from all three **perspectives**, so from time to time, each section will point out some connections between the other areas of exploration. You may find it useful to refer to different chapters in the book as a refresher on how to use those tools on whichever literary work you are studying.

Finally, you should be aware that because of the wide range of choices available to your teachers for selecting literary works for you to study, you are unlikely to encounter works in this book that you are studying in class. Therefore, you should not necessarily write about the works you learn from this book directly in your exams and other assessments. Your IB assessments require you to use works that you have studied in your course. Instead,

this book will help you to learn *how* to read any work of literature you are given, because it will show you from a conceptual stance what is required of any reader approaching any work.

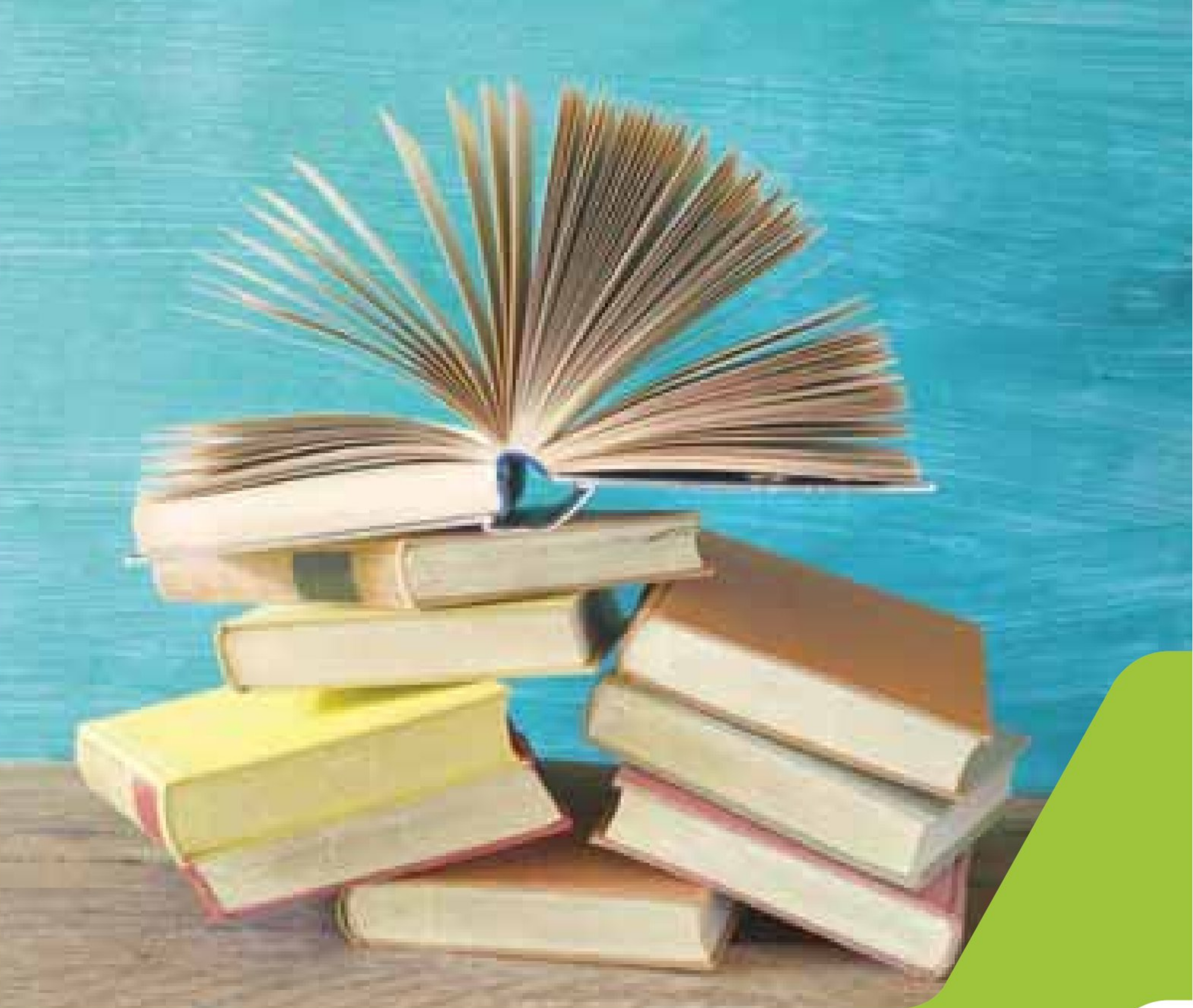
This diagram shows the relationships that we will investigate over the course of this book. The writer creates the literary work with which you, the reader, engage. The dotted lines show that the purpose of the exercise is for you to engage with the writer, but you cannot do that directly; your means of communication is through the written work. Once you understand the nature of your relationship to authors, how it is possible for you to communicate in this indirect fashion, and how authors expect you to approach that communicative task, it will be much easier for you to engage with any literary work.



Once you understand the nature of literary works themselves, and once you have the tools to interpret them, you will be able to read any novel, short story, play, poem, or work of **non-fiction** you encounter equally well, because you will know what to look for and what to do with it when you find it. Reading this book will not help you to become experts at reading particular literary works; it will help you to become literary experts. Enjoy!

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Readers, writers and texts

1.1

Why and how do we study literature?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To understand the nature of literature
- ▶ To understand the relationship of fiction, drama and poetry to truth
- ▶ To demonstrate ways to apply course concepts to specific works of literature
- ▶ To demonstrate ways to understand specific works of literature in the context of global issues
- ▶ To appreciate why we read literature
- ▶ To recognize and appreciate how we read literature
- ▶ To recognize features of texts which make them literary texts as opposed to non-literary ones
- ▶ To provide an overview of *why* we read literature
- ▶ To provide an overview of *how* we read literature
- ▶ To understand the relationship between the implied author of a text and the implied reader of the text

What is a literary work?

Literature is an art form which conveys ideas through language – and in some cases, such as with graphic novels, images and words. One of the key features of literature is that it conveys ideas indirectly, using characters and, in some forms, narrators or speakers, who think and act and talk. Readers of literature (or viewers of drama) must observe the thoughts, actions and speaking and interpret them. This process of communication is quite different from the way that we communicate with each other face to face or on the phone or through letters. In most non-literary texts, communication is more direct: the author addresses him or herself to the reader in an effort to convey an idea or belief or feeling without the intermediaries of characters, speakers, or narrators. Literature, like all other art, is something created by an artist out of his or her experience and world view, and it conveys something – ideas, values, beliefs, and/or emotions – to the person who engages with the work of art. Literature gives the reader a window into the mind and heart of the author – at least as much of that mind and heart as can be revealed by any single work of literature. This is of course a very basic definition of literature. It does not yet capture the richness or variety of the kinds of works that you will encounter which can be called literary. Some of the characteristics commonly associated with literature are the use of literary techniques, such as **metaphor**, **symbolism**, and **allusion**, the use of a particular structure to help convey the meaning, and the idea that in literature there is meaning beyond the surface meaning. The trouble is, however, that while we can try to pin down some features of literature, we will not be able to develop a single, permanent definition into which all literature naturally fits, because there are just too many factors which contribute to ‘literariness’, and any single feature can be found in other kinds of works which we would not normally consider literary (Culler 20). All of the features we just mentioned can be found in at least some works that we would normally call non-literary texts. Here is an example. Which of the following two extracts seems to you to be more ‘literary’?

At last through the broken windows, the pulse of helicopter rotors and airboat propellers set the summer morning throbbing with the promise of rescue.

(Sheri Fink)

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.

(F Scott Fitzgerald)

The first extract is the opening line from *Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital*, by investigative reporter Sheri Fink. The book is an account of an investigation into people who died in a New Orleans hospital in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This kind of investigative journalism is not the type of work we normally think of when we think of literature. Yet, this work tells us a compelling story of something experienced and observed by the author. That opening sentence relies on sensory imagery and figurative language which seems to describe the 'morning' as something alive.

The second extract is the opening sentence from F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, a very famous novel, sometimes suggested to be the greatest American novel ever written. That first sentence, however, is a very straightforward statement without obviously 'literary' elements. When we know the context, of course, we know that Nick Carraway is the narrator, a feature created by Fitzgerald to tell the story, whereas Fink is speaking to us as directly as she can in her work – but when we just look at the opening sentences, we have no way of knowing that. The language of the two sentences does not help us differentiate between literary and non-literary texts.

If the particular kind of language alone cannot determine whether a work is literary or not, then we can begin considering a great many other factors such as style, content, cultural attitudes toward literature, and so on. The question, then, as to what literature is, is one which we will be investigating throughout this book, and which you will be considering throughout your course.

The English Literature IB Diploma course identifies four forms of literary texts:

- prose fiction
- poetry
- drama
- some non-fiction.

Note that only the last of these forms is limited in such a way as to suggest that some members of that category are not literary. We can, therefore, assume that all works in each of the other forms are to be considered literary. Each of these four forms, including the literary non-fiction, contain some or all of the literary features that we have mentioned here and more. Within those four forms, we will find a great variety of genres and styles which we will consider in the following sections and, as we shall see, the four forms, while exhibiting striking differences from each other, will also have much in common.

■ What is fiction?

Sometimes, when people think of literature, they think of **fiction** – a story about something that didn't really happen. That idea is not very helpful though, for two reasons: the relationship between literary works and things that really happen or happened in the world is quite complicated, so we can't just easily say that fiction deals solely with things that did not happen. Secondly, as we can see from the list above, some non-fiction is, indeed, literary. We need a better understanding then of what **fiction** is.

We can think of **prose fiction** as being works which are written in prose form and which, at least to some degree, include elements out of the author's imagination, rather than being solely a recounting of events from the real world. There is a whole spectrum, however, of works which incorporate differing degrees of imaginative (fictive) elements.

Highly realistic fiction based on historical or contemporary fact.

Highly imaginative fiction in which events, settings and characters are invented.

When we say ‘realistic’ here, we are talking about realism in the sense of the works being strongly representational – reflecting the real world to a high degree. At the left end of this spectrum, we might put historical fiction, while at the right end, we might put fantasy or science fiction. Even within those genres, however, we would find a variety of differences in the amount of realism or real-world connection we might find.

As an example of one work which we might identify as belonging at the far left end of the spectrum, we can propose *Arthur and George*, by Julian Barnes, which is a fictionalized account of the author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his efforts (ultimately successful) to clear the name of George Edalji, an English-born son of an Indian father and a Scottish mother. Edalji was wrongfully convicted of mutilating farm animals and served three years in prison for the crime he did not commit. The story is true – that is, Barnes did his research and the facts are historically accurate. The real-life Conan Doyle did in fact establish the truth of Edalji’s innocence and restore to him his licence to practise as a solicitor. As a result of this effort, in fact, the British court of appeals was established (Rafferty). The reason that *Arthur and George* was published as a novel (fiction) rather than as an historical account is that Barnes brought the characters to life, giving us access to words and thoughts and feelings which, although very believable in the context of the historical facts, are not ‘facts’ to which Barnes had access. He imagined what it must have been like to be Arthur and George and the other people involved in the story. Nevertheless, the novel is highly realistic and richly historically accurate.

On the other end of the spectrum, we might consider a work such as Ursula LeGuin’s science fiction novel, *The Left-Hand of Darkness*. This novel takes place in an imaginary time during which interplanetary travel is possible and on an imaginary planet called Winter. The inhabitants of the planet are called Gethenians. The story is told from the perspective of an ambassador from a planet called Terra. The story revolves around the fact that the Gethenians can change gender at will, and so are sometimes male and at other times female. In a bonded couple with children, first one partner and then the other might have borne babies. The narrator, Genly Hai, struggles to try to understand and accept this fact, which is very different from the way gender exists on his home planet. He finds that when his friend and mentor appears as a woman, after a time as a man, he, Genly, cannot easily cope with the change. Genly’s brief is to bring the Gethenians into the interplanetary organization called the Ekumen, but the vast difference in culture makes this a very difficult proposition. All of these events, characters, and places are imaginary, of course.

The Left-Hand of Darkness, then, is highly imaginative science fiction, while *Arthur and George* is highly realistic historical fiction. Much fiction falls in between those two extreme ends of the spectrum. Consider the story ‘An Astrologer’s Day’ by RK Narayan, which is set in an unnamed, but realistic setting in India prior to 1957. You can access the text via the QR code on the right. We can determine the time period because the monetary unit mentioned in the story, the anna, was demonetized in 1957 (Republic India Coinage). The story itself was published in 1947 in a collection of the same name, so one might be tempted to think that Narayan was writing from his own experience; however, we know that the story is fiction because it is identified as a short story and not as a memoir. (Perhaps more saliently, we know it is fiction from the clever tidiness of the ironic twist in the ending. Real life seldom dishes up such deliciously clever turns of events!)



ACTIVITY 1

Discussion

Given what you know about the story, where along that spectrum of highly realistic to highly imaginative would you put the Narayan short story? Is it closer to *Arthur and George*, or closer to *The Left-Hand of Darkness*?

RK Narayan

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, known as RK Narayan, was an author from South India who wrote many novels and short stories, most prolifically between the 1930s and the 1980s. He was honoured for his work by both the Royal Society of Literature in England and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (Penguin India). He also won the Sahitya Academy Award in India ('RK Narayan').

Narayan wrote a number of novels and short stories set in a fictional town of Malgudi, exploring the lives of the characters who lived in that town ('RK Narayan'). He has been compared to the American writer William Faulkner, who also wrote many stories set in a fictional place called Yoknapatawpha County.

In contrast to the story by RK Narayan, Zitkala-Ša, a Dakota Sioux Native American writer from the early-twentieth century, wrote short stories which were heavily autobiographical. Her work is considered to be fiction rather than straight autobiography because she, too, used her experiences to create art.

Here is an excerpt from her story 'The Widespread Enigma Concerning Blue-Star Woman':

It was summer on the western plains. Fields of golden sunflowers facing eastward, greeting the rising sun. Blue-Star Woman, with windshorn braids of white hair over each ear, sat in the shade of her log hut before an open fire. Lonely but unmolested she dwelt here like the ground squirrel that took its abode nearby, – both through the easy tolerance of the land owner. The Indian woman held a skillet over the burning
5 embers. A large round cake, with long slashes in its center, was baking and crowding the capacity of the frying pan.

In deep abstraction Blue-Star Woman prepared her morning meal. 'Who am I?' had become the obsessing riddle of her life. She was no longer a young woman, being in her fifty-third year. In the eyes of the white man's law, it was required of her to give proof of her membership in the Sioux tribe. The unwritten law of
10 heart prompted her naturally to say, 'I am a being. I am Blue-Star Woman. A piece of earth is my birthright.'

It was taught, for reasons now forgot, that an Indian should never pronounce his or her name in answer to any inquiry. It was probably a means of protection in the days of black magic. Be this as it may, Blue-Star Woman lived in times when this teaching was disregarded. It gained her nothing, however, to pronounce her name to the government official to whom she applied for her share of tribal land. His persistent
15 question was always, 'Who were your parents?'

(Zitkala-Ša 72)

Zitkala-Ša wrote stories which reflected her knowledge of life in the Sioux tribe on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, and her experience with white American culture from her days at a Quaker boarding school in Indiana and at college in Indiana and Pennsylvania ('Zitkala-Ša Native American Writer'). She wrote from her personal experience, but she also invented characters and events, so we cannot consider her work to be autobiographical.

Zitkala-Ša

Zitkala-Ša, also known as Gertrude Simmons, was born on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. She is the first Native American woman to write stories based on tribal legends which had been conveyed from generation to generation through an oral tradition. She was a talented violinist and earned significant acclaim from white society. Eventually, Zitkala-Ša decided to return to her Native American roots and returned to South Dakota after having lived elsewhere, but found it difficult to fit in with a society who felt that she had lost the traditions of the culture ('Zitkala-Ša Native American Writer'). Much of her work reflects this difficult cultural conflict.



GLOBAL ISSUES

CHOOSING FROM MULTIPLE POSSIBILITIES

Even in this short excerpt, we can see that global issues related to two different fields of inquiry could be developed for this story. The relevant fields of inquiry are culture, identity and community, and politics, power and justice.

Blue-Star Woman asks herself directly 'Who am I?' in line 7, and that is followed by a discussion of the significance of her name. The end of the extract raises the question of the rights of Blue-Star Woman in the context of the government officials to whom she must apply for the title to 'her share of the tribal land' (lines 11–15). Seeing the connection to those broad fields of inquiry will not be enough when the time comes to prepare for your individual oral, however. You would need to read the rest of the story in order to be able to identify the point that Zitkala-Ša makes about those issues. In this case, the whole story moves from the particular situation of Blue-Star Woman to the men in Washington who will

settle her fate. The story shows that the interference of the white man in traditional Native American culture has destroyed the values and, therefore, the identity of the Native American people. It also shows an old idea: that power corrupts. The story shows how some Native American men have figured out a way to make a lot of money by 'helping' other Native Americans get their rights to the land – in exchange for half of everything they get.

A possible global issue which could be discussed in relation to this text would be the idea that culture clash leads to the destruction of one culture, which would relate to the culture, identity and community field of inquiry.

Another possible global issue would be the idea that power corrupts those who wield it; that global issue would relate to the field of inquiry of politics, power and justice.

ACTIVITY 2

'Queenie' by Alice Munro

Read the following extract from Alice Munro's short story, 'Queenie', and write a short explanation of how one of the fields of inquiry discussed above (culture, identity and community or politics, power and justice) might relate to this story.

See if you can develop a global issue from the field of inquiry you choose. After you have made your own interpretation, you can read and compare it to the commentary at the end of the book (page 417).

Both Queenie and Mr Vorguilla had to go out to work in the evenings. Mr Vorguilla played the piano in a restaurant. He wore a tuxedo. And Queenie had a job selling tickets in a movie theatre. The theatre was just a few blocks away, so I walked there with her. And when I saw her sitting in the ticket-booth I

5 understood that the make-up and the dyed puffed hair and the hoop earrings were not so strange after all. Queenie looked like some of the girls passing on the street or going in to see the movie with their boyfriends. And she looked very much like some of the girls portrayed in the posters that surrounded her. She looked to be connected to the world of drama, of heated love affairs and dangers,

10 that was being depicted inside on the screen.

She looked – in my father’s words – as if she didn’t have to take a back seat to anybody.

‘Why don’t you just wander around for a while?’ she had said to me. But I felt conspicuous. I couldn’t imagine sitting in a café drinking coffee and advertising

15 to the world that I had nothing to do and no place to go. Or going into a store and trying on clothes that I had no hope of buying. I climbed the hill again. I waved hello to the Greek woman calling out her window. I let myself in with Queenie’s key.

I sat on the cot in the sun porch. There was nowhere to hang up the clothes I had

20 brought and I thought it might not be such a good idea to unpack, anyway. Mr Vorguilla might not like to see any sign that I was staying.

I thought that Mr Vorguilla’s looks had changed, just as Queenie’s had. But his had not changed, as hers had, in the direction of what seemed to me a hard foreign glamour and sophistication. His hair, which had been reddish-grey,

25 was now quite grey, and the expression of his face – always ready to flash with outrage at the possibility of disrespect or an inadequate performance or just at the fact of something in his house not being where it was supposed to be – seemed now to be one of more permanent grievance, as if some insult was being offered or bad behaviour going unpunished, all the time in front of his eyes.

30 I got up and walked around the apartment. You can never get a good look at the places people live in while they are there.

(Alice Munro)

Alice Munro

Canadian author Alice Munro was the winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Literature. Her **fiction** draws on the history of her family, including their emigration from Scotland and settlement in Ontario three generations ago. She lived most of her life in Huron County, and much of her work has been significantly shaped by the culture and geography of that area (Thacker). Munro has led a quiet life, staying away from the spotlight, but has worked publicly against the censorship of books in high schools. She has won a long list of prizes for her work – almost exclusively short stories. Her stories explore a variety of problems – relationships, moral failings, and the question of how well memory reflects reality (Thacker).

A final important point about **fiction** is that all fiction, no matter how much or how little it relies on imaginary times, places, characters, and actions, has some basis in truth. There is something we can recognize in the feelings of the characters or their reactions to the events to which they are subjected, or there is something we can recognize in their motivations or their interactions.

In LeGuin’s book, *The Left-Hand of Darkness*, for example, we might not be able to relate to traveling to a distant planet to encounter a species greatly unlike our own, but we can recognize and relate to the difficulty of trying to understand a culture which is very different from ours

and to the struggle to empathize with and appreciate people for whom that culture is completely normal. Even in highly fantastic fiction, in other words, the opportunity is there for the reader to connect to the mind and the outlook of the author whose world view shaped the text. This opportunity is an important feature of literary works: as with all art, literature gives us access to a view of human experience through other people's eyes.

Fiction is not a literary form; however, **prose** fiction is. The term 'fiction' can be applied to other literary forms, especially drama, but some poetry is also clearly fiction. The term 'prose' differentiates novels, novellas, and short stories from other kinds of literature. 'Prose' is language which does not feature **meter**, **rhyme** or rhythm strongly. We speak in prose. **Prose** fiction almost always appears in the form of complete sentences and paragraphs, though some authors break that convention to create a particular effect.

Within the literary form of **prose** fiction, we can identify several different genres. A genre is a particular category, in this case a category of fiction, whose members exhibit various characteristics which make them similar to each other and different from works of other genres.

Genre	Description	Example
Historical fiction	Fiction which is set in an identifiable place and period in time and which can include, in the plot, actual events which occurred in that time and place.	The novels of Jane Austen can be classified as historical fiction set, as they are, in Regency England at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
Romantic fiction	Fiction which focuses on a love story between or among characters.	Colleen McCullough wrote <i>The Thorn Birds</i> , a dramatic story spanning several generations trying to make a living in the outback of Australia. At the center of the story is the passionate and tragic love between a young girl and a priest.
Western	Fiction which is set in the American west (usually this means the United States, but it could mean Canada or South America) and features as characters Native Americans and/or cowboys or ranchers.	<i>The Whistling Season</i> by Ivan Doig is the story of a family trying to make a living ranching in Montana in the early-twentieth century in an area where little rain falls.
Thriller	Thrillers feature conflict among or between large entities like government agencies or major companies and focus on crime and/or espionage.	Some people would classify Umberto Eco's novel <i>The Name of the Rose</i> as a thriller, as it is a mystery involving encoded secrets which must be solved before the truth can be known about who committed a series of murders.
Mystery	In a mystery story, someone has committed a crime (often a murder). Someone, a professional or amateur detective, tries to solve the mystery of who did it.	Writing under the pen name of Robert Galbraith, JK Rowling has published a series of mystery novels featuring detective Cormoran Strike. The first of the series is <i>The Cuckoo's Calling</i> .
Fantasy	A fantasy story features fantastical elements – that is, magical creatures and/or people with magical abilities or superpowers which do not exist in the real world.	JRR Tolkien's series <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> is a classic fantasy series set in the fictional universe of Middle-Earth. It features a magical ring, hobbits, dwarves, elves, dragons, and a creature called Gollum, among other fantastic elements.
Science fiction	Fiction set in an imaginary time, and often place, and in which the story relies in an essential way on some scientific element – often technology which does not exist in our time.	<i>The Martian</i> by Andy Weir. This novel, which later became a movie, gives us an astronaut who is stranded on Mars after an accident to his ship. He must figure out how to use the equipment left behind to survive and to travel to a place where a rescue ship can come and get him.
Post-apocalyptic or dystopian fiction	Post-apocalyptic stories are also generally set in an imaginary time, though less often in an imaginary place. Instead, post-apocalyptic stories take place in a time in which some natural or man-made disaster has destroyed civilization as we know it, and we see the survivors trying to rebuild society, or existing in the society that has arisen following the destruction. Post-apocalyptic tales are very often also dystopian. Dystopian stories are the opposite of utopian stories; in a utopia, everyone is happy. In a dystopia, at least some people suffer severely due to great injustice built into the societal system.	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> by Margaret Atwood is a dystopian story set in a time when humankind has suffered a crisis due to widespread infertility. The few fertile women have been conscripted into a kind of slavery in a strongly patriarchal society, in which the women, the handmaids, can be sold to wealthy men who use them to bear children for their infertile wives.

This list is not intended to be a complete catalogue of all the different genres of fiction. Additionally, some works of fiction do not fit easily into any of these genres. Anne Patchett's novel, *Bel Canto*, for example, is the story of a terrorist group which enacts an elaborate plot to kidnap the president of the country (the country is unnamed in the novel). The plot goes wrong when the president doesn't attend the dinner party where the attack was launched, and so the terrorists find themselves, instead, with a large group of visitors to the country, including a world-famous opera star and a Japanese businessman, for whom the party was given, and his translator. The vice-president is among the group, as well as two priests. Eventually a negotiator is found to try to be the go-between for the terrorists and the government, carrying demands back and forth. The novel is not history, but not science fiction. There is no one hero/spy, so it's not a typical thriller. It's not dystopian or a mystery. It's rather difficult to say just what genre the novel is.

Genres can also, of course, overlap. The Harry Potter series, for example, is fantasy, but it can also be seen as a thriller, in which Harry Potter and his friends have to face and defeat Voldemort in order to save the integrity of the magical world. *Arthur and George* is historical fiction, but it is also a mystery in that we don't know who did the actual crime for which George Edalji was convicted. We listed Jane Austen's novels as historical fiction in the table on page 28, but they might also be classed as romantic fiction, as each one explores the romantic relationship of the main character.

ACTIVITY 3

Discussion

Think of three or four books which you have read. Into what genre or genres would you classify them and why? **Describe** what it means to say that a work is fiction. Name at least five of the main genres of prose fiction.

Drama

Drama, like prose fiction, is a literary form. Drama is meant to be acted out on stage and the playwright tells his or her story through dialogue. Instead of our trying to understand the implications of the story by reading about the characters, as presented by narration or narrative, we observe the events directly and must draw whatever conclusions we can about the characters' thoughts, feelings and actions from our observations. The fact that plays are ideally experienced in performance means that the audience will not only hear the words spoken but will also see the actions. Setting, lighting, props, music and other sound effects are also elements that contribute to an audience's understanding of a play and which will be explored as part of the literary nature of drama. You can think of the relationship of drama to real-world events in just the same way as you can think of the relationship of prose fiction to real-life events. Plays run the gamut from the very realistic, historically accurate to the very fantastic. One example of an historically accurate play is William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The play tells the story of General Julius Caesar who ruled Rome in the last century BC and the conflict which ensued when he set out to be crowned as dictator for life. People who wished to preserve the Roman Republic opposed this move, and Caesar was brutally murdered. The murder set off a civil war. Shakespeare took his historical facts from a translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, an historical work written in the second century CE. The facts of the story are, to the best of our knowledge, true; however, Shakespeare had necessarily to invent the speeches that the characters make, including **soliloquys**, which reveal a character's inner thoughts.

An example of a play which might best be situated at the other end of the spectrum is the 1920 play *R.U.R.*, written by Czech playwright Karel Čapek. The title, in English, stands for 'Rossum's Universal Robots', and Čapek invented the word 'robot' for his play. In the play, the robots are invented to

serve essentially as slave labour, but, eventually, as scientists add more and more technological developments so that the robots become more and more like humans, the robots rebel and then become the masters, rather than the servants (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica). Perhaps in the twenty-first century, this play seems to be not too far-fetched, as we are accustomed to the reality of advanced robotics, but you might imagine that 100 years ago, the story was quite fantastic.

As with **prose** fiction, plays can fit anywhere along the continuum between these two examples – and possibly even beyond them at the extreme ends.

ACTIVITY 4

Determining the role of fiction in plays

Read the short descriptions of each of the following plays and then try ordering them along the continuum below.



<i>The Miracle Worker</i> by William Gibson	This is a biographical play about Helen Keller, who became blind and deaf at a few months of age after being ill with scarlet fever, and Annie Sullivan, who came to teach Helen how to communicate. Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan were real people, and the events of the story are factually quite accurate.
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> by William Shakespeare	This is a play based on an English poem based on an Italian novella. It tells of a pair of feuding families, the Capulets and the Montagues. The Capulets' daughter, Juliet, and the Montagues' son, Romeo, fall deeply in love with each other and their brief, tragic relationship brings an end to the feud.
<i>Cyrano de Bergerac</i> by Edmond Rostand	This is the story of a soldier with an abnormally huge nose which makes him a target of ridicule. He falls in love with his beautiful distant cousin Roxane, but he cannot declare himself because he fears her rejection due to his ugliness. Cyrano has, however, become a heroic soldier who fears nothing else. In one scene, he is attacked by 100 villains sent to kill him, and he beats them all. He has also developed a mastery over words which makes him eloquent and witty. Roxane is herself in love with a handsome young soldier in Rostand's company, Christian de Neuvillette, who, unfortunately, lacks all of Cyrano's abilities. Cyrano sees a chance to speak, through Christian, all of his love for Roxane, and the pair strike up a deal: Cyrano will write all the words that Christian will then say to Roxane to make her love him. There was a real-life Cyrano, and the story is loosely based on some events from his life.
<i>Copenhagen</i> by Michael Frayn	This is the story of a meeting in Copenhagen in 1941 between Danish Physicist Niels Bohr and German Physicist Werner von Heisenberg. The meeting took place during the height of the race to nuclear weapons, and people have long wondered what took place at that meeting. Later accounts from the two men contradicted each other, so little is known. Frayn gives us the meeting as he imagined it happened.
<i>Long Day's Journey Into Night</i> by Eugene O'Neill	This is the story of the Tyrone family on one day in their lives. The family lives in Connecticut and is coming apart at the seams due to the mother's addiction to opiates and the addiction of the three men, the father and two sons, to alcohol. The younger son has just been diagnosed with tuberculosis. The day starts out with the family feeling hopeful that this time the mother, just back from a rehabilitation center, will be off drugs for good, but it ends in tragedy. The characters are based on O'Neill's family, and he left instructions that it was not to be published until 25 years after his death.

As we saw with the fictionalized story of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his assistance to George Edalji, historical plays, like historical novels, are necessarily going to be partly fictionalized – if only because the playwright has to put words in the mouths of characters, and it is virtually never possible to have access to the actual words that a number of people said to each other over some period of their lives. Playwrights, like novelists, are artists. They write plays to create an aesthetic response; hence, they often distort, exaggerate or change facts. At the very minimum, they choose what to include and what to leave out, and they give us the words and thoughts of the characters.

Athol Fugard's play *'Master Harold'... and the boys* is an example of a highly realistic play, and one which is often seen to be in large part autobiographical. It is set in South Africa during apartheid, and it recreates to a large degree events from Fugard's own life. Fugard's family did have a Basuto servant named Sam Semela who worked for Fugard's mother at the Jubilee Boarding House and, later, in a tea shop in Port Elizabeth and, until the afternoon of the events shown in the play, Sam and Fugard were friends.

There was, however, an encounter one afternoon between Fugard and Sam which ended with Fugard spitting in Sam's face (Jordan 462). So far, these facts which appear in the play do refer to real events in Fugard's life. One thing that Fugard did which fictionalizes the play is that he enhanced the symbolic significance of many of the actions and events in the play. For one thing, the events take place during a terrible storm, and the storm takes on the symbolic function of representing the trouble which is arising in the relationships between the characters. Other events are no longer just events; events and actions also take on a greater symbolic significance than we might be likely to notice in real life. Literary critic John O Jordan gives this example:

If standing is the posture of servitude for Sam and Willie, we can better appreciate the significance of ballroom dancing in their lives. Since they are not permitted to sit down on the job, dancing and dance practice are a way not only of providing a welcome relief from the tedium of their work but also of transforming the enforced posture of subordination into a mode of creative and liberating movement. Hence the importance of the play's first significant action, when Willie rises from his knees, thinks for a moment, and then begins awkwardly to practise the quickstep. In a sense, the thematic pattern of the entire play is contained in this single non-verbal moment, not the least important aspect of which is Willie's short pause to reflect.

(John O Jordan 466)

In real life, we do sometimes see standing and kneeling as having some symbolic significance. We might stand to show respect to someone entering a room. Many people kneel in church to show their devotion and humility. In 2016, American football player Colin Kaepernick created a sensation by kneeling during the playing of the National Anthem before football games as a means of drawing attention to the problem of racial injustice. Although kneeling is usually, like the kneeling in church, a sign of humility, many people took Kaepernick's kneeling, because it was a form of silent protest, as an insult, and a national debate ensued.

Nevertheless, standing and kneeling do not always have powerful symbolic significance. Often they are just actions we take in order to accomplish tasks that we want to accomplish, rather than actions we take in order to demonstrate a particular attitude. Standing up is not a widespread traditional symbol in literature of the type which has a fixed meaning, such as the Christian symbol of the tree of knowledge (we will explore the meaning and role of symbols in much greater detail throughout this section of the book and especially in Chapter 1.5). In this play, however, the act of kneeling and standing has taken on a powerful significance which is directly

related to the situation in which the characters are presented. Fugard took a personal experience as the starting point of his play, but one way in which he then turned that experience into art was to highlight the symbolic significance of an action – standing up to practise dancing – which many people might not even have noticed in real life.

Another way in which the play differs from real life and so is fictionalized to some degree is that Fugard manipulated the ending of his play so that it does not simply recount the facts of his personal experience. He ends the play with a moment of great suspense, leaving the viewers or readers to try to decide for themselves what the main character, Hally, has learned from his encounter on that afternoon, and whether it has changed him. We are left with the image of Hally going out into the storm, alone, and we do not know what he will do next. Fugard used his experience to serve purposes quite different from simple autobiography.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

REPRESENTATION

As we mentioned earlier, plays are generally written to be performed and to be experienced in performance. How does the fact that actors must perform the roles contribute to the ability of the play to accurately represent the real world? Does it make the play more representational, or less? Does a character in a novel contribute to or reduce the degree of representation? Why do we call the 'people' in literature 'characters' instead of people? In what sense do the characters represent the author's meaning?

Genres of plays

We categorize plays into different genres from the ones we use for prose fiction. Some of the most common genres of plays are:

- tragedy
- comedy
- historical plays
- musical theatre
- theatre of the absurd.

If you have studied Shakespeare, you are probably familiar with the first three categories, as his plays were organized into those categories when they were first published in the First Folio in 1623. Historically, a **tragedy** is a play in which the main character comes to a terrible fate, often due to a problem of his own making. Traditionally, a tragedy involved aristocratic people such as kings and princes, and the disaster that is suffered by the main character usually has far-reaching effects involving many other people ('Theatre Genres'). *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are examples of classic tragedies. In modern days, the nature of tragedy has broadened. We tend to use the more general term 'drama' when talking about plays which have bad endings. Drama does not tend to involve people of high rank, and the tragedy is often more personal.

Whereas nowadays we think of books, plays or movies which are funny when we talk of 'comedy', the traditional definition of a **comedy** is a play with a happy ending. Often comedies involved more ordinary people, in contrast to tragedies. Oscar Wilde's play, *The Importance of Being Ernest*, is a comedy in both senses – it has a happy ending, and it is funny.

ACTIVITY 5

Discussion

Are 'tragedy' and 'comedy' straightforward terms which can easily differentiate one play from another, or are the ideas of a happy or tragic ending to some degree arguable? Does *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, have a tragic ending or a happy one? Can you think of another play whose ending is somewhat problematic in terms of determining whether the play should be called a comedy or a tragedy?

Historical plays are plays which tell stories of real events, although sometimes the stories are fictionalized to a significant degree. Shakespeare's many plays about the kings of England, including Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI and Henry VIII, are examples of history plays.

Musical theatre, as opposed to opera, is a nineteenth-century development (Law). In an opera, all of the lines are sung; in musical theatre, songs and dances are interspersed with regular dialogue. Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera* is one of the twentieth century's most famous musicals.

A final genre is one with which you may not be as familiar: **theatre of the absurd**. In an absurdist play, the usual conventions of theatre do not apply. The absurdist movement began as experimental theatre in France in the 1950s. It was characterized by '... a rejection of realistic settings, characters and situations, along with conventional logic, and offered instead portrayals of meaninglessness, isolation and the breakdown of language' (Chambers). Two of the best-known absurdist playwrights are Eugène Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is one of the best-known absurdist plays.

ACTIVITY 6

Determining the genre of plays

Consider the same five plays you examined in Activity 4 on page 30. Into which genre would you put each one? Why? Is there any overlap in genres?

- *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson
- *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare
- *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand
- *Copenhagen* by Michael Frayn
- *Long Day's Journey Into Night* by Eugene O'Neill

Poetry

Poetry has the same kind of relationship to events in the real world that both prose fiction and drama do: that is, any given poem may have a very strong relationship to the real world, or it may be a very imaginative piece. Poetry does not, however, have the same kinds of genres that drama and prose fiction do. Generally, we talk about three different kinds of poetry:

- epic
- narrative
- lyric.

An **epic** is a book-length narrative in verse which tells a heroic story. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer are epics with which you may be familiar. They tell the story of how Helen, the extraordinarily beautiful wife of the Greek King Menelaus of Sparta was stolen away to Troy, and of

the war that ensued between the Greeks and the Trojans for her recovery. *The Odyssey* picks up at the end of the ten-years' war and tells the tale of Odysseus' ten-year journey back home to Ithaca. There are many other epics: *Gilgamesh* is a Babylonian epic, *Mahābhārata* is a Sanskrit epic. The epic was an ancient form; some later famous epics were written in the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries – Dante's *Inferno*, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* are among the most famous of the type. Although some twentieth-century poets worked with some long forms of poetry, there are no modern poems that are truly epics in the traditional sense ('Epic').

Narrative poetry is poetry which has a speaker created by the author, much like the narrator of a prose fiction work. The speaker of a narrative poem tells a story and, as with narrators in prose fiction, the speaker can be the main character in the story, a minor character, or purely an observer. These speakers can also be either reliable – that is, trustworthy – or unreliable. We will learn more about unreliable narrators in Chapter 1.3, but for now, we can simply say that some narrators (in prose) and speakers (in poetry) believe they are telling us the truth with their story, but are mistaken, and our job is to work out whether the speaker is reliable or not.

A very famous narrative poem is 'The Raven' by Edgar Allan Poe, in which the speaker tells the story of how, after the death of his beloved Lenore, a raven comes to him and terrorizes him with his constant repetition of the single word 'Nevermore'. You can use the QR code to listen to this poem being read by actor James Earl Jones.



Lyric poetry is poetry which expresses feelings or impressions through a first-person speaker. Lyric poetry does not tend to tell a story; rather, it tries to create an effect so that the reader experiences something of the feeling that the poem expresses. We call the effect on a reader **aesthetic**, which relates to our sensory experiences, particularly of beauty. This does not mean that all lyric poetry is about beauty; a lyric poem can be about sorrow and suffering as well as about love and happiness, or it can be about something beautiful or powerful in the world. The name comes from the fact that in ancient Greece, lyric poetry was accompanied by music – usually a lyre. The music added to the aesthetic experience.

In the present day, we think of poetry accompanied by music as songs, and there are, of course, an enormous variety of songs in many styles and on many topics. What we call lyric poetry is written poems that rely on language, meter, rhyme, and other literary techniques to create an aesthetic experience. A very famous lyric poem is William Wordsworth's 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud':

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
5 Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
10 Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
 15 A poet could not but be gay,
 In such a jocund company:
 I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
 What wealth the show to me had brought:
 For oft, when on my couch I lie
 20 In vacant or in pensive mood,
 They flash upon that inward eye
 Which is the bliss of solitude;
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,
 And dances with the daffodils.

(William Wordsworth)

We see that there is a first-person speaker here who is sharing with us how he feels when he sees a simple, beautiful sight in nature. If you read the poem out loud, you will hear the musicality in the language. That and the focus on the aesthetic experience of seeing and truly appreciating the effect of a field of daffodils on one's mood makes this poem a lyric. This speaker seems to speak directly for Wordsworth himself in conveying the poet's observation of nature.

As with the genres in drama and prose fiction, the boundaries between these types of poems are not firm. One example of the intermingling of these poetic types can be seen in 'The Raven'. Although the speaker of 'The Raven' is clearly an imaginative creation of Poe's, and although that speaker clearly tells the story of a particular incident in his life—the arrival of the raven and its terrible repetition of the single word which endlessly reminds the speaker of the loss of his beloved, one American critic in 1885 (40 years after the poem was published) called it 'the most popular lyric poem in the world' (Gioia). If you listened to the reading, you experienced the lyric qualities of the poem, its musicality, and the tone of building doom.

Another type of poem which seems to cross the boundaries of the types we've looked at so far is the **dramatic monologue**. A dramatic monologue is like a narrative poem in that it has a speaker, but the speaker is presented such that he or she speaks to the reader in the moment the reader reads. The effect is that the reader is the audience to whom the speaker speaks. The speaker may also be telling a story, but the story may not be defined by a beginning, middle and end, as 'The Raven' is, or as other narrative poems are.

One of the most famous dramatic monologues is 'My Last Duchess' by Robert Browning. We will take a deeper look at this poem in Chapter 1.3; for now, we can tell that it is a dramatic monologue because of the way the poem opens:

My Last Duchess

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
 Looking as if she were alive. I call
 That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
 5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said

(Robert Browning)

In these first five lines of the poem, we get the sense that the speaker is walking through his house and has paused to look at a painting on the wall. We are asked to look at it, right now, as he speaks. We can imagine that the Duke has a guest with him, and that is the person to whom he speaks, but the effect is as if we, the readers, are the direct audience of the Duke's address.

Poetry and the real world

As with the other literary forms, poetry runs the gamut from poems which are very closely allied to real-world experiences, to poems which have been created largely out of the poet's imagination. We have seen these two extremes with the contrast between Wordsworth's poem and Browning's poem. As a generalization, lyric poetry is likely to reflect the poet's real experience with the world, while dramatic monologues are likely to be highly inventive, but, as with prose fiction and drama, many variations are possible. Because the effect of reading a poem is so personal, it is often very tempting to equate the poet with the speaker of the poem, but such an assumption can be very tricky. Some poems are very obviously fictionalized because the speaker of the poem cannot possibly be the poet. In contrast to the speaker of 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', the speaker of 'My Last Duchess' is clearly an invention of the poet. Browning was not a duke and he did not have a wife who was a duchess, whose portrait he had commissioned.

It is not always so easy to tell, however, whether the speaker of a poem is expressing directly the experiences and feelings of the poet or whether the speaker of the poem is an invention whose ideas and attitudes do not express the poet's feelings at all. Part of our job as readers of poetry is to ask ourselves this very question, but it can be quite difficult. Many people, for example, will argue that Shakespeare's sonnets are essentially autobiographical, and so the sonnets have often been used as evidence for claims made about Shakespeare's life. That assumption is a bit of an oversimplification, however. In the following sonnet by William Shakespeare, for example, the speaker tells a story about himself which the careful reader will realize is suspect.

Sonnet 30

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
 I summon up remembrance of things past,
 I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
 And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:
 5 Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
 For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
 And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,
 And moan the expense of many a vanished sight:
 Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
 10 And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
 The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
 Which I new pay as if not paid before.
 But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
 All losses are restored and sorrows end.

(William Shakespeare)

This speaker claims that when he sits, enjoying a quiet moment of happy reflection (the 'sweet silent thought' of line 1), he deliberately causes himself to remember and brood over past sorrows – failure to attain things he wanted (line 3), the death of friends (line 6), the loss of a lover (line 7). He claims to obsess on these past sorrows to the point that he feels the pain all

over again (lines 9, 11 and 12). Even more surprisingly, the speaker tells us that this revisiting of past pain happens over and over again – the ‘when’ in line 1 and the ‘then’ at the beginning of line 5 indicate that what he is describing is a repeated action. The speaker asks us to believe, then, that he is a person who on many occasions deliberately works himself into a sort of frenzy of self-pity. If this claim is true, then the speaker is probably not somebody we would want to be spending much time with. Self-pity – and deliberately instigated self-pity in this case – is not an endearing quality.

A skilled and creative reader, however, will recognize that the speaker’s claim is not really true. It is a **conceit**, a type of **extended metaphor**. The implication of the term ‘conceit’ is that the metaphor is one which is particularly fanciful or far-fetched. A conceit, therefore, is necessarily not a true description of reality. The conceit, in this case, is that the speaker is the kind of person who works himself up into an impassioned state of suffering. In actuality, however, the speaker is not such a person. The point of the invention was to create contrast. The speaker wants to show that the ‘dear friend’ (line 13) has such a powerful effect on him that the mere thought of her can restore him from the depths of the deepest suffering and despair. The speaker wishes his audience (the lover, whom he addresses directly in line 13) to see herself as he sees her: someone with incredible power to affect his well-being. The poem is intended to flatter and to convey, through an imagined scenario, what it feels like to know this woman and what it feels like to love her. The dramatic contrast between his darkest of dark moods and his happiness when he thinks of her is a much more effective way to communicate the feeling than simply saying ‘I love you’ or ‘I’m glad that you love me’.

Notice that even though the events of this poem are not true in the sense that they actually happened in the real world, they convey an idea that does reveal something true about the real world: that love is a powerful feeling, capable of bringing us great joy that can sustain us in times of great sorrow. That is an experience which many people in the real world know something about. Shakespeare has used the conceit of the self-pitying narrator in order to portray a truth about human experience.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

PERSPECTIVES AND CREATIVITY

On the surface, the narrator of ‘Sonnet 30’ has a perspective which does not match Shakespeare’s. We aren’t being asked to think that William Shakespeare himself would admire a person who engaged in such an exaggerated kind of self-pity. We are expected, instead, to recognize the conceit and thus see past the surface perspective to the underlying perspective: that love has the power to relieve even that much suffering. In that sense, then, Shakespeare would seem to share the viewpoint of the speaker. In this short poem, Shakespeare has given us two perspectives to consider: one which he expects us to be able to discredit, and the other which he expects us to believe. Our ability to recognize the fact that

the narrator is using a conceit depends on a number of things, including our knowledge of what a conceit is and our understanding that to dredge up one’s past sorrows so as to wallow in them over and over is a psychologically unhealthy action, so Shakespeare would not likely expect us to admire such a person. It requires creativity in readers to make the assessment of what perspectives are at work in this sonnet. Both creativity and perspective, therefore, are essential parts of the **immanent** experience with this text and, indeed, with all literary texts. We work towards a kind of personal meeting of the minds between ourselves and the writer through the text.

In other cases, poets might create a character, but one who does share the poet’s world view, so that it seems as if the poet might be speaking directly to us, showing us the world as he or she sees it. In this poem by Chinese–New Zealander Alison Wong, for example, the speaker is highly reliable.

Reflection on a Proposal of Marriage

after sharing a 2 for 1 voucher to an exhibition

I was married once, briefly
to a man I met at the ticketing desk
of the Christchurch Art Gallery.
We kept falling
5 into each other before
the shadowy figures of
Giacometti. 'Hello,'
we said in thin voices—
a *Standing Woman*, a *Man*
10 *Walking* away. We parted
only to find each other at
The Glade, *The Forest* and *City Square*.
We were a *Group of Three Men*—
my husband and I and our
15 marriage—each of us turning
away. Before we finally
separated, I offered
my name. 'Graham,' he said.
'Thank you.' We shook hands.
20 He never gave me a ring.

(Alison Wong)

Alison Wong

Alison Wong was born in New Zealand and earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Victoria University of Wellington. Her interest in writing, however, goes back as far as her interest in mathematics, and she has worked as both an information technology analyst and writer for many years (New Zealand Book Council). She has won a number of awards for her poetry, as well as the Janet Frame book prize and several others for her first novel, *As the Earth Turns Silver*.

The poet has indicated that this poem was based on a real experience that she had:

I had a '2 for 1' voucher from The Press but no one to share it with, so at the ticketing desk I asked the first lone person in the queue whether he'd also like to get in for half-price. He replied that this must make us married. We went our separate ways but kept bumping into each other at various exhibits. There was something of the self-consciousness I imagine upon waking with a stranger in one's bed.

(Alison Wong)

This, then, is an example of a poem with a highly reliable speaker who seems to speak directly for the poet. The story that she tells, about an event in an art museum, is factually true. In these cases, however, we must still remember that the speaker of the poem should not be considered to equate to the poet. The poem is still a work of art and, as we saw with the examples from Athol Fugard and Zitkala-Ša mentioned earlier, we must not confuse art with purely factual or autobiographical information.

Confessional poetry

An additional type of poetry which we have not yet considered is **confessional poetry**.

'Confessional poetry' is a term which is used to describe poems which readers believe to be strongly autobiographical ('A Brief Guide to Confessional Poetry'). The poems have a first-person speaker, and they deal with experiences which can clearly be connected to the poet's life. The idea of such poems being 'confessional' is that they reveal secrets about the poet's life, events or feelings that many people would not be willing to reveal about themselves, and they focus on

reactions to traumatic experiences and dysfunctional relationships. Even though it would appear to be very personal, a poem like Wordsworth's 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' is not considered to be confessional poetry, because the poet would have no reason to 'confess' to his appreciation of daffodils as symbols of the beauty of nature.

One poet whose work is very commonly described as confessional poetry is Sylvia Plath. Plath had a very difficult life. Her father, a controlling man, died when she was 8, and she struggled throughout her life with his memory. She suffered from what we would now call manic depression, about which very little was known in her lifetime and for which there was no treatment. She committed suicide when she was 30 years old. It was her third attempt to kill herself ('Sylvia Plath'). Much of her poetry features a daughter speaking with great rage or pain or depression about her father and, in some cases, about her mother. Several of her poems feature speakers who have attempted suicide. It is, therefore, quite tempting to think of these poems as Plath herself directly expressing her feelings and experience. There are some difficulties with the idea that Plath herself is the speaker, however. For one thing, the speakers of the various poems cannot be exactly the same person, as their life stories differ in detail from each other and from Plath's. The speaker of 'Lady Lazarus', for instance, says that she tries to kill herself every 10 years. Plath first attempted suicide in 1953, then 1961, and then 1963 ('Sylvia Plath'). The speaker of 'Daddy' says that her father died when she was 10 (line 57). The experiences of these speakers are certainly similar to Plath's own experience, but she has taken care to change the details.

ACTIVITY 7

Discussion

Plath's poems feature first-person speakers who, through their words, reveal some of the story of their own lives. Use the QR codes on the right to read 'Lady Lazarus' and 'Daddy' and **discuss** the poetic type into which you would fit those poems. What characteristics of lyric, narrative, dramatic and confessional poetry do they exhibit?



Plath herself objected to the idea that poetry can be seen as straightforward autobiography:

I think my poems immediately come out of the sensuous and emotional experiences I have, but I must say I cannot sympathize with these cries from the heart that are informed by nothing except a needle or a knife, or whatever it is. I believe that one should be able to control and manipulate experiences, even the most terrifying, like madness, being tortured, this sort of experience, and one should be able to manipulate these experiences with an informed and intelligent mind.

(Uroff 105)

The manipulation of personal experience is what makes poetry art. This kind of poem is based on a true story, as it were, so it is not completely fiction, but the original experience has been moulded into something greater than it was, so it is not quite autobiography either.

ACTIVITY 8

Identifying the type of poem

Read the following poem by Australian poet John Shaw Neilson. Which poetic type do you think this is? Identify the specific features of the poem which led you to your choice. When you are done, you can read the notes at the end of the book (page 417).

O Heart of Spring

O HEART of Spring!
 Spirit of light and love and joyous day,
 So soon to faint beneath the fiery Summer:
 Still smiles the Earth, eager for thee alway:
 5 Welcome art thou, soever short thy stay,
 Thou bold, thou blithe newcomer!
 Whither, O whither this thy journeying,
 O heart of Spring?

(John Shaw Neilson)

John Shaw Neilson

John Shaw Neilson's father tried to make a go of a farm in Australia under the Victoria Land Act in the 1880s. John only had a few years at school before he left to work as a labourer for his father. The farm, unfortunately, went bankrupt after only one year, and the family took on a number of jobs for several different landowners over the next few years, trying to work their own land in between. They eventually lost the farm, however, and John and his father worked as farm-hands, timber-workers and roadworkers (Anderson). The family, in other words, was quite poor through most of Neilson's childhood and young adulthood. Despite the long working hours, John found time to explore the natural environment, and this interest in nature became one of the major themes of his poetry. Neilson followed in his father's footsteps not only as a labourer, but also as a poet. His father wrote for local newspapers, was a member of the local literary society, and both Neilsons won prizes for poetry in the Australian Natives' Association competitions in 1893 (Anderson). Despite failing health and eyesight that was poor enough that he needed help to read and write, John Shaw Neilson was renowned in his lifetime for the superior quality of his lyric poetry (Anderson).

CONCEPT CONNECTION

REPRESENTATION

One aspect of the concept of representation concerns the degree to which the language of a text represents reality. You can probably understand this concept quite easily if you think about painting. The 2013 pencil drawing, *Sensazioni*, by Italian artist Diego Fazio is highly realistic; in fact it comes from a school of art called 'hyperrealism'. It represents reality very accurately, so we would say that this drawing is highly representational. (Take a look via the first of the QR codes on the right.)

On the other hand, a painting such as *Le Chaste Joseph*, painted by German artist Max Ernst in 1923, is not representational – it does not portray the world in a highly realistic way. The figures in the painting are intended to be Mary and Joseph from the Christian Bible, along with the Holy Spirit (Sebbag). The Bible characters are represented as birds, which is, of course, already not a realistic representation of people in the real world, but even the birds are not a realistic portrayal of birds. (Have a look via the second of the QR codes on the right.)

Writers can write texts with the same range of representational attitudes. So far, we have seen quite a variety: the sonnet by Shakespeare (page 36) is highly structured with rhymes. Certainly, people do not speak that way. The poem does represent reality, however, in its portrayal of a man in love who wishes to honour and flatter his beloved. 'Reflection on a Proposal of Marriage', on the other hand, is a quite realistic poem. It uses accessible language and tells of real events. 'O Heart of Spring', finally, uses language of a particularly high style, much more formal than we would ever use in everyday speech.

These features of language – the highly structured rhyming verse and the formal style, much different from everyday speech – are some of the means by which the poets have chosen to represent their insights.



CAS Links: Further study

Organize a trip to the local art museum and study the paintings in terms of the degree to which they are representational. Contact museum personnel in advance to see if you can arrange for a speaker or guide to show you around the museum specifically in order to learn about differing degrees of representation in various schools of art.

Poetry, therefore, is sometimes strictly fiction, and it is sometimes built upon facts that have been moulded and manipulated to suit the poet's purpose. The truth of all these kinds of poems – those with unreliable speakers, those with reliable speakers, and lyric poems – is a greater truth about human experience, however, than the simple factual recounting of events.

Literary non-fiction








So far, we have been considering three literary forms whose relationship to real-world events varies along a continuum. We can't apply the same concept to literary non-fiction which, by definition, does not rely on the author's imagination in all the same ways that fiction does. Prose non-fiction, by definition, is writing which tells about something which happens or happened in the real world. Writers of non-fiction do not invent characters, places, or events. Instead, they observe people, places and events, and then they write about some of those which seem to them to have some sort of significance.

The primary differences between non-fiction texts which are not literary and those that are have to do with audience and purpose. Most non-literary non-fiction texts have some kind of practical purpose: to convey information or to persuade an audience to hold a certain opinion. Some of the wide variety of non-literary non-fiction includes newspaper articles, advertisements, recipe books, social media posts and editorials. There are many more kinds of non-literary texts; if you are interested in learning more about the features of non-literary texts and how to analyse them, you may wish to consult either *English Language and Literature for the IB Diploma* or *Textual Analysis for English Language and Literature*, both published by Hodder Education.

Literary non-fiction, however, usually has a more general audience, like other literary forms do. Although they do not invent characters, settings and plot in the way that authors in the other literary forms might, the authors of literary non-fiction nevertheless are engaged in the creation of an art form, and so the process is still imaginative. Non-fiction authors still craft their works by choosing which elements to include, which to emphasize, and the order in which best to present them. They use language which creates the effects they want, and they rely on the same kinds of techniques that authors of prose fiction do. They do not invent or alter the facts, but they present them in such a way as to cause readers to notice something that most people would not notice by just witnessing the situation themselves.

Genres of non-fiction

In addition to the wide variety of types of non-fiction which we mentioned above, we can think of non-fiction, literary or otherwise, as fitting into some genres which are different from the genres of prose fiction, drama, and poetry. Some of the main genres of non-fiction are:

-  biography and autobiography
-  history
-  journalism
-  sports writing
-  essays
-  speeches
-  travel writing.

Other genres are possible, but these are some which you are most likely to encounter as literary works. It is quite possible, however, that a text in any of these categories will be seen more as a non-literary text than as a literary work.

Early in this chapter, we read just one sentence from *Five Days at Memorial*, and we saw that even in that one sentence, the work exhibits literary features. Although that book fits into the genre of journalism, we might also make a case for it fitting into the genre of memoir, since the author was writing about experiences she herself had, rather than events which she researched from primary and secondary source documents. If the work can be studied from a literary perspective, that is, using all of the strategies for analysis that we will be exploring throughout this book and which you will be practising throughout your course, it can be classed as a literary work. In fact, since this is a course in literature, any non-fiction text that you study will be considered to be a literary work and you will approach it from the perspective of literary analysis.

ACTIVITY 9

Determining the genre of a non-fiction work

Read the following passage, excerpted from the introduction to a collection of ballads, published in 1934. This introduction was written by Beverley Nichols. Answer the questions which follow.

The post-war vintage of poetry is the thinnest and the most watery that England has ever produced. But here, in these ballads, are great draughts of poetry which have lost none of their sparkle and none of their bouquet.

5 It is worthwhile asking ourselves why this should be – why these poems should ‘keep’, apparently for ever, when the average modern poem turns sour overnight. And though all generalizations are dangerous I believe there is one which explains our problem, a very simple one ... namely, that the eyes of the old ballad-singers were turned outwards, while the eyes of the modern lyric-writer are turned inwards.

10 The authors of the old ballads wrote when the world was young, and infinitely exciting, when nobody knew what mystery might not lie on the other side of the hill, when the moon was a golden lamp, lit by a personal God, when giants and monsters stalked, without the slightest doubt, in the valleys over the river. In such a world, what could a man do but stare about him, with bright eyes,
15 searching the horizon, while his heart beat fast in the rhythm of a song?

But now – the mysteries have gone. We know, all too well, what lies on the other side of the hill. The scientists have long ago puffed out, scornfully, the golden lamp of the night ... leaving us in the uttermost darkness. The giants and the monsters have either skulked away or have been tamed, and are engaged in
20 writing their memoirs for the popular press. And so, in a world where everything is known (and nothing understood), the modern lyric-writer wearily averts his eyes, and stares into his own heart.

That way madness lies. All madmen are ferocious egotists, and so are all modern lyric-writers. That is the first and most vital difference between these ballads
25 and their modern counterparts. The old ballad-singers hardly ever used the first person singular. The modern lyric-writer hardly ever uses anything else.

(Beverley Nichols)

- 1 Which genre, if any, of those listed on page 41, would you think this piece belongs in and why?
- 2 From what you know so far about the nature of literature, what features of this passage make it literary?

Once you have answered the questions, you can read the notes on page 417.

We will be looking in more depth at the features which make some non-fiction texts literary later in this book, and especially in Chapter 1.3, but for now, we will look at just one example.

Consider this excerpt from Mark Twain's essay, 'That Awful German Language':

- Surely there is not another language that is so slipshod and systemless, and so slippery and elusive to the grasp. One is washed about in it, hither and thither, in the most helpless way; and when at last he thinks he has captured a rule which offers firm ground to take a rest on amid the general rage and turmoil of the ten parts of speech, he turns over the page and reads, 'Let the pupil make careful note of the following exceptions'. He runs his eye down and finds that there are more exceptions to the rule than instances of it. So overboard he goes again, to hunt for another Ararat and find another quicksand.
- Such has been, and continues to be, my experience. Every time I think I have got one of these four confusing 'cases' where I am master of it, a seemingly insignificant preposition intrudes itself into my sentence, clothed with an awful and unsuspected power, and crumbles the ground from under me.
- For instance, my book inquires after a certain bird – (it is always inquiring after things which are of no sort of consequence to anybody): 'Where is the bird?' Now the answer to this question – according to the book – is that the bird is waiting in the blacksmith shop on account of the rain. Of course no bird would do that, but then you must stick to the book. Very well, I begin to cipher out the German for that answer. I begin at the wrong end, necessarily, for that is the German idea. I say to myself, 'Regen (rain) is masculine – or maybe it is feminine – or possibly neuter – it is too much trouble to look now. Therefore, it is either der (the) Regen, or die (the) Regen, or das (the) Regen, according to which gender it may turn out to be when I look. In the interest of science, I will cipher it out on the hypothesis that it is masculine. Very well – then the rain is der Regen, if it is simply in the quiescent state of being mentioned, without enlargement or discussion – Nominative case; but if this rain is lying around, in a kind of a general way on the ground, it is then definitely located, it is doing something – that is, resting (which is one of the German grammar's ideas of doing something), and this throws the rain into the Dative case, and makes it dem Regen. However, this rain is not resting, but is doing something actively, – it is falling – to interfere with the bird, likely – and this indicates movement, which has the effect of sliding it into the Accusative case and changing dem Regen into den Regen.'
- Having completed the grammatical horoscope of this matter, I answer up confidently and state in German that the bird is staying in the blacksmith shop 'wegen (on account of) den Regen', Then the teacher lets me softly down with the remark that whenever the word 'wegen' drops into a sentence, it always throws that subject into the Genitive case, regardless of consequences – and that therefore this bird stayed in the blacksmith shop 'wegen des Regens'.
- N.B. – I was informed, later, by a higher authority, that there was an 'exception' which permits one to say 'wegen den Regen' in certain peculiar and complex circumstances, but that this exception is not extended to anything but rain.

(Mark Twain 64–5)

Twain is writing about an experience he has had. German does have all of those cases and rules and, very probably, Twain's German text did have a sentence about a bird waiting in the blacksmith shop. What he has written here, then, is not fiction. He has, however, presented the facts about German and his experience with it in order to create an effect – primarily a comedic one. He has used several techniques in order to create the humour: the religious **allusion** in line 6

to the search for Ararat (the mountain on which Noah's ark is traditionally believed to have come to rest) creates humour because the search for Noah's ark is a vastly more significant search, culturally and historically, than the search for the proper phrasing about rain. The suggestion that the latter is as difficult a task as the former is funny. The stringing together of those long sentences about how to decide which case to use (lines 14–24) is also humorous because it puts us right inside the mind of someone trying to work that out, and we can experience the confusion that arises from all of those possibilities. The humour and the perspective helps readers to connect to the situation and to empathize with his struggle. Although Twain is writing non-fiction – a text about events that did happen to him in the real world – he has done it in a way that highlights a universal struggle among people trying to learn German as adults.

● TOK Links: Learning language

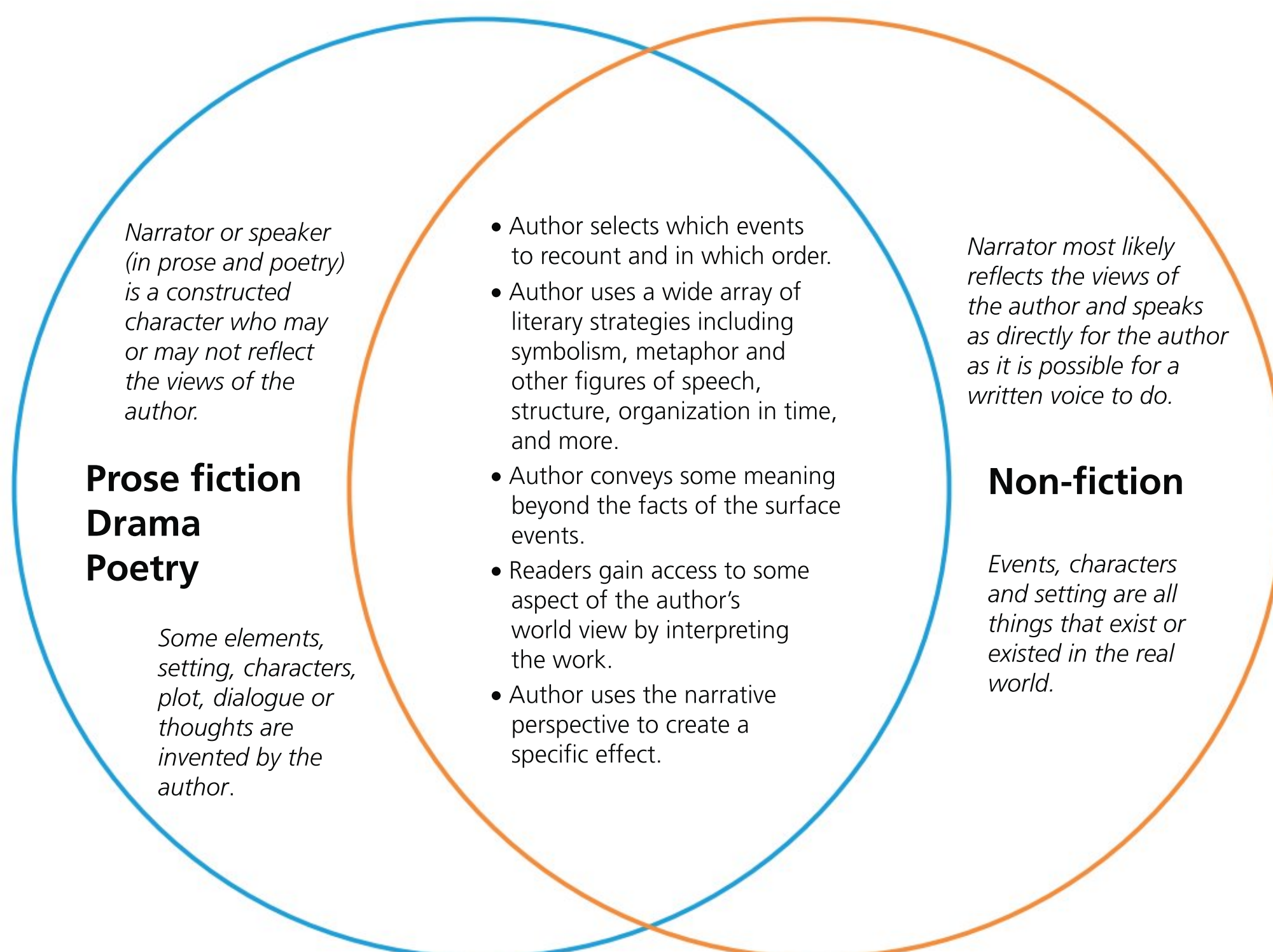
Language is a major means by which we make knowledge. What we are capable of communicating and understanding depends on our fluency with language – whether it is our native language or one we learned later. What Twain has highlighted here is a universal feature of trying to learn a foreign language. When you learn a language as a native speaker, you absorb it from context; you are immersed in language all the time, in many forms, for thousands of hours at a time when your brain is particularly suited to language learning. Native speakers of German do not have to grapple, as Twain does, with the apparently random rules of the language because they simply internalize them over time. Adults trying to learn additional languages by studying grammar are faced with all the strange inconsistencies present in every language, and the job of trying to memorize them one by one is a massive undertaking. For people who learn a language later in life and never attain native-like fluency, the knowledge that they can obtain and contribute in that language is limited by the level of their proficiency.

Although Twain here is poking fun at the oddities of the German language, English is equally unpredictable. Consider, as just one example, the different pronunciations of the following words: 'cough', 'rough', 'plough' and 'dough'. Another example is a rule that many children are taught when they are young: 'I before E except after C, or sounding as A, as in "neighbour" or "weigh"'. The only problem with that rule is that there are many exceptions to it as well. How about 'either' and 'neither', for instance? See if you can come up with a few more examples of contradictions that exist in the 'rules' of your native language.

● EE Links: Comparing non-fiction to fiction

You could develop an extended essay topic in which you compare and contrast the use of literary devices in a non-fiction work, such as 'That Awful German Language', and a work of literary fiction, such as Alice Munro's short story 'Queenie'.

The diagram on the next page shows some key features of fiction and non-fiction which differentiate the two, but also key features which make them similar – and which contribute to their literariness. The diagram is a representation of the most common state of affairs; you may very well find some exceptions from time to time, as well as additional features which are not illustrated here. The intention is to give you a good general idea of how non-fiction is related to the other three literary forms.



■ What makes a work literary?

We have seen that literary works use elements of writing such as structure, figurative language, and tone in order to convey meaning, but we have also seen that those kinds of techniques might appear in texts which are not necessarily considered to be literary. We have seen that in many cases, the narrator of a literary work is constructed to serve an author's purpose, but we have also noticed that some narrators speak very closely for the author.

An additional important feature of literature is that in writing a literary work, the author shapes reality to a purpose. Instead of giving us the story or the facts just for their own sake, authors of literature use the story or the facts to make a larger point; he or she takes an idea or a story and elevates it. Writers of fiction do the same thing that poets and writers of literary non-fiction do, but they do it with stories they invent out of their knowledge of the world and the people in it. Writers of literature construct meaning out of events that, left in their everyday form, would not seem to most people to be obviously meaningful in terms of revealing something about human experience. In so doing, literary texts communicate richer truths about what it is like to be human and what being human means. One primary feature of literature, then, is that literature elevates experiences to the universal.

Throughout the rest of this book, we will be exploring all of these aspects of literature in much more detail. As you go through your course, ask yourself what features of the works you study make them literary and also make them suitable for study in your course.

ACTIVITY 10***Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen**

Isak Dinesen (whose real name was Karen Blixen) was a Danish writer who lived in Africa for some time. While there, she met Englishman Denys Finch Hatton and fell in love with him. She took to telling him stories to win his attention. Much of her published work was written in English, which she learned because it was Finch Hatton's native tongue. Before you read the excerpt from her most famous work, a memoir of the farm on which she lived, write a paragraph describing a place that you know very well – preferably one which you love (or loved) but which you do not have access to right now, so that you are writing from memory, as Dinesen did in her memoir.

Now that you have written your paragraph, read the following extract from *Out of Africa*. How does Dinesen's description differ from yours? Obviously she is writing about Africa and you are unlikely to have done so, but probably your description seems to be less 'literary' than hers. Consider the techniques that she uses as compared and contrasted to the techniques you used. What do you think accounts for the difference in effect?

I had a farm in Africa at the foot of the Ngong Hills. The Equator runs across these highlands, a hundred miles to the North, and the farm lay at an altitude of over six thousand feet. In the day-time you felt that you had got high up, near to the sun, but the early mornings and evenings were limpid and restful, and the
5 nights were cold.

The geographical position, and the height of the land combined to create a landscape that had not its like in all the world. There was no fat on it and no luxuriance anywhere; it was Africa distilled up through six thousand feet, like
10 like the colours in pottery. The trees had a light delicate foliage, the structure of which was different from that of the trees in Europe; it did not grow in bows or cupolas, but in horizontal layers, and the formation gave to the tall solitary trees a likeness to the palms, or a heroic and romantic air like fullrigged ships with their sails clewed up, and to the edge of a wood a strange appearance as if
15 the whole wood were faintly vibrating. Upon the grass of the great plains the crooked bare old thorn-trees were scattered, and the grass was spiced like thyme and bog-myrtle; in some places the scent was so strong, that it smarted in the nostrils. All the flowers that you found on the plains, or upon the creepers and liana in the native forest, were diminutive like flowers of the downs,—only just
20 in the beginning of the long rains a number of big, massive heavy-scented lilies sprang out on the plains. The views were immensely wide. Everything that you saw made for greatness and freedom, and unequalled nobility.

(Isak Dinesen 3)

Why do we study literature?

Literature is an art form. Art is that which exists for its own sake, and not to fulfil other, pragmatic functions. The function of art is aesthetic. 'Aesthetic' is commonly considered to be a word to describe our sense of the beautiful; however, art is not necessarily an appeal to the aesthetic in the sense that beauty refers to something which is visually or aurally pleasing. Much art is not, strictly speaking, beautiful.

You may be familiar, for example, with paintings by Anselm Kiefer, a German painter who frequently turned to the Holocaust and Kristallnacht for his subject, such as in this work, called *The Breaking of the Vessels*. The books represent holy books and the broken glass recalls

Kristallnacht, the night in 1938 when Nazis smashed windows in synagogues, Jewish homes and businesses and killed nearly 100 Jews (Kiefer, 'Breaking of the Vessels').

The sculpture is not visually attractive. The glass is broken and the books have been burned, and are blackened and charred. Similarly, much literature is not beautiful in the sense of being pleasing. Consider a great tragedy such as Shakespeare's *King Lear*: the play is fraught with divisiveness and violence. In one scene, a man's eyes are gouged out. Numerous characters die before the end of the play. Artworks such as these are powerful but not, strictly speaking, beautiful. When we talk about the aesthetic appeal of a work of art, then, we are talking about the beauty that derives from our experiencing a powerful response to that work of art. Anselm Kiefer's sculpture and Shakespeare's tragedy are beautiful in the sense that they have the power to touch us deeply – to help us feel the sufferings of others and to activate our sense of empathy. When we say that art (including literature) appeals to our sense of the aesthetic, therefore, we are talking about the fact that art is that which specifically aims to touch us in ways beyond the purely rational.

In his essay, 'What is Art and If We Know What Art Is, What is Politics?', Tom Robbins defines art as that which has been created for the express purpose of appealing to our sensory receptors (Robbins 200). He says:

That is not to say that a work of art can't convey other, additional values, values with intellectual and/or emotional heft. However, if it's really art, then those values will play a secondary role. To be sure, we may praise a piece for its cultural insights, for the progressive statement it makes and the courageous stand it takes, but to honor it as 'art' when its aesthetic impact is not its dominant feature is to fall into a philistine trap of shoddy semantics and false emphasis.

(Tom Robbins 199)

In other words, art exists primarily, if not exclusively, from the desire to share our perceptual experiences with each other, to find out how the world seems to be to other people, and to determine whether what we experience is like what others experience or how it might be different. The work of art is the medium for this communication, and the perceptions it endeavours to convey are hard to pin down in direct, assertive statements. Try, for example, to explain exactly how it feels to be absolutely enraged over an injustice. To use direct statements – such as 'I was absolutely enraged over the injustice!' – does not convey the intensity or the nuance of the feelings. The reader of that statement will know, intellectually, that you were enraged, because you said so, but he or she will not experience that moment perceptually. The best way to ensure that the reader truly gets the experience is for you to provide a scenario or a metaphor or some other indirect means by which the reader can experience vicariously some of the same rage that you experienced. We connect through story and through empathy to perceptual experience rather than through straight discourse.



■ Anselm Kiefer, German, born 1945; *Breaking of the Vessels*, 1990

Consider this sonnet by Carol Ann Duffy, for example:

Demeter

Where I lived – winter and hard earth.
 I sat in my cold stone room
 choosing tough words, granite, flint,
 to break the ice. My broken heart –
 5 I tried that, but it skimmed,
 flat, over the frozen lake.

She came from a long, long way,
 but I saw her at last, walking,
 my daughter, my girl, across the fields,
 10 in bare feet, bringing all spring's flowers
 to her mother's house. I swear
 the air softened and warmed as she moved,
 the blue sky smiling, none too soon,
 with the small shy mouth of a new moon.

(Carol Ann Duffy)

We could say that the speaker of the poem suffers greatly due to the loss of her daughter, and that she is much happier when her daughter returns, but to state the case baldly like that really reduces the impact of our understanding. Duffy has given us a poem, however, in which she gives us a striking contrast in imagery and metaphor between the first two stanzas and the final three. The idea that the speaker's broken heart is like a frozen lake, and that the ice cannot be shattered even by granite or flint gives us a much better sense of just how sad the speaker is – much more than the bare fact that she is sad. The idea in the final eight lines that the daughter brings with her flowers and warming air – in fact, the return of spring – conveys the actual emotional experience of the speaker much more powerfully than 'I was happy again'. Duffy has given us a story complete with metaphors and images to help us understand in a personal, visceral sense what it feels like to be a mother whose daughter has gone away from her and then comes back.

As opposed to other kinds of texts – such as newspaper articles, blogs, letters, instruction manuals and travel writing – therefore, literature does not communicate facts and ideas directly from the writer to the reader. The purpose of literature is not to convey information; rather, it is to convey an individual world view in such a way that we come as close as possible to knowing what it feels like to have that world view. From reading literature, we get access to the mind and insights of the writer. In reading a work of literature, we are exposed to one person's vision of human experience and human nature, and we have the opportunity to test our own world view against that other one.

ACTIVITY 11

Check for understanding

Explain to a partner the role of indirect communication in literary works. Think of an example other than the ones that have been offered here.

The goal of literature means that the author's ideas are not conveyed directly, in assertions. Because the ideas are not conveyed in assertions, the reader of a work of literature must interpret the characters, events and setting in order to construct an understanding of what the author was trying to convey. The art of writing and the art of reading function together to create a meeting of the minds between the two parties engaged in the act of communication through literature.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

CREATIVITY

As we have now seen, the act of reading is a creative act. Readers have to engage with texts imaginatively in order to experience the text as more than a basic communication of information.

TOK Links: Art and the aesthetic

In TOK, you will study art as an area of knowledge. You will consider many art forms (not just literature), but in English class you are considering the nature of one specific kind of art. When you learn how to interpret works of literature, you are learning how knowledge is made in literature, and so you are engaged directly in answering a TOK question: how do we make knowledge in the arts?

The question of what 'aesthetic' means also requires an understanding about the ways of knowing that is directly related to your work in Theory of Knowledge. When Tom Robbins talks about art being something created specifically to appeal to the senses, he shows an understanding of how our senses and our emotions are related. William James, a nineteenth-century philosopher, first defined the connection between sense perception and emotions:

If we fancy some strong emotion and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no 'mind-stuff' out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains.

(Damasio 129)

James explained that in order to experience any emotions we must first have a physical response to some stimulus. The brain translates that physical response into an emotion. Robbins was correct, therefore, because the emotional response that we experience – empathy, revulsion, horror, joy, **suspense** – when we read a literary text has its roots in a perceptual reaction to stimulus. We read and we see the words, but we also experience physiological responses when we are fully engaged in reading. We might get goose bumps, or our heart might start to race a little, or some of our muscles might tense up. Sometimes we might be moved to tears. Our brains translate those responses into emotions seamlessly, and what we generally notice is the emotional feeling, not the physical feeling.

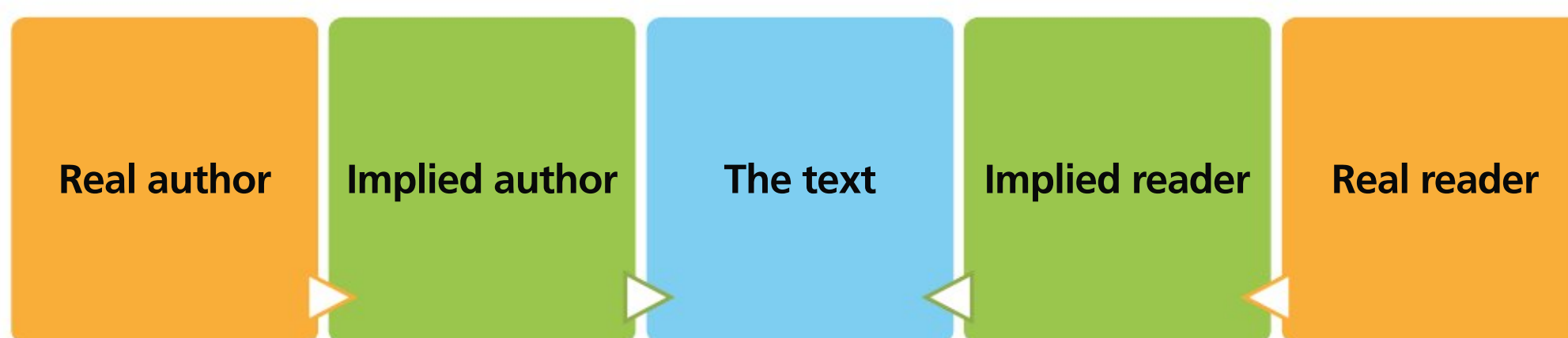
If you understand the nature of an aesthetic response, you also understand something significant about how sense perception and emotion work to help us make knowledge in the arts. Other ways of knowing are also involved in that process, so it would be wise not to think that you only use your senses and your emotions in interpreting a work of art, as we shall see.

How do we study literature?

Now that we see that literary works do not communicate directly, but rather through a series of implications, we can investigate the ways in which a reader can recognize and interpret those implications.

In a direct conversation, words and ideas are transferred directly from speaker to listener. Written communication, however, works through a medium. Writer and reader do not speak directly to each other, nor do they share the same space or even time. They are connected through the text. The writer writes the text with an idea in mind of a person who will read it. That ‘person’ is the ‘implied reader’. The reader reads the text and gets an idea of what kind of person wrote it. That ‘person’ is the ‘implied author’.

The implied author is a person who knows all the words in the text, who cares about all the ideas, who has the kind of imagination needed to create the text, who knows the history, literature, religion and culture needed to create the metaphors, symbols, imagery and so on. The **implied reader** of the text is someone who can perfectly understand all that the author intended; therefore, the implied reader is someone who knows all the words, history, literature, religion and culture implied by the text. He or she is someone who can understand all the nuances that the author intended. Neither the implied reader nor the implied author is a perfect representation of the real reader or author, however; they are ideal forms which the text suggests. The diagram of the communication, the reader–writer transaction, then, looks something like this:



Your job as the reader is to become as near as possible to the implied reader for that text. For any given text, you will start out lacking some of the knowledge, language or interpretive skills that the implied reader (the ideal reader of that text) would have. As you work on the text, you shape yourself more and more into that ideal reader. That means you may have to learn new words, look up cultural references or religious or historical allusions, and consciously wonder what any word or phrase might have buried in it. A lot of the joy of reading comes from engaging in the process, from being surprised and delighted by the way in which an author puts words together and by the way that he or she makes you understand the implications of objects, myths, religious stories or historical events in a way you had never considered before.

ACTIVITY 12

‘What is the German’s Fatherland?’ by Ernst Arndt

Now that you have almost finished this chapter, let’s review the key ideas in it and practise the several skills it introduced. Read the poem on the next page and answer the questions that follow. When you have finished, you can read the accompanying notes at the end of the book (page 418).

What is the German's fatherland?

What is the German's fatherland?
Is it Prussia, or the Swabian's land?
Is it where the grape glows on the Rhine?
Where sea-gulls skim the Baltic's brine?

5 Oh no! more grand
Must be the German's fatherland!

What is the German's fatherland?
Bavaria, or the Styrian's land?
Is it where the Master's cattle graze?

10 Is it the Mark where forges blaze?
Oh no! more grand
Must be the German's fatherland!

What is the German's fatherland?
Westphalia? Pomerania's strand?

15 Where the sand drifts along the shore?
Or where the Danube's surges roar?
Oh no! more grand
Must be the German's fatherland!

What is the German's fatherland?

20 Now name for me that mighty land!
Is it Switzerland? or Tyrols, tell;—
The land and people pleased me well!
Oh no! more grand
Must be the German's fatherland!

25 What is the German's fatherland?
Now name for me that mighty land!
Ah! Austria surely it must be,
So rich in fame and victory.

30 Oh no! more grand
Must be the German's fatherland!

What is the German's fatherland?
Tell me the name of that great land!
Is it the land which princely hate
Tore from the Emperor and the State?

35 Oh no! more grand
Must be the German's fatherland!

What is the German's fatherland?
Now name at last that mighty land!
'Where'er resounds the German tongue,

40 Where'er its hymns to God are sung!
That is the land,
Brave German, that thy fatherland!

That is the German's fatherland!
 Where binds like oak the clasped hand,
 45 Where truth shines clearly from the eyes,
 And in the heart affection lies.
 Be this the land,
 Brave German, this thy fatherland!

That is the German's fatherland!
 50 Where scorn shall foreign triflers brand,
 Where all are foes whose deeds offend,
 Where every noble soul's a friend:
 Be this the land,
 All Germany shall be the land!

55 All Germany that land shall be:
 Watch o'er it, God, and grant that we,
 With German hearts, in deed and thought,
 May love it truly as we ought.
 Be this the land,
 60 All Germany shall be the land!

(Ernst Arndt)

- 1 Consider the relationship of this poem to truth. Would you say this poem is fiction? Does it have a reliable narrator (that is, one who accurately reflects the author's thoughts, feelings, and values)? Use evidence from the poem to justify your answer.
- 2 Thinking about the concept of representation (which we explored on page 40 of this chapter), would you say that this poem is highly representative or not? Why or why not? Provide text to support your answer.
- 3 Review the definition of the field of inquiry of culture, identity and community from the introduction (page 17) and in the example we used in this chapter (page 26). What do you think Arndt's poem suggests about this field of inquiry? Can you develop a global issue relevant to that field of inquiry which would be reflected in this poem? Provide text to support your interpretation.
- 4 Identify two features of the poem which reveal the characteristics of the ideal reader of this text. Justify your choices. Did you find that you had difficulty in reading the poem because you do not match the ideal implied reader of this text? What things, if any, did you not know that made the text hard to read?
- 5 Finally, consider the text as a work of art. What features of this poem appeal to the aesthetic? Provide text to support your answers.

Ernst Moritz Arndt

Ernst Arndt was born in 1769 and educated as a clergyman. He rejected that calling at the age of 28, and began to travel instead. As a result of what he saw of the damage done by the French to German castles during several wars in the eighteenth century, he became embittered against the French and embarked on a long career of patriotic writing for his country, Germany (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). Much of his poetry is deeply patriotic-nationalistic in its promotion of Germany as a nation. He also wrote non-fiction, including an autobiography, and some of his poetry reflects his commitment to his religion.

Conclusion

We have seen that the process of interpreting a text involves a conscious and conscientious effort to discover what there is in the text, as well as what it means. As we noted at the beginning of the chapter, the IB English Literature course asks you to consider three different ways of doing this: the **immanent**, the **contextual**, and the **comparative**. The remainder of the section on **readers, writers and texts** will explore in detail the ways in which an individual reader can work on a text to discover the meaning on his or her own – the immanent approach to analysing literature that we mentioned in the introduction – without considering external factors such as the time period or the geographical place in which the text was written, and without comparing or contrasting it to other texts.

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1.2

How are we affected by literary texts in various ways?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To understand that texts provide us with insights into particular times and places
- ▶ To understand that texts provide us with insights into human nature
- ▶ To appreciate the beauty of language
- ▶ To appreciate the artist's craft
- ▶ To appreciate a writer's courage
- ▶ To understand that texts give us a way to connect to other human minds

Introduction

We study literature for the same reasons that we engage in the study of any art form: we are entertained, touched, made to think, and given a variety of insights. One simple reason for engaging with literature is to be entertained. As we saw in the excerpt from 'That Awful German Language' in Chapter 1.1 (page 43), literature can be very funny, and we are entertained by well-written humour. Entertainment, however, is never the sole function of literary texts. We read literature for the insight that it gives us into the world around us, for an appreciation of the power of language and imagination, and for a connection to other people (authors) who think in ways that resonate with us.

Insight into particular times and places

You will read in much greater detail about how literature affects us by giving us insight into particular times and places in the section on **Time and space** (page 177), so for now, we will just take a brief look at some examples.

The excerpt from 'The Widespread Enigma of Blue-Star Woman' (page 25) showed us something about what it was like to be an aging Native American woman in the time when white people were just beginning to force the tribes on to reservations and were controlling their lands. The excerpt from *Out of Africa* (page 46) gives us some insight into a place that most of us have probably never been – the foot of the Ngong Hills. It was also written about life in the 1920s, so even if we were to go there today, we would likely find it to be much changed.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

PERSPECTIVES

In each of the cases mentioned above, the particular insight we are capable of getting about a time and place different from ours is shaped by the perspective which portrays that time and place for us. In the case of 'Blue-Star Woman', the author was herself a Dakota Sioux who was educated in the white man's world and so had experiences, both positive and negative, of the way in which those two cultures interacted. This story is given to us through the eyes of two different Native American characters: Blue-Star Woman, whom we met in the excerpt, and an elderly Native American Chieftain, who appears later

in the story. Their version of events would be quite different from a version given to us by the white superintendents of the land or the government officials in Washington. In the case of Isak Dinesen's description of her farm in Kenya, her perspective is that of a person speaking of a place that she loved deeply and had to leave. She views the farm through a lens of nostalgia which helps her create the effect that she wants, focused entirely on the beauty of the place. We may have got a different version had she written about the farm while she was still living there, struggling to grow coffee. We will never know.

Other literary works can give us insight into places and times much nearer to ours. In *We Need New Names*, Zimbabwean writer NoViolet Bulawayo writes a twenty-first-century story about the immigrant's experience.

NoViolet Bulawayo

NoViolet Bulawayo is the pen name of Elizabeth Tshele. The first name means 'with Violet', and is a tribute to the author's mother, who died when Tshele was an infant. 'Bulawayo' is for her hometown (Smith). Bulawayo lived in Zimbabwe until she was 18 and then emigrated to the United States. She has recently revisited Bulawayo after more than a decade away, and was distressed to see the dramatic changes that have taken place. She cares about questions of **identity** and transformation and the way her personal experience has shaped her as a person. Her novel, *We Need New Names* (a significant choice of title given her renaming of herself) is the first by a Zimbabwean to be listed for the Man Booker Prize for the best original novel written in English and published in the United Kingdom (Smith).



In this excerpt from *We Need New Names*, the narrator, Darling, describes her transition from her home in Zimbabwe to her new place in America. The title of the chapter is 'Destroyedmichygen', a new name for Detroit, Michigan, which expresses the narrator's experience of it.

A few days before I left, Mother took me to Vodloza who made me smoke from a gourd, and I sneezed and sneezed and he smiled and said, The ancestors are your angels, they will bear you to America. Then he spilled tobacco on the earth and said to someone I could not see: Open the way for your wandering calf, you, Vusamazulu, pave the skies, summon your fathers, Mpabanga and Nqabayezwe and Mahlathini,
 5 and draw your mighty spears to clear the paths and protect the child from dark spirits on her journey. Deliver her well to that strange land where you and those before you never dreamed of setting foot.

Finally he tied a bone attached to a rainbow-colored string around my waist and said, This is your weapon, it will fight off all evil in that America, never ever take it off, you hear? But then when I got to America the airport dog barked and barked and sniffed me, and the woman in the uniform took me aside and waved
 10 the stick around me and the stick made a *nting-nting* sound and the woman said, Are you carrying any weapons? And I nodded and showed my weapon from Vodloza, and Aunt Fostalina said, What is this crap? and she took it off and threw it in a bin. Now I have no weapon to fight evil with in America.

With all this snow, with the sun not there, with the cold and dreariness, this place doesn't look like my America, doesn't even look real. It's like we are in a terrible story, like we're in the crazy parts of the Bible,
 15 there where God is busy punishing people for their sins and is making them miserable with all the weather. The sky, for example, has stayed white all this time I have been here, which tells you that something is not right. Even the stones know that a sky is supposed to be blue, like our sky back home, which is blue, so blue you can spray Clorox on it and wipe it with a paper towel and it wouldn't even come off.

(NoViolet Bulawayo 152–3)

This passage contains some elements which are probably quite foreign to most readers: the portrayal of the ceremony to call upon ancestors to serve as guardian angels on a journey and the gift of the bone weapon to fight off evil is the portrayal of a culture quite different from twenty-first-century Western technological civilization. Many readers, however, will be quite familiar with the experience of being searched at an airport, and seeing the process through Darling's eyes helps us to understand how strange it is to someone who has no idea about airline security policies. By seeing her lack of understanding, we can better empathize with her fear about having to face the evils of America without any weapon from home to aide her. The symbolism of the snow and the **allusion** to God's punishment in the Bible also help us to see this new world through Darling's eyes. Even if Zimbabwe is completely unfamiliar to us, we can understand the longing for home experienced by someone trapped in an environment which is completely alien to what they have always known.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

Bulawayo's novel investigates the impact of immigration on a child for whom the chance to move from a shanty town in Zimbabwe to the United States ought to be a positive thing, but who discovers that it is not so easy for immigrants to gain access to all of the advantages that America is supposed to offer. You would, of course, have to read the whole book

in order to develop a thesis about what Bulawayo has to say about the immigrant experience, but if you were studying this text, you might investigate the possibilities of what this novel has to say about the immigrant experience as a potential global issue for your individual oral related to the field of inquiry of culture, identity and community.

CAS Links: Immigration

Do some research into immigration in your area and find out how many immigrants come into your community and what they might need by way of assistance in settling into the community. Organize an event in which you raise funds to assist local immigrants, or organize a social event or a school presentation in which the native-born community can learn something about the immigrant experience in your town.

ACTIVITY 1

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams

Read the following letter written by Abigail Adams to her husband, John Adams, in 1776. John Adams was away fighting in the American Revolution. After you read the letter, answer the questions to consider what it can reveal to you about a time and place different from your own. Read the notes at the end of the book (page 419) and compare them to your own observations.

Braintree March 31, 1776

I wish you would ever write me a Letter half as long as I write you; and tell me if you may where your Fleet are gone? What sort of Defence Virginia can make against our common Enemy? Whether it is so situated as to make an able Defence?

5 Are not the Gentry Lords and the common people vassals, are they not like the uncivilized Natives Brittain represents us to be? I hope their Riffel Men who have shewen themselves very savage and even Blood thirsty; are not a specimen of the Generality of the people.

I [illegible] am willing to allow the Colony great merrit for having produced a Washington but they have been shamefully duped by a Dunmore.

10 I have sometimes been ready to think that the passion for Liberty cannot be Eaquelly Strong in the Breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow Creatures of theirs. Of this I am certain that it is not founded upon that generous and Christian principal of doing to others as we would that others should do unto us.

15 Do not you want to see Boston; I am fearfull of the small pox, or I should have been in before this time. I got Mr Crane to go to our House and see what state it was in. I find it has been occupied by one of the Doctors of a Regiment, very dirty, but no other damage has been done to it. The few things which were left in it are all gone. Cranch has the key which he never deliverd up. I have wrote to him for it and am determind to get it cleand as soon as possible and shut it up. I
20 look upon it a new acquisition of property, a property which one month ago I did not value at a single Shilling, and could with pleasure have seen it in flames.

The Town in General is left in a better state than we expected, more oweing to a percipitate flight than any Regard to the inhabitants, tho some individuals discoverd a sense of honour and justice and have left the rent of the Houses in which they were,
25 for the owners and the furniture unhurt, or if damaged sufficent to make it good.

Others have committed abominable Ravages. The Mansion House of your **President** is safe and the furniture unhurt while both the House and Furniture of the **Solisiter General** have fallen a prey to their own merciless party. Surely the very Fiends feel a Reverential awe for Virtue and patriotism, while they Detest the paricide and traitor.

30 I feel very differently at the approach of spring to what I did a month ago. We knew not then whether we could plant or sow with safety, whether when we had toild we could reap the fruits of our own industery, whether we could rest in our own Cottages, or whether we should not be driven from the sea coasts to seek shelter in the wilderness, but now we feel as if we might sit under our own vine and eat the good of the land.

35 I feel a gaieti de Coar to which before I was a stranger. I think the Sun looks brighter, the Birds sing more melodiously, and Nature puts on a more chearfull countenance. We feel a temporary peace, and the poor fugitives are returning to their deserted habitations.

Tho we felicitate ourselves, we sympathize with those who are trembling least the Lot of Boston should be theirs. But they cannot be in similar circumstances
40 unless pusilanimity and cowardise should take possession of them. They have time and warning given them to see the Evil and shun it. – I long to hear that you have declared an independency – and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do
45 not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determind to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit
50 of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in
55 immitation of the Supreem Being make use of that power only for our happiness.

(Abigail Adams)

- 1 Are there elements of this letter that you find surprising given the time period in which the letter was written? What are they and why are they surprising?
- 2 Identify the elements of daily life that Adams reveals in her letter. How does her life then differ from yours now?
- 3 How does Adams' plea to her husband to 'remember the ladies' resonate in a twenty-first-century world?

Abigail Adams

Abigail Adams was the wife of one American president and the mother of another. The Adamses are renowned for their extraordinarily strong marriage, which was tested by a great many circumstances, including the American war for independence from England. John Adams was an unusual man: he gained notoriety when, in 1770, he defended the British officers after the infamous Boston Massacre ('Abigail Adams Biography'). Adams felt that it was crucial for the young nation to show that it was not a land of tyranny and anarchy and that Americans operated under the rule of law ('Abigail Adams Biography'). Abigail supported her husband through this experience, and all others, including his presidency. The couple were often apart, as he travelled around for his professional obligations, and they produced a huge correspondence which reveals a great deal about their relationship and the time in which they lived. Abigail Adams was notable for her time in her forward thinking about the role that women could play in a self-governing nation.

Insight into human nature

Not all texts can, or are intended to, give us insight into particular times and places, however. Think of texts that are set in completely imaginary times or places long ago or well into the future. The effect on us as readers, in those cases, is something different altogether.

José Rivera

Puerto Rican born playwright José Rivera came to the United States with his family when he was five. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Rivera said that when he was a child he aspired to be a bus driver, because he wanted to do better than his father, a taxi driver, had been able to do (McElroy). After seeing a production of *Rumpelstiltskin* performed at his school, Rivera's career plans changed ('José Rivera'), and he is now the author of a dozen plays ('José Rivera Goodman Theatre'). Rivera has also turned to screenwriting, and his screenplay for *The Motorcycle Diaries*, a story about Ernest 'Che' Guevara and a motorcycle trip he took in his youth, was nominated for an Oscar, making Rivera the first Puerto Rican to be so nominated ('José Rivera'). Rivera's work in **magical realism** stems from his time studying with Gabriel García Márquez at the Sundance Institute (McElroy).



Consider this excerpt from Puerto Rican playwright José Rivera's play *Marisol*, a play which uses magical realism and features an angel as an important character.

ANGEL Now the bad news.

(The Angel goes to the window. She's silent a moment as she contemplates the devastated Bronx landscape.)

MARISOL (Worried) What?

5 (The Angel finds it very hard to tell Marisol what's on her mind.)

ANGEL I can't expect you to understand the political ins and outs of what's going on. But you have eyes. You asked me questions about children and water and the moon: the same questions I've been asking myself for a thousand years.

(We hear distant explosions. Marisol's body responds with a jerk.)

10 MARISOL (Quiet) What's that noise?

ANGEL The universal body is sick, Marisol. Constellations are wasting away, the nauseous stars are full of blisters and sores, the infected earth is running a temperature, and everywhere the universal mind is wracked with amnesia, boredom, and neurotic obsessions.

MARISOL (Frightened) Why?

15 ANGEL Because God is old and dying and taking the rest of us with Him. And for too long, much too long, I've been looking the other way. Trying to stop the massive hemorrhage with my little hands. With my prayers. But it didn't work and I knew if I didn't do something soon, it would be too late.

MARISOL (Frightened) What did you do?

20 ANGEL I called a meeting. And I urged the Heavenly Heirarchies – the Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Archangels and Angels – to vote to stop the universal ruin ... by slaughtering our senile God. And they did. Listen well, Marisol: Angels are going to kill the King of Heaven and restore the vitality of the universe with His blood. And I'm going to lead them.

25 (Marisol takes this in silently – then suddenly erupts – her body shaking with fear and energy.)

MARISOL Okay, I wanna wake up now!

ANGEL There's going to be a war. A revolution of Angels.

MARISOL GOD IS GREAT! GOD IS GOOD! THANK YOU FOR OUR NEIGHBORHOOD!

ANGEL Soon we're going to send out spies, draft able-bodied celestial beings, raise taxes ...

30 MARISOL THANK YOU GOD FOR THE BIRDS THAT SING! THANK YOU GOD FOR EVERYTHING!

ANGEL Soon we're going to take off our wings of peace, Marisol, and put on our wings of war. Then we're going to spread blood and vigor across the sky and reawaken the dwindling stars!

(José Rivera 15–16)

We can see how this extract is not very representational. Clearly angels do not walk the streets of New York City, nor has there ever been (or do we expect there to be) a revolution in heaven which spills over on Earth and causes the apocalypse. The events imagined for this play make it fantastic, rather than realistic, so we aren't going to gain insight into a particular time or place from the plot or setting. Instead, we are being asked to explore truths about human nature, truths about religious faith, about what kind of characteristics it takes to survive in difficult – even extraordinary – circumstances, and truths about what it means to be a good person.

It is worth noting, however, that we might still gain some insight into present-day culture through seeing and reading a play such as *Marisol*. The events are not realistic, but they can be seen as symbolic. This passage suggests that Rivera might be making a satire on warfare as waged by humans right here on Earth. He might also be making a comment about changing religious values in a modern era in which mankind has developed weapons of mass destruction and in which we could see the effects of climate change not too far in the future. Faced with evil injustices on Earth, some people question the relevance of the traditional vision of God. That challenge to long-standing values might be seen as a kind of revolution in heaven, and the play can give us insight into why some people might feel that way.

ACTIVITY 2

Discussion

Think about the concept of communication. How might this play pose difficulties for some readers or viewers due to the religious content? Even in the extract, we see that Marisol is shocked by the Angel and makes a strong effort to deny his words. What do you think Rivera might be asking of readers in terms of their ability to communicate with him?

EE Links: Literary investigation

Rivera's play could be the subject of an extended essay with the focus of investigation being absurdism. 'How does José Rivera use absurdist elements to create meaning in his play *Marisol*?' could be a potential research question.

TOK Links: The nature of faith as a means of underpinning knowledge

One of the topics you might study in Theory of Knowledge is religious knowledge. Religious knowledge relies on authority and tradition, and people sustain their religious faith on the belief that the nature of the supernatural world is what it has always been said to be. We see in this excerpt from *Marisol* that Marisol is driven to defend her faith – by reciting some of the doctrines that she has been taught – when the Angel presents her with a version of heaven that contrasts dramatically with what Marisol has been accustomed to believing. A good TOK question arising from this excerpt is the question of whether faith alone is sufficient to sustain belief when that faith is challenged by evidence from direct experience.

One reason that some literary works survive and thrive for hundreds of years is that they portray universal human experiences and characteristics. William Shakespeare is widely considered to be the greatest writer in the English language, and he wrote at the turn of the seventeenth century, 400 years ago. Many of his plays were not a whole lot more realistic than *Marisol* is. Consider the compressed relationship between Romeo and Juliet who meet, marry, and die all in less than four days, or the mad jealousy of King Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, who in a single, unprovoked moment decides that his pregnant wife has been unfaithful and that the baby is that of Leontes' oldest friend. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, we have a woman, Helena, who is content to marry

a man who quite openly hates her! Some of Shakespeare's plays also involve straightforward magical elements: in *The Tempest*, Prospero is a magician and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, spells are cast causing humans to turn into part-animals and people to fall in love with the next creature they see, whether human or animal. Many of Shakespeare's plays, then, do not consist of the kind of realism that might give us insight into a particular time and place – most are not set in his own time period, for example. Rather, watching and reading Shakespeare's work is gratifying because in doing so we see that people have held the same kinds of values, experienced the same kinds of feelings, and exhibited the same kinds of character flaws for hundreds of years.

Often, we get our insights about human nature through examining a character who is far from admirable. Flannery O'Connor was an American writer living in and writing about the Deep South in the mid-twentieth century. Much of her **fiction** focuses on ignorance and on its resulting bigotry.

Flannery O'Connor

Flannery O'Connor was born in 1925 in Georgia, where she would spend most of her life. She began her writing career in college, where she was known as a cartoonist, but also published some essays, short stories, and poems (Gordon). She travelled to Iowa for graduate school where she earned a master's degree from the now-famous Iowa writer's program, and where she met people who would be influential on her career for the rest of her relatively short life. She died, at age 39, of the same disease that had killed her father 24 years earlier (Gordon). Her literary career was marked by numerous awards, and she is renowned for writing fiction that reflects her deep commitment to her religion and the belief that mankind is inherently flawed and in need of redemption (Gordon).



SENSITIVE CONTENT

Caution: this extract includes sensitive content and dehumanizing language. The author includes the word 'nigger' to illustrate the society she writes about. We have chosen to let the word remain as it originally appeared, so you can consider for yourself the dehumanizing power of this term and how O'Connor has used it to describe her fellow human beings. This is central to understanding the themes of identity and human behaviour at the heart of this short story. Furthermore, the IB recommends that your studies in Language A: Literature should challenge you intellectually, personally and culturally, and expose you to sensitive and mature topics. We invite you to reflect critically on the various perspectives offered while bearing in mind the IB's commitment to international-mindedness and intercultural respect.

One of O'Connor's stories, 'Revelation', published shortly after her death in 1964, gives us a character named Mrs Turpin who believes herself to be one of God's chosen people, and who is assured in her own mind that all of her actions, attitudes and beliefs carry with them God's approval and blessing. When she encounters a young woman who, in response to Mrs Turpin's self-important judgments of other people, throws a book at her and calls her a 'warthog from hell', Mrs Turpin is forced to see herself for at least a moment as some other people see her. In the following extract, we get a feeling for her quite un-Christian attitude towards others:

Next to the ugly girl was the child, still in exactly the same position, and next to him was a thin leathery old woman in a cotton print dress. She and Claud had three sacks of chicken feed in their pump house that was in the same print. She had seen from the first that the child belonged with the old woman. She could tell by the way they sat – kind of vacant and white-trashy, as if they would sit there until Doomsday
 5 if nobody called and told them to get up. And at right angles but next to the well-dressed pleasant lady was a lank-faced woman who was certainly the child's mother. She had on a yellow sweatshirt and wine-colored slacks, both gritty-looking, and the rims of her lips were stained with snuff. Her dirty yellow hair was tied behind with a little piece of red paper ribbon. Worse than niggers any day, Mrs Turpin thought.

The gospel hymn playing was, 'When I looked up and He looked down', and Mrs Turpin, who knew it,
 10 supplied the last line mentally, 'And wona these days I know I'll we-eara crown'.

Without appearing to, Mrs Turpin always noticed people's feet. The well-dressed lady had on red and grey suede shoes to match her dress. Mrs Turpin had on her good black patent-leather pumps. The ugly girl had on Girl Scout shoes and heavy socks. The old woman had on tennis shoes and the white-trashy mother had on what appeared to be bedroom slippers, black straw with gold braid threaded through
 15 them – exactly what you would have expected her to have on.

Sometimes at night when she couldn't go to sleep, Mrs Turpin would occupy herself with the question of who she would have chosen to be if she couldn't have been herself. If Jesus had said to her before he made her, 'There's only two places available for you. You can either be a nigger or white trash,' what would she have said? 'Please, Jesus, please,' she would have said, 'Just let me wait until there's another
 20 place available,' and he would have said, 'No, you have to go right now, and I have only those two places so make up your mind.' She would have wiggled and squirmed and begged and pleaded but it would have been no use and finally she would have said, 'All right, make me a nigger then – but that don't mean a trashy one.' And he would have made her a near clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black.

(Flannery O'Connor 194–195)

In this story, the narrative **perspective** is third person; however, it is focused on giving us the world as Mrs Turpin sees it. The effect of that perspective is that we are privy to Mrs Turpin's thoughts, which show her to feel herself superior to those around her. Mrs Turpin is both judgmental and a bigot, and she reveals this through her thoughts about the other people around her. We see in the first paragraph that Mrs Turpin judges all the other people in the room to be inferior to her, calling them, in her own mind, 'ugly', 'white-trashy', 'lank-faced', and 'dirty'. In the very next paragraph, however, we see Mrs Turpin singing along with the gospel hymn, evidently smugly reassuring herself that one day she will wear the crown of Jesus' blessing. The effect of the **juxtaposition** is highly ironic, as we can see from knowing her thoughts that Mrs Turpin is not a person who lives by the principles of Christianity. The author also spelled out the words of the hymn the way that Mrs Turpin pronounces them, and we can see that her English is not the English of the upper classes. Others listening to Mrs Turpin might be inclined to judge her, on the basis of her language, in similar ways to how she judges others.

In the final two paragraphs of the excerpt, we see Mrs Turpin comparing herself to other people and establishing hierarchies of people which she would be at the top of. O'Connor is making a powerful point about humankind's capacity for hypocrisy and self-delusion.

● TOK Links: Taboo words and the ethics of art

Language both helps us communicate and reveals us for what kinds of people we are. We have seen how O'Connor called upon prejudices about language use to help create a character who is not well educated or classy. She has also put into Mrs Turpin's mouth language that is taboo, but which we strongly suspect Mrs Turpin does not know she should not use.

Nowadays, the 'n-word' is taboo to use. The word is so taboo, in fact, that in most cases, if someone needs to talk about the word, he or she will say 'the n-word' instead of using the full word. The taboo is so strong that the reaction to the 'n-word' can cause some people to forget the context, which is how we often judge the use of words.

O'Connor has chosen to use the 'n-word' numerous times. In every case it is spoken by someone who is particularly self-satisfied and superior – none appreciates that it is offensive to the people to whom they apply it. The story was published in 1965, just after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. That Act ended public segregation and made it illegal for employers to discriminate on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex, or national origin. The white people in the story complain in a number of places about how different things are now and how people of colour have new ideas about 'their place in the world'. O'Connor chose to use the 'n-word' as a means of illustrating character. You could argue that O'Connor, as the author of this story, is using this taboo word to show the failure of the main character – and the other characters in the story – to live up to basic principles of humanity. What do you think? You might consider whether a white author writing today, over 50 years after 'Revelation' was originally published, could use the word at all.

Ethics

In recent years, some publishers have begun expunging this particular taboo word from texts, even in cases in which the use was – as in 'Revelation' – intended to reveal the ignorance and bigotry of a particular character. In 2011, Alan Gribben, a professor of English at Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama (a Deep South state), created an edition of *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain which replaced the 'n-word' with 'slave' (Kakutani). Clearly those two words do not share the same **connotation** and so, just as clearly, Twain's

intention is significantly undermined in that edition. Here is a case in which ethical value systems clash. To make knowledge ethically in the arts, or in any area of knowledge, the processes have to be true to the aims of that area of knowledge. To alter an artist's work, therefore, violates the significant aim of the arts which we discussed on page 48: it hijacks the personal world view of the artist.

Another ethical constraint on people trying to make knowledge, however, is societal values. There are many experiments that natural or human scientists cannot run, simply because to do so would violate more general human ethical codes. In the case of the Gribben edition of *Huckleberry Finn*, we appear to have a clash between two ethical systems: the ethics of making knowledge in art and the ethics of society. One can argue, however, that the censorship of works such as *Huckleberry Finn* misses the point entirely. One high school teacher wrote a column in *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* in which he argued that books such as *Huckleberry Finn*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men* ought to be removed from high school curricula:

The time has arrived to update the literature we use in high school classrooms. Barack Obama is president-elect of the United States, and novels that use the 'N-word' repeatedly need to go.

(Foley)

Such a position seems to ignore the argument that the authors of those works were putting this particular slur in the mouths of characters that they most probably expected their readers to recognize as ignorant, unkind, or downright cruel. You could argue they used the term precisely to reveal its ugliness. The **bowdlerization*** of *Huckleberry Finn* reveals one difficulty in knowledge-making: how to reconcile conflicting ethical systems without undermining the purpose of art.

***Bowdlerize** is a verb that takes its name from Thomas Bowdler, an eighteenth-century doctor who became famous for editing out of Shakespeare's works anything he found to be offensive (King). Over time, his name has become synonymous with the defacing of literature based on personal values. The term 'bowdlerize' has a negative connotation; it suggests that the person saying it disapproves of what has been done.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

COMMUNICATION

The problem with the use or banning of taboo language from works of literature gets right to the heart of the concept of communication via literature. As the IB curriculum guide says, 'The concept of communication revolves around the question of the relationship that is established between a writer and a reader by means of a text.' We do not communicate directly with the author; we must figure out the author's intentions by reading and interpreting the text. All interpretations of text necessarily rest on an unacknowledged assumption: the author is a reasonable, moral, intelligent person. Authors count on our making that assumption

when they write about characters who are immoral, foolish, or wicked. When we read a text such as 'Revelation' or *Huckleberry Finn*, then, the author assumes that we will understand that it is the character, not the author, who holds the bigoted view of the world and is ignorant or cruel. If we do not recognize the indirectness of the mechanism of communication through a text, we run the risk of misunderstanding the author's intention altogether and ascribing to him or her the undesirable character traits that he or she has given to the characters in order to make a point.

ACTIVITY 3

'The Amen Stone' by Yehuda Amichai

Poetry too can give us insight into human nature. In the following poem, Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai, gives us a description of a piece of a gravestone and thinks about what it represents in terms of our memory of the person to whom it belonged. Read the poem and then answer the following questions. There are notes about the activity at the end of the book (page 419).

The Amen Stone

On my desk there is a stone with the word 'Amen' on it,
 a triangular fragment of stone from a Jewish graveyard destroyed
 many generations ago. The other fragments, hundreds upon hundreds,
 were scattered helter-skelter, and a great yearning,
 5 a longing without end, fills them all:
 first name in search of family name, date of death seeks
 dead man's birthplace, son's name wishes to locate
 name of father, date of birth seeks reunion with soul
 that wishes to rest in peace. And until they have found
 10 one another, they will not find a perfect rest.
 Only this stone lies calmly on my desk and says 'Amen'.
 But now the fragments are gathered up in loving kindness
 by a sad good man. He cleanses them of every blemish,
 photographs them one by one, arranges them on the floor
 15 in the great hall, makes each gravestone whole again,
 one again: fragment to fragment,
 like the resurrection of the dead, a mosaic,
 a jigsaw puzzle. Child's play.

(Yehuda Amichai)

Consider that Amichai lived in Israel and fought with the Israeli Defence Forces in 1948 ('Yehuda Amichai'). The poem was published in 2000 but is about a Jewish gravestone that was 'destroyed many generations ago' (lines 2–3).

- 1 What insights does this poem give you into the time and place in which it was written?
- 2 What insights does this poem give you into human nature?

Yehuda Amichai

Yehuda Amichai was born in Germany in 1924, but moved with his family to Palestine in 1936. Over the course of his lifetime, he served as a soldier in the British army, and as a guerrilla fighter against the British in the dispute over the formation of Israel (The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica). He later fought with the Israeli Defence Forces ('Yehuda Amichai'). He wrote in Hebrew, but his work has been translated into more than 40 languages. Much of his writing focused on his Jewish faith, his commitment to Israel, and the nature of war, all derived from his personal experiences. He once said in an interview that all poetry is political: 'This is because real poems deal with a human response to reality, and politics is part of reality, history in the making,' he said. 'Even if a poet writes about sitting in a glass house drinking tea, it reflects politics' ('Yehuda Amichai').

CONCEPT CONNECTION

COMMUNICATION

Poets intend to communicate with readers just as all other authors do. Successful communication depends on the reader's ability to understand all the nuances of the words and images and other literary devices that the author has employed. In the case of a work such as this, which you read in translation, communication becomes significantly more difficult. Amichai's native language was German, but he was fluent in Hebrew and wrote in Hebrew ('Yehuda Amichai'). This poem was translated into English by poet Chana Bloch, who wrote her own poetry in English (Bloch). As you work at trying to understand what Amichai was trying to communicate, then, you are at a disadvantage, because no work ever translates perfectly into another language. Amichai's work has been translated into 40 languages, but translator Robert Alter has claimed that Amichai's poetry is much more complex in the original Hebrew than it is in any translation ('Yehuda Amichai'). Alter describes the problem this way:

Perhaps the most subtle manifestation of the indigenously Hebrew character of Amichai's style [is] its frequent shifts in levels of diction. These are usually invisible in translation because the scale of diction operates rather differently in English, having more to do with social hierarchies and less to do with the historical stratification of the language.

(Robert Alter)

Alter makes an important point about the way that readers who must read a work in a language other than the one in which it was written are necessarily at a disadvantage because they miss so much that is implied, but not stated. In the case of Amichai's work, what Alter suggests we miss if we read the work in English is a complex reflection of the historical significance of certain vocabulary. Readers of Hebrew would be aware of the history of words which have changed over time, and the choice that Amichai makes of which version of the word he uses conveys something to those readers. Alter gives the example of Amichai's choice of an archaic form of the word 'where'. Alter says that any Hebrew reader would recognize the form he chose, from several options, as being a poetic form from biblical language, and so would recognize the usage as introducing a heightened style from history. In English, we have only one version of the word 'where', and so Amichai's original meaning is lost.

Whenever you are reading something in translation, you must recognize that you are missing something of an author's intentions, and it is worth your while, whenever possible, to seek out information about the original version.

So far in this chapter, we have seen that works of literature affect us in ways that have to do with increasing our understanding of others and of human nature, and by increasing our ability to empathize by giving us a chance to experience events indirectly, through the lives of others. Another effect of literary texts has to do with our appreciation of the skill that creating a work of art entails.

ACTIVITY 4

Check for understanding

What are three examples of the ways in which literature can help us appreciate other people's view of the world? Think of another work, not discussed here, which can help readers empathize with people who have a different viewpoint.

Appreciation of literature as art

As we saw in Chapter 1.1, art appeals to the **aesthetic**. While our sense of the aesthetically compelling is not the same thing as an emotional reaction (see pages 46–9), very often our reaction to something which is aesthetically powerful takes the shape of an emotional response – especially when the art is aesthetically pleasing. In this section, we will look at the ways in which literature affects readers by activating an emotional response.

Appreciation of the beauty of language

One of the most obvious ways in which literature reveals itself as an art form is through the power and eloquence of the language the author uses. Beautiful language stirs an aesthetic and then an emotional response in the listener or reader.

We might be most familiar with the idea that one of the author's goals is to create beautiful language in the realm of poetry. Not all poetry is beautiful, of course; some is deliberately jarring or upsetting, depending on what the poet wishes to accomplish. Allen Ginsberg's very famous poem 'Howl', for example, offended so many people when it was first published that copies were seized by US customs officials on entering the country (it was printed in London) and a bookseller, poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, was arrested and tried for selling obscene materials (Kaplan). In the former case, the US Attorney General declined to prosecute, and in the latter, Ferlinghetti was found not guilty on the grounds that the work had social value (Kaplan). You can listen to a recording of Allen Ginsberg's first public reading of the poem via the QR code provided. A lot of poetry, however, does give us beautiful language, either because of the content and images or the sound of the lines, or both.

In the following example, the final stanza of 'Fern Hill' by Dylan Thomas, we get both. Thomas' poem is a deeply nostalgic reminiscence of a childhood in which all the days seemed to the speaker to be long and happy. In this final stanza, the speaker comments on his regret over the fact that when he was young, he did not realize that he would inevitably grow up, and that his experience of life as a kind of carefree Eden would come to an end, never to be experienced again.



Fern Hill

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me
 Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,
 In the moon that is always rising,
 Nor that riding to sleep
 5 I should hear him fly with the high fields
 And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.
 Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
 Time held me green and dying
 Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

(Dylan Thomas)

The first six lines of this stanza give us the speaker's retrospective realization that time took him away from the sunlight of his childhood into a darker place. The last three lines, however, may be some of the most beautiful in the English language. The rhythm is like that of the sea which the speaker mentions, and the lyrical sounds of the soft consonants make the end of the stanza sound like a lullaby. The regret and the nostalgia are depicted in equal parts, so that we are left at the end of the poem with a powerful sense of both wonder and loss.

Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas was born in Wales in 1914. He began writing poetry early, and his first book of poetry was published when he was only 20 (Poetry Foundation). One attitude which characterizes Thomas' approach to poetry is his love of words: 'Like James Joyce before him, Dylan Thomas was obsessed with words – with their sound and rhythm and especially with their possibilities for multiple meanings' (Poetry Foundation). Although his poetry was published to much acclaim early in his career, Thomas struggled throughout his life with drink and poverty (Johnson, 'The Life of Dylan Thomas'). His marriage, though it lasted until his death, was always contentious. Later in his life and after his death at the age of 39, Thomas' drinking and bad behaviour became so well-known that it coloured the way that people saw his poetry (Poetry Foundation). Nowadays, however, he is viewed as one of the finest poets to come out of the United Kingdom.

Poetry is not the only literary form, however, that can provide us with beautiful language. In Chapter 1.1 (page 46), we looked at Isak Dinesen's passage from *Out of Africa* in the context of exploring how language makes some **non-fiction** writing literary. At that time, we focused on a variety of literary techniques, included the detailed description which reveals the narrator as a careful and close observer and which also reveals her attachment to the place about which she is writing. We did not consider, at that time, the beauty of the language which, like Thomas' poem, also evokes a strong sense of nostalgia. In the passage from *Out of Africa*, Dinesen has used **meter** to great effect. We usually think of meter as being an important element of poetry, but it can function equally strongly and purposefully in **prose**. Try reading the opening sentences from Dinesen's description out loud. The bold-faced syllables emphasize the patterns of stresses that occur in the passage. You will hear the rhythmic nature of the sentences. Similar to the way that Thomas used stresses in 'Fern Hill', Dinesen uses them here to make her language musical, like a lullaby, especially in the final sentence:

I had a **farm** in **Africa** at the **foot** of the **Ngong Hills**. The **Equator runs across** these **highlands**, a **hundred miles** to the **North**, and the **farm lay** at an **altitude** of **over six thousand feet**. In the **day**-time you **felt** that you had got **high up, near** to the **sun**, but the **early mornings** and **evenings** were **limpid** and **restful**, and the **nights** were **cold**.

(Isak Dinesen 3)

The musical nature of the prose makes it sound beautiful to the reader who listens to the sounds of the words. The gentle musical rhythm carries with it the sense of nostalgia. We may never have been to Africa – and we may never go – but we can relate to the love that the author has for this place, and so we are moved by her feelings about her farm at the foot of the Ngong Hills. In Chapter 1.4, we will explore in detail the ways in which writers use language to create meaning in various literary forms.

ACTIVITY 5

Check for understanding

What features of language do you think help to make it beautiful? Can you think of songs or poems that you find emotionally powerful? What makes them so moving?

Admiration of the author's courage

One important influence on works of literature is an author's desire to help change the world for the better, by shining a light on things that are wrong. This can require a great deal of courage when the wrong in question runs deeply through a culture, and people are reluctant to look at it closely for fear that it will make them look at themselves and see something they don't like. One example of a book that made a sharp and painful criticism of the society from which it came is F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. That novel revealed a kind of greed and selfishness that was rampant among the wealthy people of Europe and America in the early 1920s, and the book, which Fitzgerald felt was his great masterpiece, failed to sell in its day. There were copies left in the warehouse from the original printing when Fitzgerald died in 1940 (Fresh Air). It was only 25 years later that critics began praising the novel and its author (Lucey). We might surmise that by then the reading public was made up of people who could appreciate the honesty with which Fitzgerald portrayed a certain segment of society and the courage with which he called for a higher standard of behaviour.

That kind of courage is common among artists of all sorts, including writers. The example of Allen Ginsberg mentioned on page 67 is that of someone who challenged societal values to such an extent that it led to arrests. We saw earlier in this chapter Flannery O'Connor's honest portrayal of the racism that was common in her part of the country in the first years following the passage of civil rights legislation. Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, famously created a heroic figure in Atticus Finch, a white lawyer who defends a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. The portrayal condemns the kind of gross miscarriage of justice in the treatment of anyone who is not white that prevailed in the United States during the time of its publication.

In South Africa, long-standing bigotry and the policy of apartheid, which lasted 50 years, created equally deep and damaging problems. Athol Fugard, a playwright born in South Africa, challenged the policy in his work, first in *Blood Brothers* and later in *'Master Harold'... and the boys*. By examining the consequences of racism on a personal level, both plays depict some of the tragedies that apartheid caused. In *'Master Harold'... and the boys*, the heroic figure is Sam Samela, a black servant to a white family. Sam emerges as a truly magnificent human being who manages to rise above the kind of hatred engendered by apartheid, and who nonetheless suffers for his trouble. Readers and viewers of the play are asked to look at their own levels of courage for standing up for what is right against what is socially acceptable, and Fugard accomplishes this by commanding our empathy and admiration for Sam. Stories like these – which require the author's courage – are the depictions of human behaviour that have the capacity to inspire people to do better. These are the stories that have the power to change the world. In such a way does literature affect us.

ACTIVITY 6

Discussion

Think about works that you have read which have seemed to you to require the author to be courageous. What are those works? Why did the writing of them require courage? Do you think that art has the power to change people's minds about important ideas?

■ The power of the direct appeal

One final way that authors use language to influence readers' emotional reactions is by writing a piece that reflects a deeply passionate **perspective** on a subject through a direct appeal to the reader or listener. There are famous examples of this kind of writing that you will not study in your literature class: Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech, for example, or King George VI's speech upon England's entry into the Second World War, or the letter that Private Sullivan Ballou wrote to his wife on the eve of his first battle in the American Civil War to tell her why he felt so strongly that he had to help fight, despite his deep love for her. All of these texts are moving in large part because the authors or speakers are so obviously deeply committed to what they are saying and they believe that what they are saying is something that matters in the course of their lives. The approach is directly from the speaker to the audience with no persona or character making the communication indirect. The fact that there is no mediating speaker is one of the reasons you will not study this kind of text in your literature course.

We do, however, see the same kind of powerful appeal in literary works. The following example is from *The Merchant of Venice*. One main storyline in the play is the story of Antonio, who borrows money from Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. According to the contract they agreed on, should Antonio be unable to pay back the money, he will owe Shylock a pound of flesh. As it happens, Antonio cannot pay back the money, and the day comes when the parties all report to the court where Antonio is to pay the forfeit he owes. A woman named Portia appears in disguise as a lawyer and she makes this speech as a plea to Shylock to let Antonio out of the agreement.



■ Martin Luther King Jr.

PORTIA, as Balthazar

The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
5 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
10 But mercy is above this sceptered sway.
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings;
It is an attribute to God Himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
15 Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

(The Merchant of Venice Act 4 Scene 1, lines 190–208)

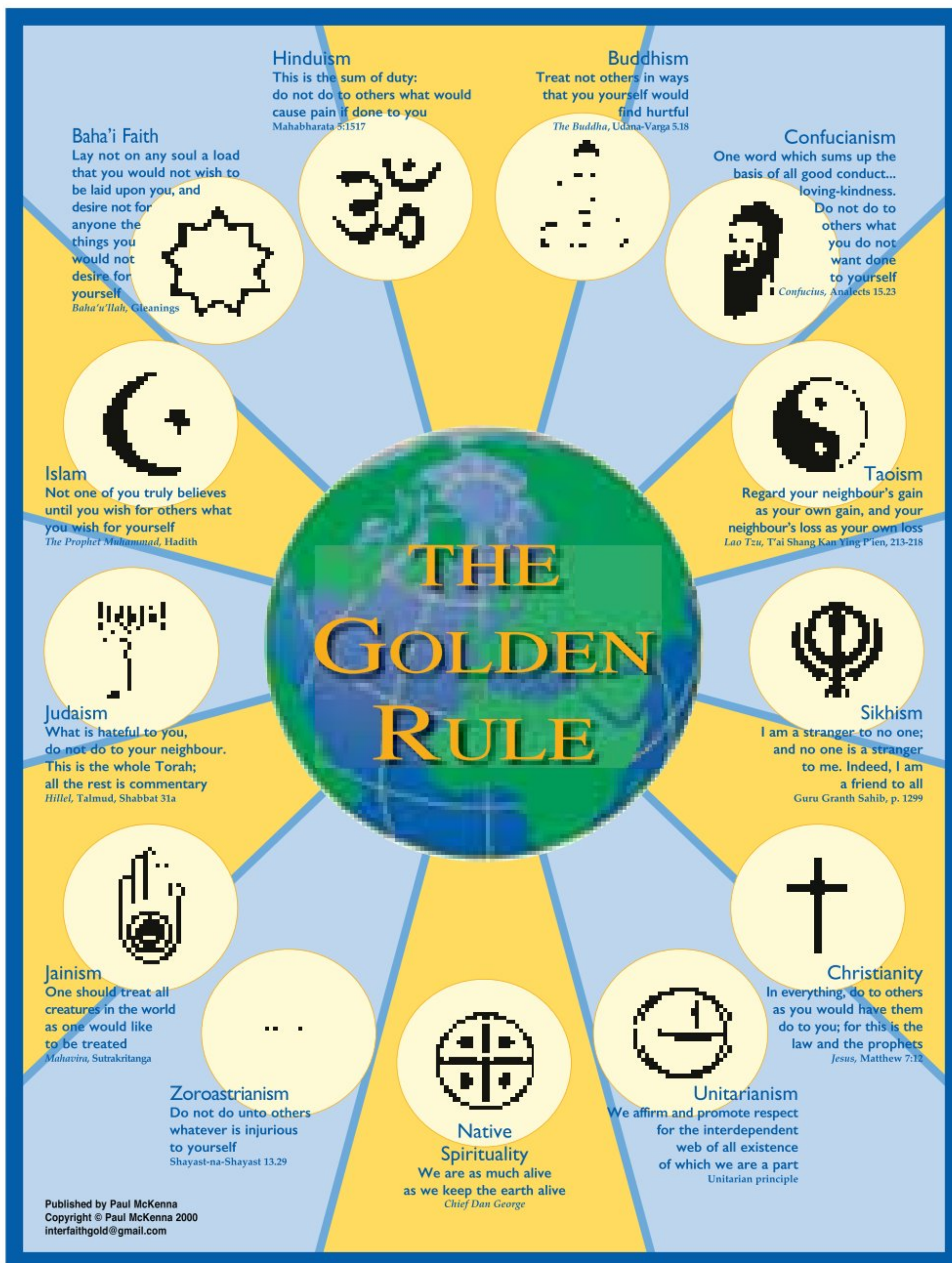
The speech is among the most famous of Shakespeare's **monologues** and **soliloquys**. The passionate call for mercy is made directly to Shylock (Portia, of course, has no knowledge of any play or any audience reading or watching the play), but through Portia's appeal to Shylock, Shakespeare speaks to all of us and reminds us of one of the foundational principles of Christianity: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. This principle, in fact, appears in one form or another in virtually every known religion.

The fame of this speech, then, arises from the fact that it speaks to so many people about important matters which appeal to readers' empathy, and it does so in beautiful, eloquent language. The image of the rain is a powerful one suggesting that mercy spreads far, and the reminder that everyone, including kings, is called upon to show mercy reminds us of our common humanity.

ACTIVITY 7

Discussion

Do the ideals expressed in this speech seem familiar to you? Why or why not? How can a speech such as this one help readers to see themselves as part of a long history of human beliefs and values?



■ The 'golden rule' of religion

CONCEPT CONNECTION

COMMUNICATION

The speech in the context of the play is actually quite ironic, as Portia shows herself to be merciless to Shylock just a few lines later, but Portia's hypocrisy only highlights the power of Shakespeare's writing, because we are struck more strongly by the truth of the speech when we see her failing to live up to it. This monologue on the quality of mercy, therefore, provides us with an excellent example of how readers communicate with authors through the text.

We are led to be impressed by Portia's values when we hear the words she delivers so passionately, and then our admiration of her is almost immediately undermined. But when we see Portia fail to live up to our expectations, we don't then jettison the speech altogether: we realize that Shakespeare is showing us what should be, and it is Portia, not he, who fails to live up to that standard.

ACTIVITY 8

You and your reading

Think back on the reading you have done. Can you think of some works that are memorable to you personally because of the power of the language, either in whole or in part? Recall some sentences or phrases that struck you powerfully, either because you were moved in some way or because you admired the writer's skill or passion.

ACTIVITY 9

'Dulce et Decorum Est' by Wilfred Owen

Read the following poem and then answer the questions that follow. The Latin phrase at the end of the poem is an **allusion** to Horace and translates to: 'Sweet and fitting it is to die for one's country' (Owen, Poetry Foundation). You will find suggested answers at the end of the book (page 419).

Dulce et Decorum Est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

5 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

10 Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
15 In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
20 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
25 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

(Wilfred Owen)

- 1 Give an example of a powerful use of language from the text and explain why it is powerful.
- 2 Find an example of the poet using his craft masterfully and explain how he has done so.
- 3 What social commentary does this poem make? What is the poet's passion?
- 4 This speaker makes a direct appeal to someone – the 'you' of line 25. Who might that person be in the world of the speaker?

CAS Links: Civic action inspired by literature

After reading a work which functions as social commentary, you could create a CAS project to help address the problem that the literature highlighted. After reading Owen's poem, for example, you could decide to raise money for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. It is by inspiring people to take action that the arts, including literature, can be a driving force for change in the world.

Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter some of the many ways in which literature has the power to affect readers. We cannot possibly identify them all, as the ways that a text can affect a reader are as varied as the number of readers who might read it. What we have tried to do here is to highlight some of the common reasons that we find literature affecting and, we hope, to help you to remember texts that have affected you in meaningful ways.

Later in this book, we will explore the ways in which literature, like all art, can have significant effects on events in the real world. In this chapter, however, we have investigated the ways in which literature affects individuals personally. This is very much a matter of the **immanent** approach to the study of literature, focusing as it does on our individual interactions with literary texts.

Perhaps the greatest effect a work of literature can have on an individual reader is that it allows for connection with another human mind, whether of our time or another. A great work of literature helps us to discover the identity of an author. This might reveal that author to be one who sees the world the same way that we do, or one who challenges us in ways that we hadn't thought before, but which we recognize as being true. Such a connection helps us to recognize how, despite changes that do occur over time, we share a deep thread of commonality over barriers of time and place – we are not alone in our experiences.

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1.3

How does language use vary among literary forms?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To recognize that poetry, fiction and literary non-fiction use language as a means of creating art
- ▶ To appreciate how poetry uses language to distinguish the speaker and any characters
- ▶ To recognize that narrative fiction uses language primarily for characterization
- ▶ To appreciate that narrative fiction, like poetry, uses language for artistic purposes
- ▶ To recognize that literary non-fiction uses language in the same ways that fiction does
- ▶ To understand that drama uses language in place of narration to deliver plot and characterization

Introduction

Literature is an art form for which the tool of construction is words. Where other artists can use a wide variety of materials – painters can use oil paint, watercolours or acrylic, for example – writers all work using the same tool. They can, however, mould the material into quite distinct styles which function almost as different materials. In Chapter 1.4, we will take a closer look at how authors develop individual styles. In this chapter, we will look at how language use varies from one literary form to another.

Language use in poetry

There are two main functions of language use in poetry: the primary function is artistic. Language in poetry is particularly compressed. Because there are so few words, every word is significant. Poetry communicates through figures of speech such as **symbols** and **metaphors**, so the language used almost always has two or more meanings. Professor Thomas C. Foster, author of several excellent books about how to read literature, describes the use of language in poetry this way:

Poetry uses language to take us to a place beyond language. I could say that it is the place where one soul meets with another, but that's a little mystical for this discussion. Perhaps that's what alarms readers, whichever way we describe it. Both the meeting of souls and the inherent self-contradiction of language going to a place beyond itself can sound pretentious, at best. But they are also what makes poetry so exciting, allowing us to go to intellectual or psychic spaces that we can't ordinarily access.

(Thomas C. Foster 7)

What Foster is talking about is the way that language is used in poetry as an art form. We will explore this function of language in detail in the next section of this chapter. Foster refers mostly to lyric poetry, rather than **narrative poetry** (poetry that tells a story), but narrative poets also use language as a tool for making art.

The second function of language in poetry is to convey character. That function is at work in poems in which there is someone with a conspicuous voice, either the narrator or a character. We will explore this function of language in poetry as well, later in this chapter.

Language as the mechanism of art

One way in which the language of poetry is made artistic is by the employment of a variety of strategies, including rhythm, rhyme, word choice and use of literary figures. Your ability to recognize and appreciate all of these strategies will help to define your ability as a reader. The tradition of shaping poetry via rhythm and rhyme goes back to the earliest days of English literature. We can see, in this fourteenth-century ballad from Geoffrey Chaucer, the function that both play:

To Rosemounde: A Balade

	Madame, ye ben of al beaute shryne	A
	As fer as cercled is the mapamounde,	B
	For as the cristal glorious ye shyne,	A
	And lyke ruby ben your chekes rounde.	B
5	Therwith ye ben so mery and so jocounde	B
	That at a revel whan that I see you daunce,	C
	It is an oynement unto my wounde,	B
	Thogh ye to me ne do no daliaunce.	C
	For thogh I wepe of teres ful a tyne,	A
10	Yet may that wo myn herte nat confounde;	B
	Your semy voys that ye so smal out twyne	A
	Maketh my thought in joy and blis habounde.	B
	So curtaysly I go with love bounde	B
	That to myself I sey in my penaunce,	C
15	'Suffyseth me to love you, Rosemounde,	B
	Thogh ye to me ne do no daliaunce.'	C
	Nas neuer pyk walwed in galauntyne	A
	As I in love am walwed and ywounde,	B
	For which ful ofte I of myself devyne	A
20	That I am trew Tristam the secounde.	B
	My love may not refreyde nor affounde,	B
	I brenne ay in an amorous plesaunce.	C
	Do what you lyst, I wyl your thral be founde,	B
	Thogh ye to me ne do no daliaunce.	C

(Geoffrey Chaucer)

Even though the language is difficult for us to follow nowadays, we can easily see that the lines are very similar in length throughout the poem, which suggests that the number of syllables, and therefore the rhythm, is similar or the same. We can also see the rhymes, even if we don't know exactly how they should be pronounced. The rhyme scheme is indicated above, and you can see how regular it is. The rhyme scheme here is, in fact, the normal rhyme scheme for ballads. You can listen to Jay Ruud, English professor at the University of Central Arkansas in the United States, reading the poem aloud via the QR code provided. If you play the video, you will be able to hear the regular rhythm and the rhyme.



If you listen to the reading, you will also hear that the language sounds quite natural. It is not singsong, and there are no hard stops at the ends of lines where the rhymes occur. The effect of the rhythm and rhyme, then, is to create a melody. This use of language is tighter and more direct than everyday speech. The musicality of the poem is suitable to it being a ballade – a form that we associate with songs. The original ballads were dance songs ('Ballad Examples and Definition'). In this case, as with many ballads, the melodic nature of the language helps convey the meaning. This is a love poem, and the musicality of the language supports the feelings that the speaker has for Rosemounde.

Here is the poem translated from Middle English to Modern English, by Chaucer scholar AS Kline:

To Rosemounde: A Ballad

	Madame, you are of all beauty the shrine	A
	Within the circle of the mappamund;*	B
	For as the crystal glorious you shine,	A
	And like ruby are your cheeks round.	B
5	And therewith you're so merry and jocund	B
	That at a revel when I see you dance,	C
	It is a salve for my every wound,	B
	Though you with me suffer no dalliance.	C
	For though I fill a cask with tears of mine,	A
10	Yet that woe may my heart not confound;	B
	Your demi-voice that so small you twine	A
	Makes my thought with joy and bliss abound.	B
	So courteously I go with love bound,	B
	That to myself I say, in penance,	C
15	It suffices me to love you, Rosamund,	B
	Though you with me suffer no dalliance.	C
	Never did pike so wallow in galantine	A
	As I in love do wallow, and am wound,	B
	For which full oft I of myself divine	A
20	That I am truly Tristan the second.	B
	My love will not grow cold or be unsound;	B
	I burn with amorous pleasure, at every chance.	C
	Do what you will, I will your thrall be found,	B
	Though you with me suffer no dalliance.	C

(Geoffrey Chaucer, trans. AS Kline)

*'Mappamund' or 'mapamounde', as Chaucer spelled it, means 'map of the world' (Oxford Reference).

In the modern script, we can see more easily the romantic nature of the poem, in which the speaker declares himself forever at the service of Rosamund, despite the fact that she does not wish to involve herself with him. The repetition of the last line of each stanza may be easier to see in the Modern English as well, but it is retained from the original. Repetition is

another of the features of the language of this poem which helps convey meaning; it serves, here, to reiterate the speaker's devotion to his love and, possibly, also his frustration with her determination to reject him.

CAS Links: Translation

Because you are essentially studying a work in translation when you read a modern version of Chaucer's work, an interesting CAS activity would be to arrange for a local Chaucer expert to do some reading of his work in Middle English and then to speak to students about the differences between Middle English and Modern English.

Geoffrey Chaucer

Chaucer was born sometime between 1340 and 1344. Early in his life, he was a soldier in the Hundred Years' War and was taken prisoner during the English invasion of France. He had to be ransomed by King Edward III, and afterward he served as a sort of ambassador for the king, travelling through Europe on diplomatic missions ('Geoffrey Chaucer'). It was through his travels that he became familiar with the influential writers of his time, people such as Dante, author of *The Inferno*, and Petrarch ('Geoffrey Chaucer – Poet'), famous for creating the sonnet form that Shakespeare would later reinvent into the English sonnet. Chaucer later served as justice of the peace and a member of parliament ('Geoffrey Chaucer – Poet'). He seems to have begun writing in the mid-to-late 1380s, and is most famous for writing *The Canterbury Tales*.

You can see the same kind of structured use of language in more modern poems, too. Here is Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, written 200 years after Chaucer's ballad. The sonnet form is somewhat different from the ballad form, but it shares the features of tightly structured rhythm and rhyme.

Sonnet 116

	Let me not to the marriage of true minds	A
	Admit impediments. Love is not love	B
	Which alters when it alteration finds	A
	Or bends with the remover to remove.	B
5	O, no, it is an ever-fixèd mark	C
	That looks on tempests and is never shaken;	D
	It is the star to every wand'ring bark,	C
	Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.	D
	Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks	E
10	Within his bending sickle's compass come;	F
	Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,	E
	But bears it out even to the edge of doom.	F
	If this be error, and upon me proved,	G
	I never writ, nor no man ever loved.	G

(William Shakespeare)

Like Chaucer's ballad, this poem is a love poem. This one is not directed to a particular person, however; it is a testament to the nature of true love. The central idea of the poem is that true love never alters but remains true no matter what obstacles it encounters. The regular rhythm and the regular rhyme reflect that constancy. Notice that Shakespeare, like Chaucer before him, also used repetition to reiterate an important idea; in this sonnet, the repetition is of the word 'Love', personified. Over and over the speaker makes bold declarative statements about what Love is or is not. That repetition underlines the certainty that the speaker and, by extension, Shakespeare, feels about his knowledge of the nature of love.

ACTIVITY 1

Check for understanding

Based on what you have read so far, what are some ways in which poets use language to create meaning? Do these strategies differ from the way writers of other literary forms use language?

Even in the present day, poets often rely on heavily structured language to help convey their meaning. The following poem, by American poet Bruce Snider, is number seven in a series of eight sonnets, called ‘Devotions’, about a gay couple waiting to hear from an adoption agency. The sonnets explore the question of motherhood, including considering the speaker’s relationship to a puppy he and his partner adopted, as well as his observations of a neighbour who treats his son harshly.

7

A nuthatch bargains from its split branch.	A
Our neighbor stops by, complains our fence	A
breaks his field. It must be moved eight inches.	B
The puppy – <i>Annie</i> , we call her – pushes	B
5 her nose in everything, the front yard, the garden,	C
finds, across the road, the neighbor’s trash –	D
drags stripped wire, eggshells that harden	C
like the bones she buries off his porch.	D
I want to say we are consoled by her,	E
10 but each day John jumps when he hears the phone.	F
We walk over and over down the worn	F
path to the empty mailbox: <i>Maybe soon</i> .	F
Some nights we make love. We sleep arm to arm.	G
We wake to our neighbor yelling at his son.	G

(Bruce Snider)

Notice the rhyme scheme: it is present, but it is not nearly as well defined as the rhyme patterns we saw in Chaucer’s work, or Shakespeare’s. Here, most of the rhymes are **slant rhymes** (sometimes also referred to as imperfect rhymes or half rhymes), words that almost rhyme, but not quite. If you say ‘branch’ and ‘fence’ from lines 1 and 2 aloud, for instance, you will hear a strong similarity in the words, but not nearly so strong as you hear in the full rhyme in lines 5 and 7 of ‘garden’ and ‘harden’. In a sonnet, the lines are normally 10 syllables long. At least half the lines here contain more or fewer – the most common is 9 syllables. That structure seems to suit the meaning of the poem: the two men are in a state of uncertainty, waiting to hear from the adoption agency. Their lives are not quite as full as they would like – the rhythms and rhymes of their experience are just slightly out of sync.

Snider, too, uses repetition, but in quite a different way to how Chaucer and Shakespeare used it. Snider uses the repetition of ideas to connect the last line of each sonnet with the first line of the next one. The last line of the sonnet preceding this one, for example, is ‘a nuthatch bargaining from its split branch’, and the first line of the sonnet following this one is, ‘Again we wake, our neighbor yelling at his son’. Each of the poets chose the way to use repetition to create the effect that he wanted. That is the essence of artistic work and the essence of how language is used in poetry.

Bruce Snider

Bruce Snider was born and raised in rural Indiana. Much of his poetry draws heavily on his personal memories and depicts the experience of growing up gay in a small rural community ('Bruce Snider'). He is the winner of numerous awards, including a James A. Michener fellowship to the University of Texas at Austin, a fellowship to the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, and the Lena-Miles Wever Todd poetry prize, which he won for his first collection of poems, *Paradise, Indiana* (Snider). He has taught at several universities and is currently an assistant professor at the University of San Francisco.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

Within the field of inquiry of culture, identity and community, a global issue you might explore related to Bruce Snider's work is the question of how identity shapes and is shaped by relationships. In Snider's work, the speaker's relationship with his partner, his neighbour, and, potentially, with the child that he and his partner wish to adopt have led to introspection on the speaker's part about his identity and the role he has to play in his family's life.

Naturally, many poems are not characterized by rigid structure, rhythm or rhyme; nevertheless, you can nearly always recognize a poem by how it looks on the page. Language ordered in lines and, often, stanzas, is one feature of the way language is used in poetry, even without those more formal features. Here is a poem by American poet Lucille Clifton:

blessing the boats

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out

5 beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will

love your back may you
10 open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

(Lucille Clifton)

You see right away that this is a poem. The short overall length and the short lines signal the genre immediately. This poem doesn't have any of the kinds of rhythm and rhyme that we have been looking at with the previous three poems, but there are several features of the language use which are distinctly poetic: the non-standard grammar, the lack of punctuation and the lack of capital letters are all poetic elements that have come into use in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

ACTIVITY 2

Discussion

Before you read the model analysis in the table on the next page, discuss with a partner the language in this poem which seems to you to help convey meaning. How many different techniques can you find?

More importantly, the rich metaphorical use of language here marks this out as poetry rather than **prose** or some other literary form. Other literary forms do, of course, use **metaphor** and other figures of speech, but those elements do not comprise so much of the work as they do in a poem. In ‘blessing the boats’, Clifton used only 58 words, but they contain all of the following literary elements:

■ Table 1.3.1

Element	Line(s)	Explanation
Religious reference	Title	A blessing is a formal religious ceremony.
Repetition	1, 6, 9, and 12	The repeated phrases ‘may the’ and ‘may you’ call a formal blessing to mind immediately.
Allusion	3	The phrase ‘the lip of our understanding’ carries an echo of verse from the Christian Bible: ‘And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 4:7).
Metaphor	3	‘Lip’ is used metaphorically; as it is used here, it means ‘edge’, but the suggestion of lips is also the suggestion of a kiss which conveys ideas of both love and of religious blessing.
Face	5	‘Face’ is used as personification to give ‘fear’ the status of a person. The blessing is intended to carry the listener out past the place where fear might be a danger.
Kiss	6	Here the word ‘kiss’ recalls the idea of the ‘lip’ in line 3, only this time it is the listener who is to give the blessing. The idea of kissing the wind is a suggestion that the sailor can embrace the wind as a blessing.
Personification	9	The wind, in response to the kiss from the sailor, will love ‘your back’. That suggests that the wind will work in the sailor’s favour.
Pun	9	The phrase ‘your back’ literally refers to the sailor’s back, because the wind will be pushing the sailor onward. But it also suggests ‘you back’, as in ‘the wind will love you back’, returning the love the sailor gave the wind.
Allusion	9	The phrase ‘your back’ in association with the wind recalls an old Irish blessing: ‘May the wind be always at your back’. Wind at the back of a sailor is always desirable because it pushes the boat onward.
Symbolism	1, 10 and 11	References to water (‘tide’ in line 1): water is a traditional Western symbol for rebirth. It can also be a symbol for drowning, and of course this poem is a blessing to keep the sailor from drowning, that he might return safely home again.
Personification	11	The water is depicted as waving – a gesture associated with goodbyes. If the water is waving goodbye, it is sending the sailor onward.

If we studied the poem longer, we might find even more literary elements at play. We might, for instance, explore the effect of the lack of capitalization and the absence of punctuation. We could explore the nature of this speaker – whoever it might be – and the speaker’s relationship with the audience. Despite the lack of obvious rhythm and rhyme in formalized structures, we can still explore the use of rhythm and rhyme in this poem. If you read the poem aloud, you will hear that it does have a rhythmic pattern, and although there are not obvious end rhymes in this poem, there are other elements of sound such as assonance. Fifteen literary strategies in a 58-word, 13-line poem may seem like a lot, but it is not at all surprising to find that kind of rich density of literary elements in a poem. That kind of density is what we meant, at the beginning of this section, when we said that the language of poetry is compressed.

Lucille Clifton

Lucille Clifton was born in Depew, New York, outside of Buffalo, in 1936. Neither of her parents was educated, but they instilled in their children a love of books and Clifton herself went to college at Howard University, majoring in drama (Moody). While at Howard, Clifton met people who later took the forefront of African-American academics, including Chloe Wofford, now known as Toni Morrison (Moody). Clifton's first book of poetry was published after she won a poetry contest in 1969. Over the course of her career, until her death in 2010, Clifton won several important awards, including the National Book Award for poetry for *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems 1988–2000*. She was twice nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, once for *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969–1980* and once for *Two-Headed Woman* ('Lucille Clifton – Poet'). She served as Poet Laureate of Maryland from 1979–1985 and was the first African American to serve in that role. Among numerous other awards for her work, she also won an Emmy Award from the American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for writing for the 1976 television special *Free to Be You and Me* ('Lucille Clifton').

We have seen how all of these poets have used the same literary strategies in creating their poetry, but we have also seen how each strategy was used to a different purpose. That variation in the way that poets use their tools is what make them artists. Professor Thomas C. Foster (whose definition of the use of language in poetry we considered on page 77) has this to say about the way that poets use the language available to them:

A poem is an experiment with and in language, an attempt to discover how best to capture its subject and make readers see it anew ...

(Thomas C. Foster 33)

One of the great pleasures of studying poetry is to discover how each poet decides to use language and for what purpose. One of the joys of reading poetry is to be surprised by originality, not just of ideas, but also of method.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

CREATIVITY

Part of your job as a skilled reader of literary texts – and not just poetry – is to notice and appreciate places where the author has revealed his or her creativity. To do that, you have to be on the lookout for any new **perspective** that the author gives you on his or her subject, but you also have to be on the lookout for ways in which the author uses words creatively. This means more than just noticing a fresh turn of phrase; it means thinking hard about what that usage contributes to your understanding of the meaning. In the case of the Bruce Snider sonnets, for example, we first have to notice that there is always a tight connection between the sonnets created out of repetition, but then we have to think about *why* that was necessary. One possibility is that one of the main subjects of the poem is the relationships –

the connections – between people and particularly the relationship between a father and his child, and whether that relationship can perform the role of mothering. The fact that all of the sonnets are connected, regardless of the specific content in each, suggests a solid structure as a collection that offers hope for the establishment of effective connections in relationships, despite worries – or maybe even because of the awareness of the potential problems that will need to be dealt with. No such idea is stated in the poem, nor is this a common, recurring example that you can easily recognize from other poems. The poet thought creatively about how to convey his ideas. The interpretation of poetry and other literary works requires you to think creatively about what the strategy of repetition could mean.

ACTIVITY 3

Discussion

Think of at least one poem that you have read and which struck you as being a good poem. Discuss with a partner what it was that you admired about the poem. Were the features you liked the same as those discussed here, or different?

ACTIVITY 4

'Bread' by Kamau Brathwaite

Read the following poem by Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite. Identify as many poetic uses of language as you can. Consider the formal elements we have discussed here as well as other standard literary strategies. You can read the notes at the end of the book (page 420) for comparison when you have finished.

Bread

Slowly the white dream wrestle(s) to life
hands shaping the salt and the foreign cornfields
the cold flesh kneaded by fingers
is ready for the charcoal for the black wife

5 of heat the years of green sleeping in the volcano.
the dream becomes tougher. settling into its shape
like a bullfrog. suns rise and electrons
touch it. walls melt into brown. moving to crisp and crackle

breathing edge of the knife of the oven.

10 noise of the shop. noise of the farmer. market.
on this slab of lord. on this table w/ its oil-skin cloth
on this altar of the bone. this sacrifice

of isaac. warm dead. warm merchandise. more than worn merchandise
life

15 itself. the dream of the soil itself
flesh of the god you break. peace to your lips. strife

of the multitudes who howl all day for its saviour
who need its crumbs as fish. flickering through their green element
need a wide glassy wisdom

20 to keep their groans alive

and this loaf here. life
now halted. more and more water additive.
the dream less clear. the soil more distant
its prayer of table. bless of lips. more hard to reach w/ pen-

25 ies. the knife
that should have cut it. the hands that should have broken open its victory
of crusts at your throat. balaam watching w/ red leak
-ing eyes. the rats

finding only this young empty husk
 30 sharp-
 ening their ratchets. your wife
 going out on the streets. searching searching

her feet tapping. the lights of the motor-
 cars watching watching round-
 35 ing the shape of her girdle. her back naked

rolled into night into night w/out morning
 rolled into dead into dead w/out vision
 rolled into life into life w/out dream

(Kamau Brathwaite)

Kamau Brathwaite

Kamau Brathwaite was born Lawson Edward Brathwaite in Bridgetown, Barbados, in 1930. Unlike many other scholars from the Caribbean, Brathwaite has maintained a lifelong connection with his home country, living and working there throughout his life ('Writers of the Caribbean – Kamau Brathwaite'). He was educated at Harrison College in Barbados, Pembroke College in England, and the University of Sussex, also in England. He returned to Caribbean, however, to teach at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, where he taught for 30 years (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). Over the course of his career, he published numerous volumes of poetry. A central interest in his work is the study of the roots of Caribbean culture in the cultures and history of Africa and the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). He has won many awards over the course of his career, including the Casa de las Americas Prize for Literary Criticism, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, the Bussa Award, and the Charity Randall Prize for Performance and Written Poetry, and he has won fellowships from both the Fulbright and the Guggenheim foundations ('Kamau Brathwaite').

Poetic language used to characterize speaker or characters

A second major use of language in poetry is to convey to the reader a sense of the speaker's reliability. This function is particularly important in **narrative poetry** in which the reliability of the speaker must be considered, but it can come into play in other kinds of poems as well. In all of the poems that we have examined in this chapter so far, the speakers are reliable. Even so, we can get a sense of how they are different from each other, just from the way that they use language.

- In Chaucer's 'To Rosemounde: A Balade', we have a speaker who uses quite formal and even florid language – his words and phrases are extravagant.
- In Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, we have a speaker who is very certain of himself, who makes bold claims in strong declarative sentences.
- In the extract from Snider's sonnet sequence, we have a speaker who relies heavily on description. He notices details of the world around him and uses them to create images. (This is the most strongly narrative poem so far in this chapter, especially if you look at the whole sequence.)
- In 'blessing the boats', we have a speaker who speaks in the formalized rhythms of ceremony.
- And in 'Bread' we have a speaker who gives us pieces of images. He uses language in such a way as to create an impression of the scene, and of the reader he demands the effort of filling in.

You would not think, from reading this set of poems, that the speaker of any one was the same as the speaker of any other – or indeed, that any had been written by the author of any of the others. Even though these are strongly lyrical poems, we can definitely see distinctive differences in the way language is used.

There are poems, however, in which the speaker is much more strongly featured. In narrative poems, the speaker is someone who has clearly been depicted as an individual with a strong personal connection to the story that he or she is telling. Sometimes, it becomes clear that the speaker is not reliable – he or she is telling the story wrong, though without intending to do so. Wayne C. Booth, who was a professor at the University of Chicago, defined the term ‘unreliable narrator’ in his important work, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, published in 1961, which is still an important book today for anyone wishing to understand how literature is constructed and interpreted. Booth discusses the relationships between authors and narrators in terms of the distance between them. Here is what he had to say about unreliable narrators:

For practical criticism probably the most important of these kinds of distance is that between the fallible or unreliable narrator and the implied author who carries the reader with him in judging the narrator. If the reason for discussing point of view is to find out how it relates to literary effects, then surely the moral and intellectual qualities of the narrator are more important to our judgment than whether he is referred to as ‘I’ or ‘he’, or whether he is privileged or limited. If he is discovered to be untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed.

(Booth 158–9)

Booth goes on to say that a narrator who lies is not ‘unreliable’, because that narrator knows the truth, though he or she chooses not to tell it for their own reasons (159).

Whether the speaker is reliable or not, whenever we have a speaker with a personal stake in the story, the language the speaker uses is our clue as to the speaker’s nature and to his or her reliability or lack thereof.

The following poem by Robert Browning is renowned for the speaker’s **perspective**. The speaker is not unreliable – he does tell the truth about what has happened – but he is rather shockingly wicked.

My Last Duchess

FERRARA

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

15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
 Fra Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
 Over my lady's wrist too much', or 'Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along her throat.' Such stuff
 20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had
 A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
 25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace—all and each
 30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
 In speech—which I have not—to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let
 40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
 —E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
 45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
 As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
 The company below, then. I repeat,
 The Count your master's known munificence
 50 Is ample warrant that no just pretense
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
 55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

(Robert Browning)

TOK Links: Language and deception

How do authors use language to create characters who deceive others as to their true intentions? How do we uncover those deceptions so that we know that the author has created an unreliable narrator or speaker or an unreliable character?

ACTIVITY 5

Discussion

Before you read the next section with a possible interpretation of the poem, discuss with a partner the claim that we made before the poem that this speaker is 'wicked'. What characteristics does the speaker exhibit which reveal his evil nature? What has the poet done to help you see that?

We can see from lines 45 and 46 that this speaker has had his wife killed. Not only does he feel no remorse, but he also feels completely justified in his actions – to the point where he is bragging about them to his listener, the person standing there looking at the painting with him. This speaker uses language in such a way as to reveal his complete arrogance. The rhetorical questions in lines 35 and 45, for example, show that he knows that there is only one possible answer to his questions – and that that answer justifies his actions. He makes accusations in lines 25 to 34 which are designed to validate his appraisal of his wife as having been a woman of no judgment. His references to his own greatness, such as his 'nine-hundred-years-old name' in line 33, also reveal the conceit that underlies his actions with regard to his last wife. Perhaps the most striking way that he uses language arises in lines 49–53, where it becomes clear that the person to whom the speaker is talking is an emissary for a Count who is the father of this Duke's potential next wife. The arrogance of his making such a direct point of telling a story about how he had his last wife killed to a man who has the power to arrange a marriage to a new wife reveals to us not only the speaker's self-importance but also his blindness to how others might perceive him. Browning has crafted the speaker's words masterfully to reveal to the reader the kind of man that the speaker is.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

COMMUNICATION

This poem is another example of the kind of communication that gets established between an author and a reader through the medium of a work that we saw when we considered the excerpt from 'Revelation' by Flannery O'Connor in Chapter 1.2. Even though this narrator is not strictly unreliable, because he is telling exactly what happened, there is a definite distance between him and the poet. Browning does not condone the narrator's actions; he wishes his readers to look at the narrator and be appalled both by his actions and by his lack of concern over them.

Robert Browning

Robert Browning was born in 1812 to very educated parents who raised him to love books and to speak several languages. He wrote poetry at a very young age, and by the age of 13, was such a fan of Percy Bysshe Shelley that he became both a vegetarian and an atheist in honour of his hero ('Robert Browning – Poet'). Thereafter, there was a gap of many years in which Browning did not write any poetry. He wrote a number of plays which were unsuccessful. He married Elizabeth Barrett after reading a volume of her poetry, and for a long time he was known only as Elizabeth Barrett's husband ('Robert Browning – Poet'). He did, however, begin writing poetry again and had books published in the years after his marriage. His experience in writing drama gave him a particular gift for the dramatic **monologue** ('Robert Browning – Poet'), of which 'My Last Duchess' is an example. He did not become widely respected until the publication of *The Ring and the Book*, poems based on a seventeenth-century murder trial ('Robert Browning – Poet').



Conversely, Carol Ann Duffy's poem 'Head of English' gives us a fully unreliable narrator, one who does not know that the story she is telling is not true.

Head of English

Today we have a poet in the class.
A real live poet with a published book.
Notice the inkstained fingers, girls. Perhaps
we're going to witness verse hot from the press.

5 Who knows. Please show your appreciation
by clapping. Not too loud. Now

sit up straight and listen. Remember
the lesson on assonance, for not all poems,
sadly, rhyme these days. Still. Never mind.

10 Whispering's, as always, out of bounds –
but do feel free to raise some questions.
After all, we're paying forty pounds.

Those of you with English Second Language,
see me after break. We're fortunate

15 to have this person in our midst.
Season of mists and so on and so forth.
I've written quite a bit of poetry myself,
am doing Kipling with the Lower Fourth.

Right. That's enough from me. On with the Muse.

20 Open a window at the back. We don't
Want winds of change about the place.
Take notes, but don't write reams. Just an essay
on the poet's themes. Fine. Off we go.
Convince us that there's something we don't know.

25 Well. Really. Run along now girls. I'm sure
that gave an insight to an outside view.
Applause will do. Thank you
very much for coming here today. Lunch
in the hall? Do hang about. Unfortunately

30 I have to dash. Tracey will show you out.

(Carol Ann Duffy)

Here Duffy has used language to reveal this speaker both as being self-centred and completely lacking self-awareness. The speaker, the titular 'Head of English', is introducing a guest speaker to her class, but the guest speaker never gets a single word in edgeways. Instead, the speaker rushes on, pouring out words in a kind of **stream-of-consciousness** rush, commenting on everything from the speaker's fingers to the classroom window. She thinks of herself as a poet, as she says in line 17; however, her language use shows up her lack of skill with words – not only can she not control the flow of words, but she also cannot control tone. First she makes a sarcastic comment

about the poet's 'inkstained fingers' (line 3), and then she talks about her guest as 'this person' (line 15), which is actually pretty insulting – either she does not know the guest speaker's name or she refuses to grant the dignity of using it – and she criticizes poetry which does not rhyme (line 9). Presumably the guest poet's poetry is of that sort. None of these verbal acts constitutes an appropriate way to treat a guest. Her own poem here, furthermore, also does not use rhyme very well. She manages 'bounds' and 'pounds', but the rhyme of 'forth' with 'Fourth' does not demonstrate any particular prowess with language. The use of language is doubly clever on Duffy's part, then, because not only does it reveal to us a speaker who is rude, unwelcoming, and self-important, but it also shows us that that speaker is either ignorant or hypocritical or both, since she proclaims herself to be gifted with language when she patently is not.

Carol Ann Duffy

Carol Ann Duffy was the Poet Laureate of Britain for 10 years, between 2009 and 2019, and she is the first woman to hold the position in the 400-year history of its existence. She is also the first Scot to do so (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica – 'Poets Laureate of the United Kingdom'). The honour was amply earned: her career as a poet has been spectacular. She has published more than 50 volumes of poetry (for children and for adults), drama and **fiction** ('Carol Ann Duffy – Literature') and she has won a large number of major awards, including the Somerset Maugham Award, the Whitbread Poetry Award, Forward Poetry Prize (Best Poetry Collection of the Year), the 2005 T. S. Eliot Prize, the 2011 Costa Poetry, and the PEN/Pinter Prize, all for her poetry. She was awarded an OBE in 1995, a CBE in 2001 and became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1999 ('Carol Ann Duffy – Literature'). In her role as Poet Laureate, Duffy is recognized for her generosity to other poets in giving them important opportunities to have their work shown in public. She has pointed out that when she first started writing poetry, women poets were called 'poetesses', and she has been instrumental in changing that image of women writers (The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica).



We can see the important role in defining character that language has to play in the examples from Robert Browning and Carol Ann Duffy. That role is central to the way that language functions in fictional works, as we shall see in the next section.

ACTIVITY 6

Check for understanding

What are the differences between a reliable narrator and an unreliable narrator?

Language use in narrative fiction

The most significant difference between the way that language is used in prose fiction and the way that it is used in poetry is that the language of **prose** does not exhibit the dense compression that poetry does. With prose, there is always a narrator, and the narrator always has plenty of time to tell the story with all the details he or she wants filled in. The communication between author and reader is still indirect, in the sense that it is mediated by the narrator in the text, but the readers are not required to make the kind of creative imaginative leaps that poetry demands of them.

That said, language does play similar roles in narrative to those it plays in poetry: it is the artist's tool, and it does help characterize both the narrator and characters in the stories. It also has a great deal to do with setting tone through descriptions of a kind that do not generally appear in poetry.

■ Language as a means of characterization

We just saw that language is often used in poetry as a means of revealing to the reader the kind of person a speaker is. The same is true in prose fiction, only to a greater degree, because novels and short stories mostly tend to have many characters rather than just one, and so the requirement the author faces in using language for this purpose is a great deal more complex.

Jane Austen, in *Pride and Prejudice*, used language masterfully to reveal the dramatic differences among her characters. In this excerpt from Chapter 2, we already get very clear portraits of both Mr and Mrs Bennet. The exchange below takes place on the evening of a day in which Mrs Bennet has begged her husband to go and introduce himself to Mr Bingley, a wealthy young man who has just moved into the neighbourhood. Mr Bennet, although he roundly denied any intention of doing so at the time, did indeed go and visit Mr Bingley that afternoon. This is the scene in which he chooses to reveal that fact to his wife and daughters:

'We are not in a way to know what Mr Bingley likes,' said her mother resentfully, 'since we are not to visit.'

'But you forget, mamma,' said Elizabeth, 'that we shall meet him at the assemblies, and that Mrs Long promised to introduce him.'

'I do not believe Mrs Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish,
5 hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her.'

'No more have I,' said Mr Bennet; 'and I am glad to find that you do not depend on her serving you.'
Mrs Bennet deigned not to make any reply, but, unable to contain herself, began scolding one of her daughters.

'Don't keep coughing so, Kitty, for Heaven's sake! Have a little compassion on my nerves. You tear them
10 to pieces.'

'Kitty has no discretion in her coughs,' said her father; 'she times them ill.'

'I do not cough for my own amusement,' replied Kitty fretfully. 'When is your next ball to be, Lizzy?'
'To-morrow fortnight.'

'Aye, so it is,' cried her mother, 'and Mrs Long does not come back till the day before; so it will be
15 impossible for her to introduce him, for she will not know him herself.'

'Then, my dear, you may have the advantage of your friend, and introduce Mr Bingley to her.'

'Impossible, Mr Bennet, impossible, when I am not acquainted with him myself; how can you be so teasing?'

'I honour your circumspection. A fortnight's acquaintance is certainly very little. One cannot know what
20 a man really is by the end of a fortnight. But if we do not venture somebody else will; and after all, Mrs Long and her nieces must stand their chance; and, therefore, as she will think it an act of kindness, if you decline the office, I will take it on myself.'

The girls stared at their father. Mrs Bennet said only, 'Nonsense, nonsense!'

'What can be the meaning of that emphatic exclamation?' cried he. 'Do you consider the forms of
25 introduction, and the stress that is laid on them, as nonsense? I cannot quite agree with you there. What say you, Mary? For you are a young lady of deep reflection, I know, and read great books and make extracts.'
Mary wished to say something sensible, but knew not how.

'While Mary is adjusting her ideas,' he continued, 'let us return to Mr Bingley.'

'I am sick of Mr Bingley,' cried his wife.

30 'I am sorry to hear that; but why did not you tell me that before? If I had known as much this morning I certainly would not have called on him. It is very unlucky; but as I have actually paid the visit, we cannot escape the acquaintance now.'

The astonishment of the ladies was just what he wished; that of Mrs Bennet perhaps surpassing the rest; though, when the first tumult of joy was over, she began to declare that it was what she had expected all the while.

35 'How good it was in you, my dear Mr Bennet! But I knew I should persuade you at last. I was sure you loved your girls too well to neglect such an acquaintance. Well, how pleased I am! and it is such a good joke, too, that you should have gone this morning and never said a word about it till now.'

'Now, Kitty, you may cough as much as you choose,' said Mr Bennet; and, as he spoke, he left the room, fatigued with the raptures of his wife.

40 'What an excellent father you have, girls!' said she, when the door was shut. 'I do not know how you will ever make him amends for his kindness; or me, either, for that matter. At our time of life it is not so pleasant, I can tell you, to be making new acquaintances every day; but for your sakes, we would do anything. Lydia, my love, though you are the youngest, I dare say Mr Bingley will dance with you at the next ball.'

(Jane Austen 8–12)

● EE Links: Language and character

The topic of how a writer uses language to create particular kinds of characters can form an interesting investigation for an extended essay. You could write about this novel from the perspective of trying to answer the question: 'How does the author's use of language relate to the formation of character traits in the characters and narrator of *Pride and Prejudice*?' A similar question could, of course, be asked about any other novel.

We find out, from this conversation, that Mr Bennet is a person who enjoys creating a ruckus. In his speeches beginning on lines 6, 16, and 18, we see that Mr Bennet speaks to his wife as if she knows that he already made the visit to Mr Bingley. We know, however, that Mrs Bennet does not know, so we see that Mr Bennet is toying with her understanding. He waits until his wife declares that she wants nothing to do with Mr Bingley (line 28) before he reveals that he has made the acquaintance she desired. He obviously set her up for this trap: he knew that if he provoked her long enough, she would get fed up and make some such foolish declaration. We see, from the way that Mr Bennet uses his language to manipulate his wife, that he understands his wife's mind perfectly, and he plays with her for his own amusement. He is not downright cruel, but only because she is too foolish to understand what he is doing. Austen has shown us that Mr Bennet is a man who does not take his relationship with his wife very seriously, and that he resorts to amusing himself at her expense.

At the same time, Austen generates some sympathy for Mr Bennet's position by showing us, through Mrs Bennet's speech, how very foolish a person she is. For one thing, she shows by her responses to her husband's remarks that she does not understand what he is getting at. When he tells her, at line 18, that she will have had a fortnight's acquaintance with Mr Bingley by the time of the dance, Mrs Bennet does not pick up on the hint – instead she just declares 'Nonsense!' It is only nonsense to her because she does not understand her husband. We see right away that Mrs Bennet is not a person of very great intelligence. We also see, from her dramatic turnaround between lines 28 and 36, that Mrs Bennet is not someone who is capable of holding any position on a principle. Instead, she changes her mind in a moment. At line 28, she declares that she is sick of Mr Bingley, but on line 33, she is completely overjoyed at the prospect of knowing him.

She herself does not recognize the complete turnaround she has made in her position. Austen has shown us that Mrs Bennet only means what she says in the very moment that she says it. We cannot trust her to tell us anything that truly means something to her in a significant way.

One final example of characterization that we can get from this scene is the characterization of the narrator of this novel. It requires careful reading to pick it up, but the narrator of this novel is herself extremely witty and not a little sarcastic – a bit like Mr Bennet. We get a hint, here, of what she is like when she comments, at line 26, about Mary that: ‘Mary wished to say something sensible, but knew not how’. The narrator is telling us, subtly, that Mary, like her mother, does not have a mind which is capable of rapid processing or even of making sense. The narrator makes a further similar observation when she describes Mr Bennet’s departure from the room at line 38, when she remarks that Mr Bennet is ‘fatigued with the raptures of his wife.’ We understand from this gently sarcastic comment that Mrs Bennet is tiresome; that her means of expressing her happiness is to ramble on and on, repeating herself and saying nothing of consequence. There is no substance in Mrs Bennet’s discourse, and Mr Bennet cannot, therefore, conduct a meaningful conversation with her. The narrator reveals to us, through her use of language, that she is on Mr Bennet’s side here, and that having to listen to a wife who can talk incessantly without saying anything significant makes for a less than successful marriage.

Jane Austen

Jane Austen was born at the end of 1775 in a rural town in England, where her father was the rector of the local church. Hers was a family of readers, and Jane began writing in her childhood. She also participated in the family tradition of putting on plays for their friends and extended family members (Warren). She never married, and she never travelled out of England – the French Revolution was going on during much of her life – but she had rich exposure to what was going on in other parts of the world via her brothers. Henry was a Lieutenant in the Militia (Byrne 124) and two of her brothers, Francis and Charles, were in the British Navy (Byrne 4–5). Through her cousin Eliza, whose first marriage was to a French count who was guillotined in 1794 (‘Jane Austen’s Family Tree’), and who eventually married Jane’s brother Henry, Austen had knowledge of the French Revolution. Through her brother Edward, Austen had a connection to Lord Mansfield, who was the presiding judge on a famous trial in which the ruling was that escaped slaves could not be forcibly removed from England (Byrne 215). Austen thus had knowledge of the slave trade in the Caribbean. Due to all these connections, her novels make frequent and accurate reference to events that were going on in the larger world outside of her small town. Austen found it difficult to get her works published, and, indeed, had to pay for some of the publication costs herself. The total fee she earned from *Pride and Prejudice*, one of the most famous novels in English literature, was £110 (Byrne 282) or roughly £7,000 in today’s money (‘Inflation Rate’).



ACTIVITY 7

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

Having seen how Jane Austen uses language as a means of characterizing both the narrator and two different characters from *Pride and Prejudice*, see if you can notice the way in which Zora Neale Hurston does the same thing in her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Read the following passage and focus on the character of Janie. What are the prominent features of the way she uses language? What do those features suggest to you about her character and about how Hurston wants us to view her? When you have made your own conclusions, you can compare them to the notes on page 420.

This scene appears at the end of the book, after Janie has finished telling her friend, Phoeby, the story of her life and several marriages, culminating with the story of her marriage to a man named Tea Cake. The marriage was a very happy one, but ended tragically.

Janie stirred her strong feet in the pan of water. The tiredness was gone so she dried them off on the towel.

5 'Now, dat's how everything wuz, Phoeby, jus'lak Ah told yuh. So Ah'm back home again and Ah'm satisfied tuh be hear. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons. Dis house ain't so absent of things lak it used tuh be befo' Tea Cake came along. It's full uh thoughts, 'specially dat bedroom.

10 Ah know all dem sitters-and-talkers gointuh worry they guts into fiddle strings till dey findout whut we been talkin' 'bout. Dat's all right, Phoeby, tell 'em. Dey gointuh make 'miration 'cause mah love didn't work lak they love, if dey ever had any. Then you must tell 'em dat love ain't somethin' lak uh grindstone dat's de same thing everywhere and do de same thing tuh everything it touch. Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore.

(Zora Neale Hurston 191)

● TOK Links: Artist's choices

In her time, some prominent African-American figures criticized Hurston's choice to use the dialect transcription that we see in the passage above. Richard Wright denounced the choice, calling it a 'minstrel technique' ('Zora Neale Hurston'). He felt that she was deliberately trying to appeal to white audiences. An interesting question to pursue here is whether we can tell, from a novel or other artistic work, whether the artist was trying to appeal to a particular audience and, if so, whether the decisions made in order to appeal to that intended audience affects the value of the work to society at large. We could also question the nature of language use: how would that same passage appear to today's readers if the novel had been written by a white author?

Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston was born in Alabama in 1891, the daughter of two former slaves. She did not have an easy life. Her mother died when she was only 13 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica – 'Zora Neale Hurston'). She was falsely accused of molesting a 10-year-old boy and she was the subject of more negative publicity for criticizing the Supreme Court decision which ordered the desegregation of schools. She was able, however, to attend first Howard University and then, after winning a scholarship, Barnard College where she earned a degree in Anthropology (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). She was able to do research into oral histories in her home state, and she went to Haiti to study voodoo (History.com editors). She published two novels, a history from her research into folklore, and a memoir, but, despite being a recognized figure of the Harlem Renaissance, did not earn much money from her writing. She worked as a maid toward the end of her life (History.com editors) and she eventually died in poverty in a welfare home in 1960 ('Zora Neale Hurston').

Words contribute to artistry

Although the language used in **prose** is not as compressed as it is in poetry, **fiction** writers nevertheless use many of the same techniques in their work, and so the language they use also has the effect of shaping stories into art – language which takes us, as Foster put it, beyond language. Here is an example from Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges' short story 'The Garden of Forking Paths':

I went up to my bedroom. Absurd though the gesture was, I closed and locked the door. I threw myself down on my narrow iron bed, and waited on my back. The never changing rooftops filled the window, and the hazy six o'clock sun hung in the sky. It seemed incredible that this day, a day without warnings or omens, might be that of my implacable death. In despite of my dead father, in despite of having been

5 a child in one of the symmetrical gardens of Hai Feng, was I to die now? Then I reflected that all things happen, happen to one, precisely now. Century follows century, and things happen only in the present. There are countless men in the air, on land and at sea, and all that really happens happens to me ...

The almost unbearable memory of Madden's long horseface put an end to these wandering thoughts. In the midst of my hatred and terror (now that it no longer matters to me to speak of terror, now that I

10 have outwitted Richard Madden, now that my neck hankers for the hangman's noose), I knew that the fast-moving and doubtless happy soldier did not suspect that I possessed the Secret – the name of the exact site of the new British artillery park on the Ancre. A bird streaked across the misty sky and, absently, I turned it into an airplane and then that airplane into many in the skies of France, shattering the artillery park under a rain of bombs. If only my mouth, before it should be silenced by a bullet, could shout this

15 name in such a way that it could be heard in Germany ... My voice, my human voice, was weak. How could it reach the ear of the Chief? The ear of that sick and hateful man who knew nothing of Runeberg or of me except that we were in Staffordshire. A man who, sitting in his arid Berlin office, leafed infinitely through newspapers, looking in vain for news from us. I said aloud, 'I must flee.'

(Jorge Luis Borges 120)

ACTIVITY 8

Discussion

Before you read the notes below about literary elements in this passage, what literary elements can you find?

This is a much longer passage than 'blessing the boats' is; it has 350 words and 18 full lines, but includes fewer literary elements. A first reading reveals these literary elements at work:

■ Table 1.3.2

Element	Line(s)	Explanation
Symbol of a locked door	1	A locked door is a classic symbol of entrapment or a barrier keeping someone from a desired goal. In this case, the narrator locks the door himself, suggesting that he is trying to keep some danger outside. The fact that he is trapped inside out of this fear means that his situation is bad – escape is not likely.
Symbol of a window	2	A window is normally a symbol of freedom and escape, especially when the window is open, but here rooftops fill the window, blocking his way. This image increases the sense of entrapment.
Symbol of the Sun	3	The Sun is normally a symbol of life, but here the Sun is hazy and it is six o'clock – evening draws near. The suggestion, then, is that life is coming to an end – or at least the potential for death is present.
Reference to a garden	5	Any reference to a garden could be an allusion to the Biblical Garden of Eden – a paradise of immortality. That reference makes sense in this context, as the garden is a memory contrasted to the narrator's present situation. The reference to Hai Feng and symmetry, however, suggests that this garden is one of Eastern origin. The narrator's name, as we learned in the story's introduction, is Dr Yu Tsun. The element of symmetry suggests a certain rightness which, as we see, the narrator has been counting on to keep him safe.

Element	Line(s)	Explanation
Irony	4–7	Benjamin Lytal, writing for <i>The New York Sun</i> , points out the contradiction inherent in the idea that just because his father died and he had an association with a particular place, the narrator should somehow be immortal (Lytal). This irrational belief could be the kind of flaw that leads to tragedy in the traditional Aristotelian sense.
Symbol of a bird	12	A bird, especially a flying bird, is another traditional symbol of freedom. This bird has replaced the rooftops that the narrator was noticing before.
Contrast	1–3 versus 12	The change in focus from rooftops to bird suggests that there is now potentially a way out of the trap in which our narrator finds himself.
Allusion to the title	Title	This passage reflects the idea in the title of a labyrinth, or a path with many choices. In this one paragraph we are given two possible outcomes for this narrator: death and escape.

We could examine the passage more deeply and consider the effects of such elements – the allusions to the First World War and the references to the passing of time surely also contribute important ideas to any interpretation of this passage. The density of literary strategies and the compression of language is not as striking as it is in Clifton’s poem (there we found approximately 0.26 strategies per word; here we have found 0.03, about nine times fewer), but those strategies have a definite role here, and the passage conveys meaning in a much more artistic way than a bald statement about the fear of the soldier would.

A final thing to remember about this excerpt is that it has been translated from the original Spanish, which means that the language use here is at least very strongly influenced by the work of the translator, Andrew Hurley. You are reading a work which has been **transformed** from its original form, and that transformation will necessarily have affected our understanding of the work.

Jorge Luis Borges

Jorge Luis Borges was born in Argentina in 1899. His parents were well-to-do and his father had an enormous library, and Borges himself called the library the major event of his life (‘Jorge Luis Borges’). His English-speaking grandmother lived with the family when Borges was young and he read English before he read Spanish. Thus began a lifetime of developing erudition. He became famous for his wide-ranging knowledge of the literature of the world; he regularly drew on literary references to works in English, French, Spanish and German (‘Jorge Luis Borges’). Borges said that:

From the time I was a boy, when blindness came to him [his father] it was tacitly understood that I had to fulfill the literary destiny that circumstances had denied my father. This was something that was taken for granted (and such things are far more important than things that are merely said) ... I was expected to be a writer.

(Reid 143)



Ironically, Borges himself would eventually go blind and have to dictate his work to others who could set it down for him (‘Jorge Luis Borges Biography’). Borges became famous worldwide for breaking new ground in **fiction**, moving away from realism and inspiring a generation of new writers. His style was so innovative that a new name had to be created for it: ‘Borgesian’ (‘Jorge Luis Borges’).

Language used to create atmosphere

Language can be used to create atmosphere in poetry as well as in prose fiction; however, in prose, where the author has the freedom to write a kind of description that a poet does not have the space to write, we more often find passages dedicated to evoking the scene and the mood. Canadian author Margaret Atwood wrote a very famous novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, in which she imagines a dystopian future where many women are unable to bear children and so those who are fertile are effectively enslaved as child-bearing ‘handmaidens’ to the wealthy men who can afford to keep one in his house to bear a child on behalf of his wife. The following passage is a description of the room which the narrator, Offred (‘of Fred’ – her master), has been given to live in.

A chair, a table, a lamp. Above, on the white ceiling, a relief ornament in the shape of a wreath, and in the center of it a blank space, plastered over, like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out. There must have been a chandelier, once. They've removed anything you could tie a rope to.

A window, two white curtains. Under the window, a window seat with a little cushion. When the
 5 window is partly open—it only opens partly—the air can come in and make the curtains move. I can sit in the chair, or on the window seat, hands folded, and watch this. Sunlight comes in through the window too, and falls on the floor, which is made of wood, in narrow strips, highly polished. I can smell the polish. There's a rug on the floor, oval, of braided rags. This is the kind of touch they like: folk art, archaic, made by women, in their spare time, from things that have no further use. A return to traditional values. Waste
 10 not want not. I am not being wasted. Why do I want?

On the wall above the chair, a picture, framed but with no glass: a print of flowers, blue irises, watercolor. Flowers are still allowed. Does each of us have the same print, the same chair, the same white curtains, I wonder? Government issue?

Think of it as being in the army, said Aunt Lydia.

(Margaret Atwood)

The description in this passage is sparse. It contains a good many phrases and fragments instead of complete sentences, as in lines 1–2 and 4. This kind of description, which is itself incomplete, gives us the sense that the room itself is incomplete. The stark description mimics the starkness of the sparsely furnished room. We are told in line 6 that there is sunlight, but that sunlight falls on the floor, rather than on the speaker. We are also told that 'they' have chosen the furnishings and that those choices consist of old objects recycled from useless things. Since this is the room in which the narrator is going to live, we get the sense that she, too, is useless, or that she is being recycled. The final line gives us a clear understanding of the life that Offred is going to lead: she is not going to be comfortable or happy; the events are not even about her personal comfort or happiness. She is a member of an army fighting a war against the barrenness of the upper classes and against the gradual extermination of the human race. She, like a soldier, is a tool and a tool does not need luxurious surroundings.

It is tempting sometimes to skim through what appear to be long passages of nothing but description, but the description is an important tool available to the fiction writer, and a careful reading will reward the careful reader!

Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa, Canada. She has had a long career as a prolific writer, with more than 40 works to her name in a wide variety of genres, including poetry, novels, plays, non-fiction and a series of graphic novels with fellow Canadian Johnny Christmas ('Biography'). She published her first book in 1961 but did not become widely known until the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1985. In the

early days, she took buses to various locations to give readings and sell books (Biography.com editors). She won the Booker Prize for *The Blind Assassin*, a story that contains a second story embedded in it, and yet another story embedded into that. In recent years, Atwood's work has garnered renewed attention due to the highly successful television **adaptation** of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

ACTIVITY 9

Check for understanding

Review the particular techniques that this part of the chapter explored with relation to prose fiction. Think of a prose work that you are familiar with. Are these same strategies at work in that text? If so, what is the effect?

Language use in literary non-fiction

Language use in **non-fiction** differs very little from language use in realistic prose fiction. The difference between prose fiction and non-fiction is that the events related in **prose** fiction never happened; they are made up, or significant portions of them are made up. You can review these literary forms in Chapter 1.1. Non-fiction recounts events that *did* happen. Because non-fiction must necessarily be realistic, non-fiction writers cannot use language to create unrealistic or fantastic situations or settings; however, they can use language to help readers understand characters, and they can use language that incorporates artistic elements into the work.

ACTIVITY 10

'Crimes Against Dog' by Alice Walker

In this essay, American writer Alice Walker tells the story of her adoption of a Labrador retriever and of the relationship that developed between them. Read the extract and, drawing on what you have learned about the ways in which language functions in fictional works, see if you can identify language which characterizes, language which contributes to the work as an art form, and language which sets a tone. When you have made your own observations, you can look at the notes on page 420 and compare your responses to those.

My first thoughts are always about enslavement on entering a place where animals are bred. Force. Captivity. I looked at the black and the chocolate Labs who were Marley's parents and felt sad for them. They looked healthy enough, but who knew whether, left to themselves, they would choose to have litter after litter of offspring? I wondered how
5 painful it was to part with each litter. I spoke to both parents, let them sniff my hand. Take in the quality of my being. I asked permission to look at their young. The mother moved a little away from her brood, all crawling over her blindly feeling for a teat; the father actually looked rather proud. My friend joked about offering him a cigar.

I was proud of myself, too, standing there preparing to choose. In the old days of up
10 to several months before, if I were going to choose an animal from a litter I would have been drawn to the one that seemed the most bumbling, the most clueless, the most un-amused. I saw a couple like that. But on this day, that old switch was not thrown: I realized I was sick of my attraction to the confused. My eyes moved on. They all looked much alike, to tell the truth. From a chocolate mother and a black
15 father there were twelve puppies, six chocolate, six black. I'll never get over this. Why were there none with spots?

I asked the woman selling them, whom I tried not to have Slave Trader thoughts about. She shrugged. They never spot, she said. That's the nature of the purebred Lab. Well, I thought. Mother. Once again doing it just any old way you like. Mother
20 is my favorite name for Nature, God, All-ness.

I settled on a frisky black puppy who seemed to know where she was going – toward a plump middle teat! – and was small enough to fit into my hand. I sometimes wish I had chosen a chocolate puppy; in the Northern California summers the dust
25 wouldn't show as much, but I think about this mostly when Marley rolls in the dirt in an effort to get cool.

After seven weeks I returned alone to pick her up, bereft that my friend had already gone on the road. It didn't feel right to pay money for a living being; I would have been happier working out some sort of exchange. I paid, though, and put Marley in my colorful African market basket before stroking the faces of her wistful-looking
30 parents one last time. In the car, I placed the basket in the front seat next to me. I put on Bob Marley's *Exodus* CD and baby Marley and I sped away from Babylon.

(Alice Walker 81–83)

ACTIVITY 11

Discussion

Can you tell from the passage alone that this work is non-fiction rather than prose fiction? If so, how? If not, why not?

Alice Walker

Alice Walker is probably best known for her novel *The Color Purple*, for which she won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, but she has also published poetry, essays and full-length non-fiction. She was born in 1944 as the youngest daughter of poor share-croppers in Georgia. When she was 8 years old, she was accidentally shot in the eye when her brothers were playing with a BB gun. The injury, which she writes about in an essay called 'Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self', led to extreme self-consciousness and extreme shyness ('Alice Walker'). She nevertheless excelled in school, graduating as the valedictorian of her high school class, and went to Spellman College in Atlanta, Georgia, on a scholarship. She eventually moved to Sarah Lawrence College in New York, and while in New York she became active in the Civil Rights Movement ('Alice Walker'). She eventually met and married another activist, Jewish lawyer Melvyn Leventhal. They became the first legally married interracial couple in Mississippi. She has continued her activism to the present day, and many of her published works have arisen from that work.

Function of language in graphic novels

Language is used for still a different purpose in graphic works. Graphic novels or **non-fiction** works use language in conjunction with images to convey meaning. Often the images convey more than the words do directly, and the words either support or help to interpret the images. If you can, find a copy of Alison Bechdel's autobiographical work *Fun Home*. The focus of the first chapter is on her father, and it is called 'Old Father, Old Artificer'. The word 'artificer' relates to the word 'art', and can be taken at least two ways. The chapter is about how Bechdel's father worked for years renovating an old Victorian house, turning it into a showpiece. The house made people think that the family was rich, which they were not. The beauty of the house was the result of her father's work, planning and careful reusing of materials, and its appearance created an artificial impression. The house becomes a **symbol** for her father and their family in general; appearances were deceptive, and the word 'artificer' means just that – a person who deceives.

On page 7 of the graphic novel, the words help us to understand Bechdel's point about her father, but only because they support the images.

The top row of pictures shows Alison and her father talking about the wallpaper for her room. She does not want flowered paper, but her father clearly does not care. The crassness of his response to his young daughter – 'tough titty' – is a bit shocking, but it shows the real father that others do not see. The words above the first frame, in which Bechdel compares her father to both Icarus and Daedalus (Icarus's father) from Greek mythology, are allusions to a father whose grandiose dream of flying led to the death of his son, and who also built a magnificent labyrinth that housed a monster who ate young men and women. Bechdel calls Daedalus 'that skillful artificer, that mad scientist' and the allusions comment indirectly on the nature of the man in the story, and they support the message we get from the image below them.

The center panel has very few words. The image shows the father at his actual job (a teacher), but the book that the father is holding shows that he isn't really doing his job: he's reading about architecture, his hobby and his passion. The father only *appears* to be a teacher.

The image in the bottom panel is a mythological **allusion**. The image of a man holding a huge beam on his bare shoulders is reminiscent of the image of Atlas carrying the world on his shoulders, shown right.

The image suggests that this is how Bechdel's father sees himself and his labour – fixing up the house is all the world to him, and the value of the house outweighs the value of his family. For this panel, too, words are used minimally, and here they help us interpret the idea that the image the father has of himself and his work is not what the family experiences. They see his commitment to the house not as a noble effort equivalent to holding up the world, but rather as a deeply self-indulgent passion, one which is even not very healthy.

The words in a graphic work, then, are used differently from the way they are used in all other types of literary works, because in this type of work the images are primary and the words help us to understand how the author wishes us to interpret the images.



Alison Bechdel

Alison Bechdel came to international attention when her graphic novel, the story of her father's extremely troubled life and its effect on the family, was published in the UK upon making it to the *New York Times'* bestseller list (Burkeman). Bechdel was not expecting that level of acclaim or attention; she was accustomed to a small subcultural audience for her comic strip, *Dykes to Look Out For*, and was expecting the same audience for her graphic novel (Burkeman). Despite the expectations, the graphic novel was a huge hit and became a Broadway musical which won five Tony Awards (Cooke). Bechdel says that she learned a lot about her family from writing *Fun Home* and from watching it being **transformed** into a musical. She has a new **perspective** now on her childhood experiences:

In some ways, it [the new information] would have made it a less interesting book. Not knowing everything is sometimes a good thing in a memoir: a mystery or quest is better than laying out all the facts ...

(Cooke)



Following the publication of *Fun Home*, Bechdel went on to win a MacArthur Genius Grant and write a second memoir, this one about her mother, who died shortly before the musical version of *Fun Home* opened (Cooke).

Function of language in drama

Language use in drama is quite strikingly different in one major way from how language is used in poetry and **fiction** or **non-fiction** prose: the language of drama is entirely comprised of dialogue. While language in drama does all the things that language does in the other literary forms we have investigated, the fact that the language is all dialogue means that not only are characters revealed for who they are, but the dialogue also has to drive the plot. This is quite different from a narrative in which the narrator can keep the reader apprised of where the story is going.

The following excerpt from Act 1 Scene 3 of August Wilson's play, *Fences*, demonstrates how language is used in drama.

- TROY Your mama told me you done got recruited by a college football team? Is that right?
- CORY Yeah, coach Zellman say the recruiter gonna be coming by to talk to you. Get you to sign the permission papers.
- 5 TROY I thought you supposed to be working down at there at the A&P. Ain't you supposed to be working down there after school?
- CORY Mr Stawicki say he gonna hold my job for me until after the football season. Say starting next week I can work weekends.
- 10 TROY I thought we had an understanding about this football stuff? You supposed to keep up with your chores and hold that job down at the A&P. Ain't been around here all Saturday. Ain't none of your chores done ... now you telling me you done quit your job.
- CORY I'm gonna be working weekends.
- TROY You damn right you are! And ain't no need for nobody coming around here to talk to me about signing for nothing.
- CORY Hey Pop ... you can't do that. He coming all the way from North Carolina.
- 15 TROY I don't care where he coming from. The white man ain't gonna let you nowhere with that football noway. You go on and get your book-learning so you can work yourself up in that A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade. That way you have something can't nobody take away from you. You go on and learn how to put your hands to some good use. Besides hauling people's garbage.
- 20 CORY I get good grades, Pop. That's why the recruiter wants to talk with you. You got to keep up your grades to get recruited. This way I'll be going to college. I'll get a chance.
- TROY First you gonna get your butt down there to the A&P and get your job back.

(August Wilson 37–39)

One obvious way that language is used in this passage is that it is spelled in such a way as to suggest a particular dialect. We saw this technique earlier in this chapter in the excerpt from *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In this case, the function is slightly different, because this is a playscript, and the words are meant to be spoken. The non-standard **orthography** provides actors with information about where the characters are from and how they should sound on stage.

Another important feature of the way language is used here is that it gives us a good sense of what kind of person Troy is. He is a man who expects to be the boss in his family, and who is used to giving commands. His language is characterized by very strong declarative statements – the kind of statement that does not allow for any arguing back. His first few speeches suggest that he is asking questions, but he is actually phrasing his opinions about the way things are – or ought to be – as questions. When he asks, at lines 4–5, for example, ‘Ain't you supposed to be working down there after school?’ we know that he really means: ‘You are supposed to be working down there after school’. He does not expect Cory to say no, and, in fact, if Cory were to say no, we would expect Troy to react very badly. By line 12, Troy has given up the pretence of questioning and is issuing his orders.

The speech beginning at line 15 gives us insight into Troy's belief system; he wants better for his son than what he has himself (Troy works hauling garbage), but he does not believe that education alone will achieve that. He believes in trades – in working with one's hands – and that is what

he wants for his son. Working up to a management job at the A&P would be, for Troy, success enough for Cory. We also see that Troy has learned, over the course of his life, not to trust white men. He associates the football recruiter with the power structure of white culture, and that alone is reason enough to keep his son away from that world.

The last line of this excerpt is a good example of how the dialogue moves the action. Troy's command to his son to go and get his job back sets up a **conflict** in which one or the other of the two characters is going to lose. Cory is either going to try to get his job back or he is not. If he does, he will be sacrificing his dream of going to college to play football. If he does not, he will be defying his father and drawing his anger. The words, phrased as an absolute command without any options, have created a situation in which either Troy has to back down – which seems unlikely given what we have learned of him from this exchange – or the relationship is going to be irrevocably damaged. This function of moving the action on is integral to the way drama works, and it is a use of language that does not occur in the same form in the other types of literature we have studied in this chapter.

August Wilson

August Wilson was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1945. His mother was a cleaner and his father was a baker, though his father was not around much during Wilson's childhood. The family was not well-to-do (they lived in a two-room flat without hot water), and Wilson was picked on at school ('August Wilson: the Ground on Which I Stand'). He dropped out of school but taught himself thereafter by reading books in the public library. He began his writing career as a poet and eventually won a fellowship to the Minnesota Playwrights' Center which led to his being accepted into the National Playwrights Conference in Connecticut. ('August Wilson: the Ground on Which I Stand'). His experience in Connecticut was the one which secured his future as a playwright. While there, he met famed director Lloyd Richards, a man who was especially influential in African-American theatre. Richards became a father figure to Wilson and they worked together from then on ('August Wilson: the Ground on Which I Stand'). Wilson's great achievement was a 10-play cycle, each one depicting one decade in the twentieth century. His work was powerfully influenced by the histories and voices of the people in his childhood neighbourhood and by his love for Blues music ('August Wilson: the Ground on Which I Stand'). A 2016 movie version of *Fences*, perhaps his most famous play, starring Denzel Washington and Viola Davis brought renewed attention to Wilson and his career.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

TRANSFORMATION

The recent film version of August Wilson's play, *Fences*, gives you a wonderful opportunity to consider what the transformation of a work from one form to another does to the original. This question always exists for a playscript: the play on the page is not the same as on-stage in a theatre. A film is also not the same thing as a play – either in its written form or in its performed form. If you have the opportunity to see the film, read the play first and then evaluate how well you think the film represents the play, and what you gained from seeing the film that you did not get from reading the work, or what was lost.

ACTIVITY 12**Check for understanding**

In what ways do the four literary forms use language differently from each other? In what ways is the use of language similar?

Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that language is used in similar ways in all four literary forms as the mechanism for making literature into art. We have also seen that anywhere there are characters (including narrators or speakers with a stake in the content of the poem) the language that the author gives them to speak reveals to the reader the kind of person that character is. However, we have also seen that there are differences in the ways in which language is used in the four forms, and that those differences contribute to the fundamental differences among the forms.

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1.4

How does the structure or style of a literary text affect meaning?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To recognize that style refers to the kind of language that a writer uses, including such elements as sentence structure and vocabulary
- ▶ To appreciate that understanding an author's style can help us recognize important elements in all of his or her works
- ▶ To understand that being able to recognize style in local instances can help us see the relationship between form and function
- ▶ To recognize that structure in poetry can refer to a variety of formal structures in addition to the kind of language used
- ▶ To recognize that structure in poetry can also refer to such elements as stanza construction, meter and rhyme
- ▶ To understand that narrative can employ a variety of common structures that relate to character and events
- ▶ To appreciate that playwrights manipulate a standard dramatic structure to achieve particular effects

Introduction

We saw in the last chapter that language use varies in literary forms in terms of the function that the language has – the effects that it has on a reader – but that there are many commonalities among all forms. Another way to consider the language use in a literary text is to consider the style that an author uses and the effects of that choice. In this chapter, we will look at some examples of different styles and then try to come to a general conclusion about how to identify various styles and what role style plays in the construction of meaning.

We will also be investigating the role that structure plays in contributing to the meaning of a text. Structure plays a particularly prominent role in the interpretation of poetry, but can also be helpful to a reader in trying to analyse other literary forms.

What is style?

Style is a feature of language use which plays the same role in all literary forms. You will not find that poetry has one style and drama or **non-fiction** another; instead, you will find that very often a particular author will have a distinctive style. The ability to recognize a writer's style helps you as a reader to approach any new work by an author you have studied with some knowledge about how that author tends to write. You must be careful, of course, because any author can surprise you at any time, but it can be an advantage to be aware of the features that a particular author tends to favour.

Style relates to the sounds and rhythms of the language an author uses, as well as to the kind of vocabulary that appears in a particular text. If you read each of the following three texts, for instance, you will instantly recognize that they could not have been written by the same person.

Here is Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, which we examined in the last chapter:

Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds
 Or bends with the remover to remove.
 5 O, no, it is an ever-fixed mark
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 10 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error, and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

(William Shakespeare)

Here is a poem published in 1931 by American poet EE Cummings:

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond
 any experience,your eyes have their silence:
 in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
 or which i cannot touch because they are too near
 5 your slightest look easily will unclose me
 though i have closed myself as fingers,
 you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
 (touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose
 or if your wish be to close me,i and
 10 my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly,
 as when the heart of this flower imagines
 the snow carefully everywhere descending;
 nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
 the power of your intense fragility:whose texture
 15 compels me with the colour of its countries,
 rendering death and forever with each breathing
 (i do not know what it is about you that closes
 and opens;only something in me understands
 the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
 20 nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands

(EE Cummings)

EE Cummings

EE Cummings (1894–1962) was born Edward Estlin Cummings in Massachusetts, US. His poetry, which reflects elements of **romanticism** (primarily a profound respect for nature) and **modernism** (a deliberate effort to overturn conventions) also reflects the many varied experiences that he had over the course of his life. He graduated from Harvard in 1915 and joined the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps, but was arrested after five months, falsely accused of espionage (Kennedy). He published a biography based

on these experiences which was very well received. Although we know him primarily as a poet, he was also a painter, and his work in cubism had a direct influence on his poetry, which is highly imagistic. He was married three times; only the third marriage was happy, and the influence of that happiness can be seen in his later work (Kennedy). Cummings won a number of accolades in his lifetime, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Bollingen Prize, and a grant from the Ford Foundation (Kennedy).

CONCEPT CONNECTION

REPRESENTATION

EE Cummings' poem is an example of a non-representational piece. Although he is concerned with features of the real world and notices it in great detail, his presentation of those details is highly impressionistic. The reader has to work to construct the images rather than getting them straight from description in the text. Think, for instance, of what Cummings means by 'nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands'. The rain does not have hands – in a representational work, it would not be described as such; however, we can think of how rain falling on a flower gently works

the flower petals open, almost as if it were prising them apart with tiny hands. So the image does portray something that the author has observed in the real world, but that observation has been transformed into an artistic image for the purposes of the poem.

Another relevant aspect of representation is the means that Cummings has chosen in order to represent his ideas. His methods are striking, and we can consider that impressionism is part of his choice for how effectively to represent what he wants readers to understand.

Follow the QR code and read a few stanzas of 'I Hate You' by hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar.

Kendrick Lamar

Kendrick Lamar has been described as 'indisputably the most acclaimed rap artist of his generation' (Kellman). That claim is validated by Lamar's many accomplishments, which include twelve Grammy Awards, and a Pulitzer Prize for his album *Damn*. Lamar is not only the first rap artist ever to win a Pulitzer Prize for music, he is also the only musician working outside of classical or jazz to do so ('Kendrick Lamar'). Lamar was born Kendrick Lamar Duckworth in Compton, California, in 1987. His parents had moved there to escape the gang culture of Chicago, but Lamar nevertheless grew up surrounded by gang culture. He was not, however, drawn into it; instead, he became a close and thoughtful observer of it, and what he witnessed has become the subject of much of his music ('Kendrick Lamar'). He was a good student who started writing young; when he was 16, he released the first of several mix tapes that brought him to the attention of the music industry and launched his highly successful career.



ACTIVITY 1

Check for understanding

Before you go on to the discussion on the next page, which offers a description of the style of these three authors, try it for yourself. How would you characterize the differences in these three writers' styles?

Shakespeare's sonnet is characterized not only by the sonnet form, including the highly structured end rhymes, but also by inverted sentence structure and formal vocabulary. In lines 2–3, for example, Shakespeare writes: 'Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds'. He has inverted the verb and noun in the second half of the sentence; we would normally expect to see 'Love is not love which alters when it finds alteration'. That kind of inversion is typical of Shakespeare's style; you will find it throughout his sonnets and plays.

EE Cummings' style is characterized by the lack of punctuation and capital letters, and by the fact that he relies heavily on unexpected inversions, not only of grammar, but of our expectations of how the world works. For instance, we don't normally think of eyes as having voices, nor do we think of roses being 'deep', as he describes them in lines 19–20. Cummings' style is impressionistic, rather than realistic, and it demands of the reader a committed engagement with figures of speech. We have to read with a great deal of creativity and imagination in order to understand what he means. Cummings' vocabulary is also entirely different from Shakespeare's. Where Shakespeare uses a formal and sophisticated vocabulary – such as 'impediment' (which comes from the marriage ceremony), 'alteration', 'ever-fixèd' and 'tempests' – Cummings uses very simple, everyday vocabulary, such as 'gesture', 'flower', 'fragility' and 'voice'. The differing vocabularies reflect the differing topics: Shakespeare's poem is about the universal, transcendent nature of love, while Cummings' is about one particular love between two people.

Kendrick Lamar's style is completely different from either of the others. Like Shakespeare, Lamar relies on strong rhymes but, unlike Shakespeare or Cummings, 'I Hate You' relies on extensive repetition and the use of fragments. The beat is strongly rhythmic; each line has both stressed and unstressed syllables, but they do not alternate, as the beats of the iambic pentameter that Shakespeare uses do. Instead, Lamar often uses many strong beats in short phrases for emphasis. Lamar's vocabulary is neither formal, like Shakespeare's, nor intimate, like Cummings'. Instead, Lamar's diction gets its power from the repetitions and the plays on sounds as in the rhymes 'others', 'mothers' and 'brothers'. The word 'you' appears nearly 50 times in the song. 'You' is always stressed, so we get a sense of the song pounding relentlessly away at the person to whom it is addressed.

If you were to study more of each person's writing, you would find that these characteristics recur in many of their works.

ACTIVITY 2

Identify the author

Here are three excerpts from works by Shakespeare, Cummings and Lamar. Which one was written by which author? How do you know?

Excerpt A

When the lights shut off
 And it's my turn to settle down
 My main concern
 Promise that you will sing about me
 5 Promise that you will sing about me
 I said when the lights shut off
 And it's my turn to settle down
 My main concern
 Promise that you will sing about me
 10 Promise that you will sing about me

- I woke up this morning and figured I'd call you
 In case I'm not here tomorrow
 I'm hoping that I can borrow a piece of mind
 I'm behind on what's really important
 15 My mind is really distorted
 I find nothing but trouble in my life
 I'm fortunate you believe in a dream

Excerpt B

- anyone lived in a pretty how town
 (with up so floating many bells down)
 spring summer autumn winter
 he sang his didn't he danced his did.
 5 Women and men(both little and small)
 cared for anyone not at all
 they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
 sun moon stars rain

Excerpt C

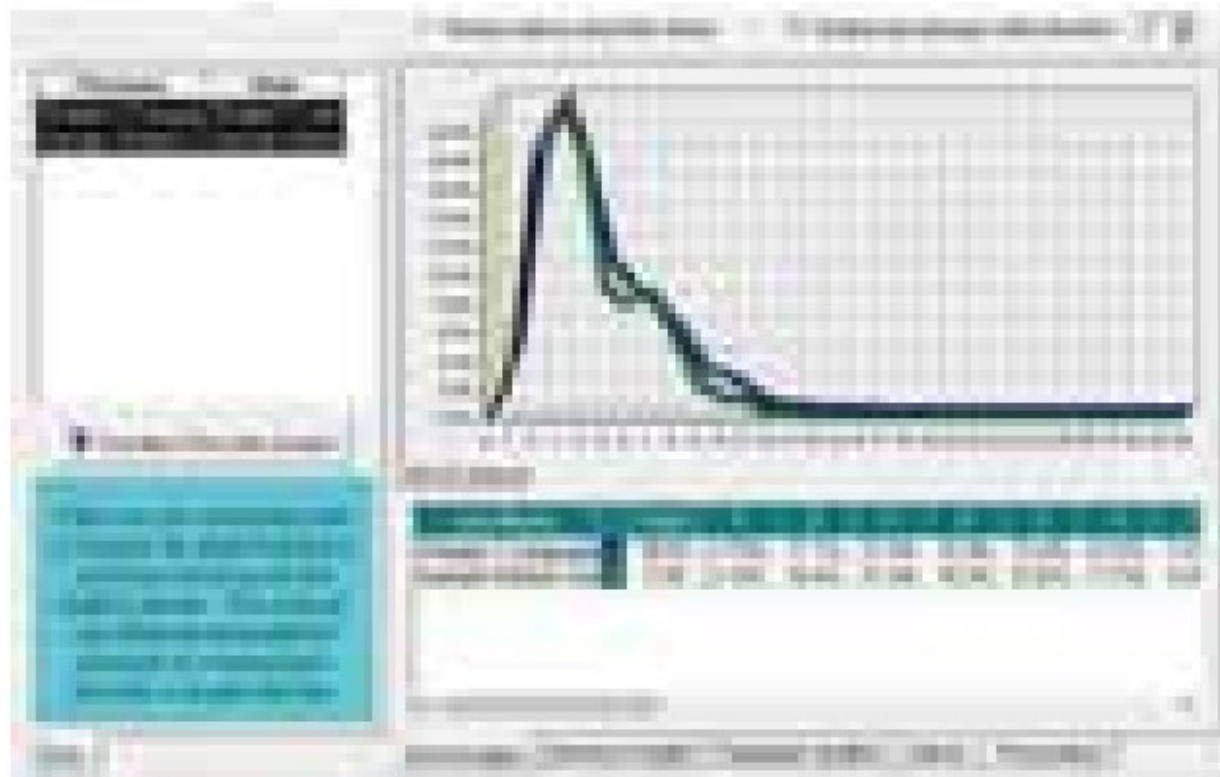
- And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
 5 Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.

You can check your answers against the notes on page 421. Did you have any trouble identifying the authors? Why, or why not?

Style is made up of many elements. We saw in the examples above that style includes the use of rhyme, the order of subjects and verbs in sentences, the level of **diction**, and the use of repetition. A writer's style is also reflected in his or her sentence construction in terms of the length and type of sentence, and in the vocabulary in terms of the average number of syllables per word. These features are easier to quantify in **prose** works because there are many more words than there are in a poem or song, as a rule. The features of style are so strongly characteristic of a particular writer that modern mathematics and computer science can now identify the author of previously unidentified works by running an algorithm that checks for those features.

In April 2013, a new author, Robert Galbraith, published a detective novel called *The Cuckoo's Calling* to wide praise. In July of the same year, the *Sunday Times* in England broke the story that 'Robert Galbraith' was a pseudonym for JK Rowling (Mostrous). Before they published the claim, they consulted with two experts in linguistics, each of whom had developed a computer program for making comparisons of various features of multiple texts for the purposes of determining whether or not the authorship is the same (Hughes). The software compares features of texts such as word length, sentence length, frequency of the usage of letters, paragraph length and punctuation. It turns out that the combination of these features is highly individualistic – almost like a fingerprint. Here, for example, are the graphs generated by one of these programs,

Signature, developed by Peter Millican at Oxford University (Millican, *et al*), comparing an early draft of Chapter 1.3 of this book, written in January of 2019, with a sample Language A written commentary produced 15 years earlier, in 2004, by the same author as a model for her students. The graph on the left below shows the comparison between the two works in terms of word lengths. Despite the completely different focuses of the two texts, you can see that the two graphs are nearly identical in terms of the percentage of words of varying numbers of syllables that are used.



■ Graph showing the difference between word lengths of two texts

© Peter Millican

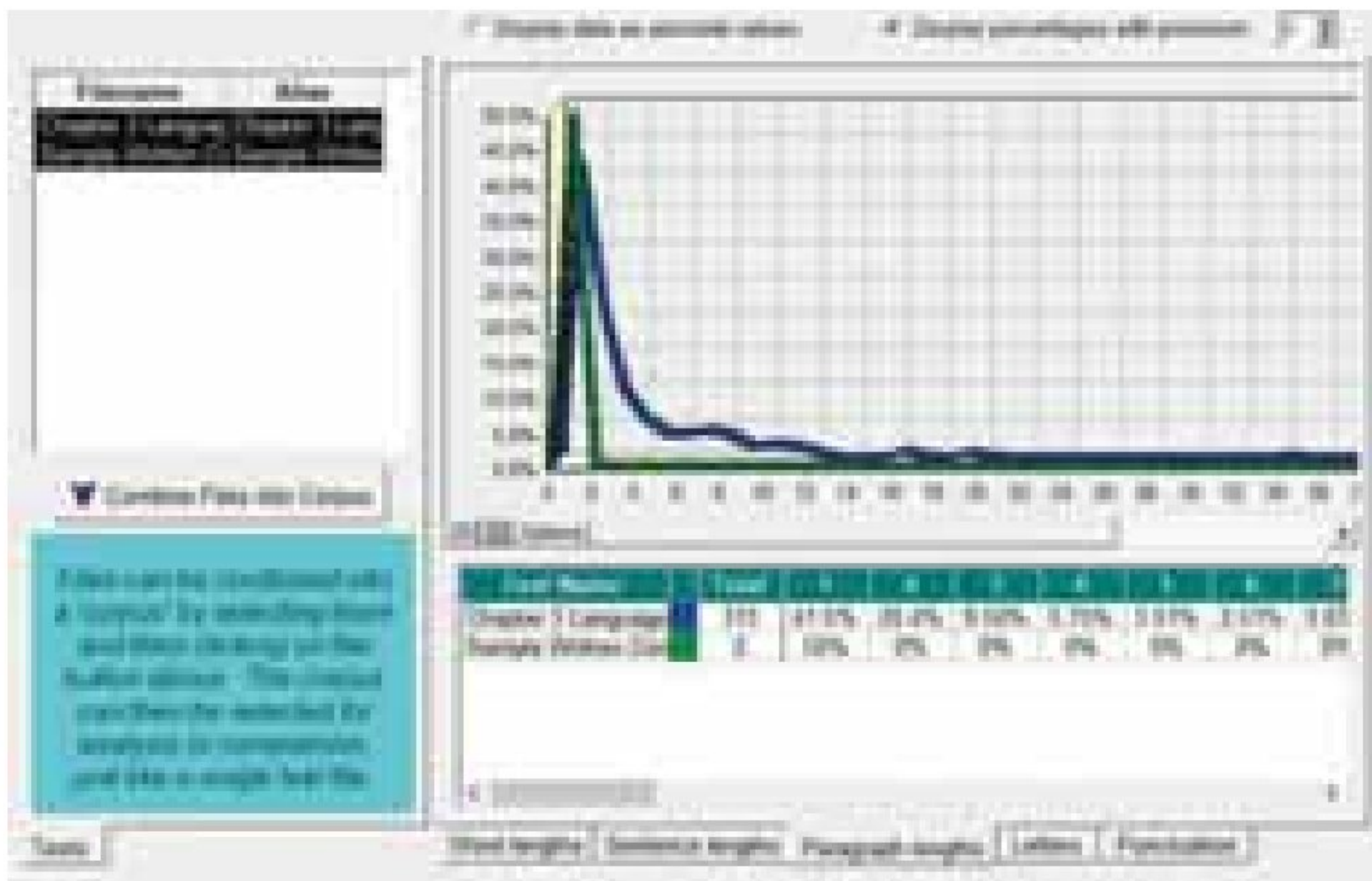


■ Graph showing the difference between sentence lengths of two texts

© Peter Millican

The graph on the right above shows sentence length comparison and, in this particular case, the graphs are quite different. The green line is for the sample written commentary, and it has somewhat longer paragraphs in general. That might be because the text of Chapter 1.3 is a draft which includes a lot of material that will eventually become boxed features in the finished book, rather than part of the main text. It might be interesting to run the comparison with the finished text and see if the match is higher.

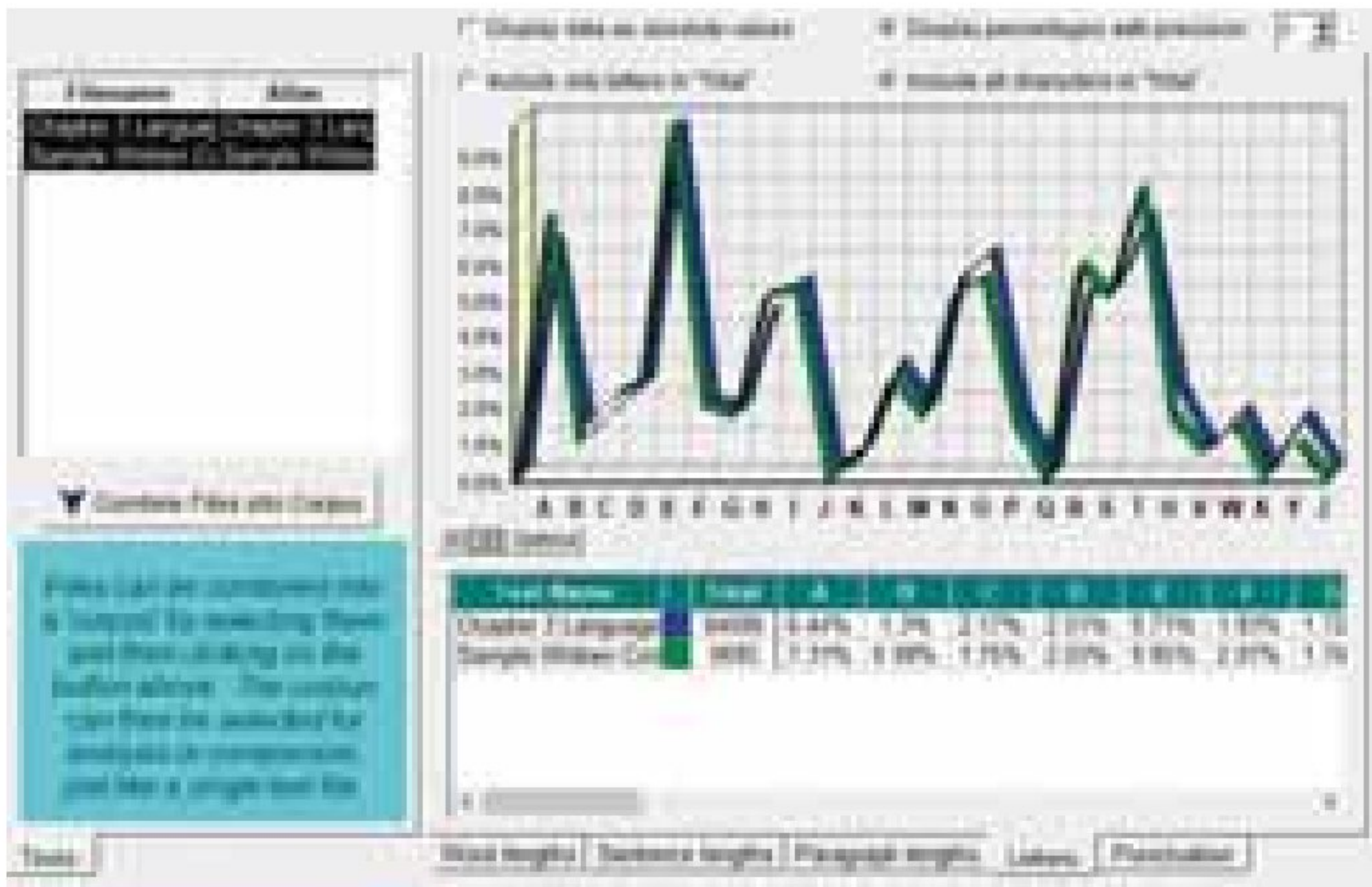
The following graph shows the comparison between paragraph lengths. Like the comparison of word lengths, this graph shows very strong similarity between the texts.



■ Graph showing the difference between paragraph lengths of two texts

© Peter Millican

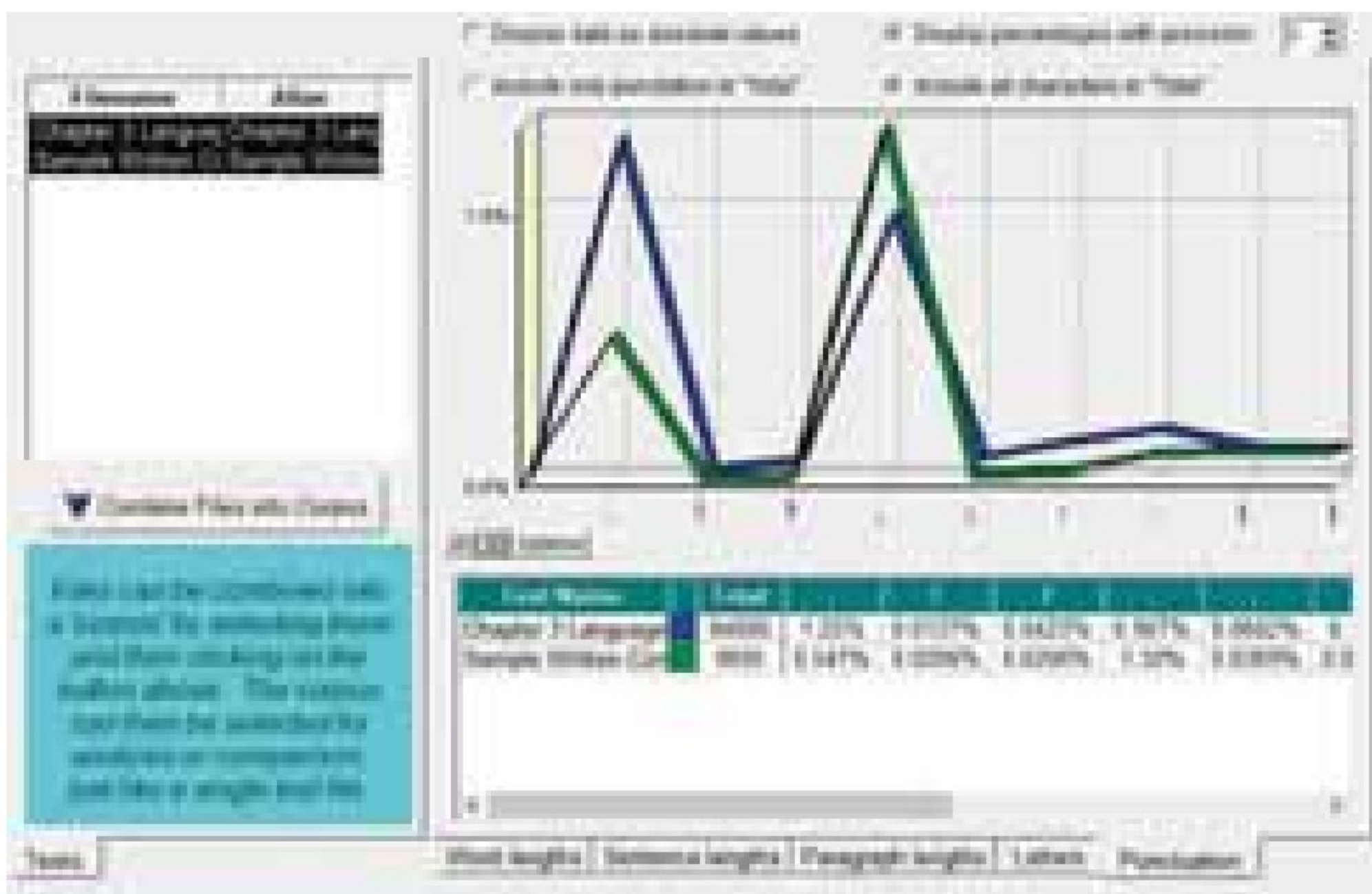
The graph shown below compares the frequency of use of all 26 letters of the alphabet. As you can see, the two graphs are almost completely identical. The odds of such a match being coincidental between two works by the same author are extremely low.



■ Graph comparing the frequency of use of all 26 letters of the alphabet in two texts

© Peter Millican

The final graph, which shows punctuation use, is below.



■ Graph showing the difference between use of punctuation in two texts

© Peter Millican

Once again, we get a similar graph. The differences are probably accounted for to some degree by the length of the two works: the draft chapter was a total of 40 single-spaced typed pages, and the sample essay comprised five double-spaced pages. You can see for yourself that the probability that those two documents were written by the same person is extremely high. We must remember, of course, that this is a comparison between only two documents, but we can already predict that if we ran more, we would more likely see a stronger correlation than a weaker one.

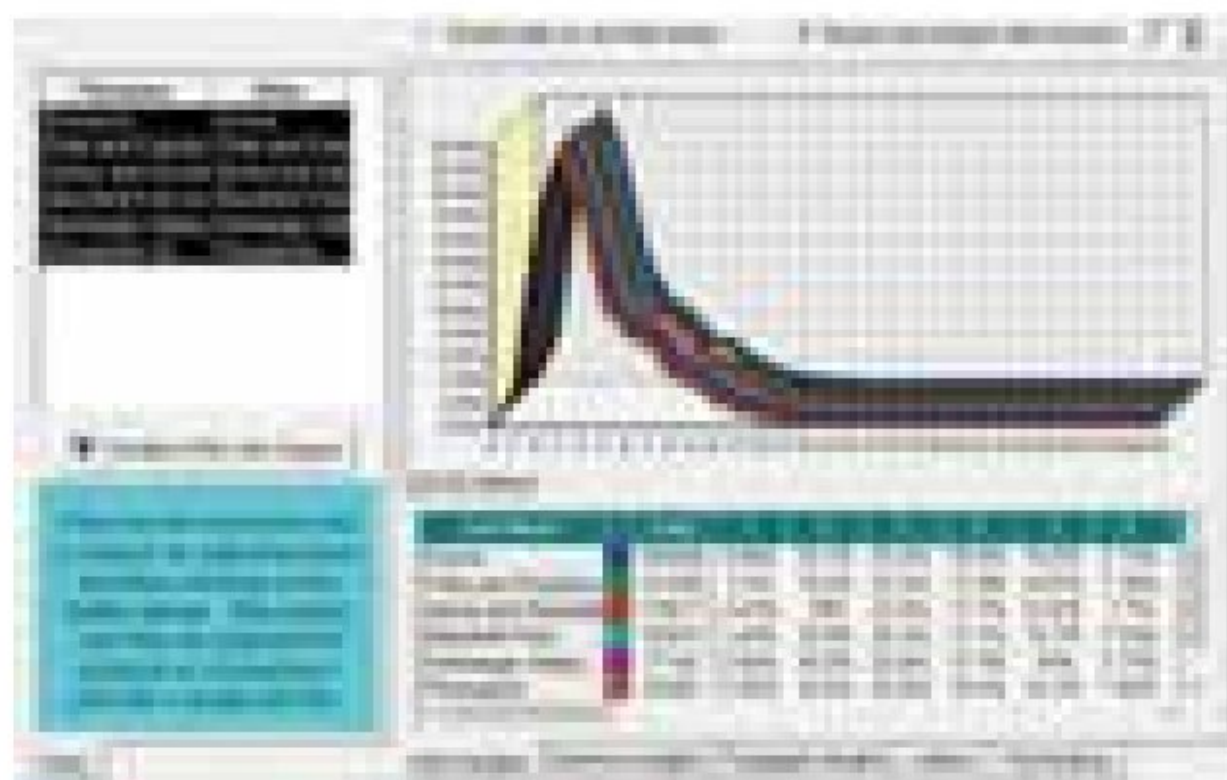
An interesting thing to notice about the graph of the relative use of punctuation is that it reveals something about the way a writer constructs sentences. This writer, for example, seldom uses question marks at all. On the other hand, she uses as many – and in one of the texts more – commas in place of full stops, which suggests a fairly large number of **compound sentences** (sentences that are constructed of two or more **independent clauses**, connected by that comma and a conjunction). This graph also reveals a fairly idiosyncratic pattern of the use of colons and dashes, which again suggests that she tends to write fairly complex sentences.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

IDENTITY

When we think about what a text reveals about the identity of the author, we are usually thinking of what we can learn from studying the content – the ideas contained in the text. What the linguistic analysis shows us is that we can also learn something about an author's identity from his or her style. Does the writer think in long, complicated sentences? In short, pithy thoughts? Does the author develop long, intricate paragraphs or short, punchy ones? We get a little glimpse of how a writer's mind works when we consider the structural elements of his or her writing style.

For an example that takes into account a lot more text, below are two graphs showing the similarities among Jane Austen's six novels. The first graph shows the comparison of word lengths, and the second graph shows the comparison of the usage of letters.



■ Graph comparing word lengths in six of Jane Austen's novels

© Peter Millican

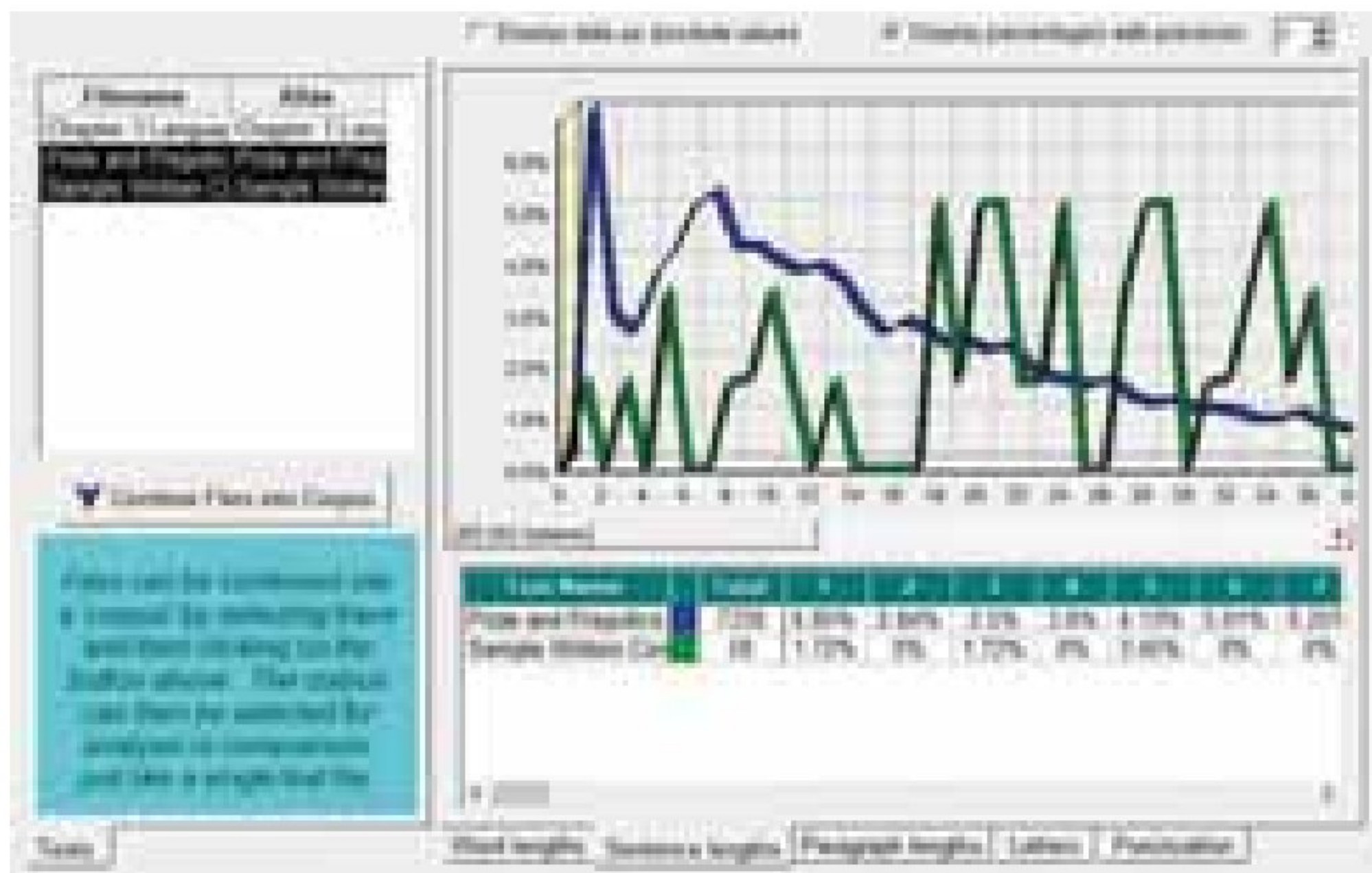


■ Graph comparing use of all letters in the alphabet across six of Jane Austen's novels

© Peter Millican

The similarities of these two features across six novels is quite astonishing. No one could reasonably believe that these works were written by different people.

No one graph by itself could be fully convincing; surely, for example, the frequency of the use of letters must have something to do with the frequency in which those letters occur in the English language in general. But if we graph five different features – word length, sentence length, paragraph length, letters, and punctuation – for all six novels, we can see that coincidence alone cannot account for the overall signature (hence the name of the program). To give one example of the dramatic difference between two writers, here is a comparison of the Language A written commentary (used previously) with *Pride and Prejudice* in terms of sentence length:



- Graph comparing sentence lengths between *Pride and Prejudice* and a Language A written commentary

© Peter Millican

This aspect of style is not in any way constrained by the nature of the language itself. It is purely a matter of an author's personal preference, and you can see how dramatically different the use of sentences is between these two writers.

ACTIVITY 3

Discussion

What do you think of the use of technology in order to analyse style? Is it helpful to you as a reader, or is it only useful for the kind of investigation that was undertaken to identify JK Rowling as the real author of the Robert Galbraith books? Even if you don't run the software on texts that you read, what has this demonstration of the technology revealed to you about how style manifests in a work of literature?

The fact that authors have such highly individualized writing styles is of value to readers because they can learn to recognize a writer's style. The more familiar you are with any one writer's style, the more easily you can interpret any future work you read by that author. You can also compare and contrast styles in different works that you study, which will help you to appreciate the endless flexibility of the English language, as well as the vast array of effects that authors can create.

ACTIVITY 4**Textual comparison practice**

If you would like to try some textual comparisons yourself, you can download the software for free via the QR code in the margin.



Project Gutenberg has over 58,000 texts in the public domain that you can use to try this exercise, if you wish. Try running works from two authors you think have either quite different or quite similar styles and see how the graphs come out.

● TOK Links: Mathematics and the arts

It is easy to think that the knowledge-making processes in mathematics and in the arts are so different that they cannot have anything to do with each other, but we have seen here that, in the past decade or so, a need has arisen for the mathematical analysis of literary texts. Looking at the charts shown on the previous pages can be fun, but this kind of analysis can also be used very seriously.

Shortly before Barack Obama was elected as president of the United States in 2008, someone floated a claim that terrorist Bill Ayers was the real author of Obama's memoir, *Dreams of my Father*. Millican, the same man who worked on the JK Rowling question, ran

the analysis and proved that that claim was not true (Hughes). The other person who worked on the Rowling case, Patrick Juola at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, was once involved in a court case that involved establishing the authorship of some anonymous newspaper articles. The reason the authorship became important is because the articles were critical of a foreign government, and the man who wrote them was about to be deported back to that country with the police waiting on his arrival. Juola was able to establish it was his authorship to the satisfaction of the judge and the man was not deported (Hughes). It is possible that this linguistic analysis saved his life.

● EE Links: The linguistic analysis of text

Comparing and contrasting the linguistic analyses of two texts with an eye to identifying the specific differences in style would make for an interesting study for the extended essay.

■ How style contributes to meaning

So far, we have looked at the fact that authors have a distinctive style, like a fingerprint, but that applies on a larger scale to works as a whole. At any given moment in a book, an author can choose to write something in a particular style in order to create a specific effect. The next passage is the opening paragraph from the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *All the King's Men*, by Robert Penn Warren, former poet laureate of the United States.

MASON CITY

To get there you follow Highway 58, going northeast out of the city, and it is a good highway and new. Or was new, that day we went up it. You look up the highway and it is straight for miles, coming at you, with the black line down the center coming at and at you, black and slick and tarry-shining against the white of the slab, and the heat dazzles up from the white slab so that only the black line is clear, coming
5 at you with the whine of the tires, and if you don't quit staring at that line and don't take a few deep breaths and slap yourself hard on the back of the neck you'll hypnotize yourself and you'll come to just at the moment when the right front wheel hooks over into the black dirt shoulder off the slab, and you'll try to jerk her back on but you can't because the slab is high like a curb, and maybe you'll try to reach to turn off the ignition just as she starts the dive. But you won't make it, of course.

(Robert Penn Warren 3)

This is a remarkable piece of writing, if only for the tremendous length of that second sentence. The first sentence is 21 words long, but the second is 160 words. The truly amazing thing is that it is not a run-on sentence (a sentence which got away from the writer); instead, the sentence has been carefully crafted to accomplish at least two things.

First, the sentence recreates for the reader the experience of being in the car on a long straight highway in the sun with the road ahead of you without any end in sight. The sentence, too, comes at you without any end in sight; it was constructed in such a way as to mimic the sensation that it describes, with clauses strung together one after the other, creating the impression that it will keep going forever. The style of the sentence helps us to understand the meaning that the author wanted us to get – that feeling of driving on an endlessly straight road for a long time and becoming mesmerized without any apparent end. It is a beautiful example of **form fitting function**; the form of the sentence reflects its meaning.

Secondly, that long sentence reveals a great deal to us about the narrator and how his mind works. You will find, if you read the entire novel, that the story is ultimately more about the narrator, Jack Burden, than it is about the people he seems to focus on, and the narration becomes essential for us to understand the narrator's character. Here, in the very first paragraph of the novel, we know nothing at all about Jack, his life or his history, but right away we get a striking portrayal of his powers of observation, his vibrant imagination and his deep sense of fatalism. He begins by describing one particular car journey (line 2), but he immediately universalizes the description with the present tense – the road was that way on that day, but it is always that way. By line 6, however, Jack has shifted his description into the realm of the hypothetical – he describes what could (and would) happen if the driver allowed himself to become hypnotized. The crash, as he imagines it, is inevitable and fatal.

Robert Penn Warren

Robert Penn Warren was born in Kentucky in 1905 and grew up in the shadow of the American Civil War; both his grandfathers had fought in it on the side of the Confederacy. That very strong sense of Southern heritage remained with him all his life and coloured his work (Bohner). Warren was set to enter the US Naval Academy when he was victim of a freak accident: he was hit by a stone thrown by his brother and permanently lost the sight in his right eye. This loss devastated him and changed the direction in which he had been intending to go. He ended up at Vanderbilt University, where he met some young literary talents who encouraged his writing, ultimately leading to his determination to embark on a career as a writer (Bohner). This decision turned out to be a good one, not only for him personally, but also for the world of letters. He wrote poetry, novels, essays, biography, literary criticism and textbooks. He won more than 30 different honours over the course of his 60-year career, including the Pulitzer Prize twice – once for fiction and once for poetry, the only author to be so recognized ('Robert Penn Warren') – as well as the National Medal of Arts.

Now let's contrast this paragraph to another paragraph about a car journey. This excerpt comes from Kathleen Jamie's essay 'The Woman in the Field', from her collection *Sightlines: A Conversation With the Natural World*.

Then one day in May 1979, it may even have been my seventeenth birthday, I sat my last, lacklustre exam and left school without much ceremony or much notion of a personal future. A day or two later, my mother drove me the thirty miles from our house into rural Perthshire. She had suggested librarianship, which was the stock idea for a kid who read books. I did read books: the paperback
 5 stuffed into my haversack on the back seat was by Tom Wolfe – *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. She suggested secretarial college. When she said these things, tears of belligerent dismay pricked at my eyes. No one suggested university.

The route we followed in the family VW Passat was almost the same, I now realise, to that which separates the sites where the two decorated food vessels were found. We, too, travelled by river valley and hill-pass.
 10 We followed the motorway upriver to Stirling, skirted the edge of the Ochil Hills, dipped into Strathallan and crossed the Allan Water, and continued through farmland and old villages. It was an alien land. We drove narrow roads shaded by huge trees, passing the driveways and gates to secluded private houses larger than either of us had ever entered. Blue election posters were still nailed to roadside trees, but they would soon be removed. They'd done their work – ten days before, Margaret Thatcher had been voted into office.

15 There must have been an exchange of letters and directions. I must have seen an advert recruiting volunteers, applied, and been told to turn up at this mid-May date. I remember nothing of that except that I had to bring a trowel, 'cast not welded'. I had no idea what that meant, except that it seemed suggestive of the ancient magic of metalwork. It meant only that cast trowels were stronger, and there would be a lot of trowel work.

20 We crossed the Earn by a lovely old four-arched bridge, then took the right turn under a road lined with tall pines. On the right, the river; on the left, after half a mile, an unremarkable farm track began. We turned in, the track at once sloped uphill, and led quickly onto a level terrace of farmland. Suddenly, when we crested the rise, there appeared the long ridge of the Ochils, five miles away and blocking any view further south. This low but determined range of hills formed the entire horizon. To the north, more hills,
 25 higher and jagged, the beginning of the Highlands. All of this – the crossing of rivers, the terrace of land, the encircling raised horizon was relevant, but I didn't know it then.

(Kathleen Jamie 46–7)

ACTIVITY 5

Check for understanding

Before you read one interpretation of the contrast between Robert Penn Warren's style and Kathleen Jamie's, try it for yourself. What do you notice about how each writer uses description to portray a journey on a road in a car?

The style here is quite different from what Warren did in *All the King's Men*. Instead of the long sentence suggesting the road coming towards you, and inevitably destroying you, Jamie's style relies on much shorter sentences, with ideas connected by commas, rather than by 'and.' The effect of the commas is to suggest an interconnection between the ideas, rather than the sequential arrival of separate things, which is what the repeated 'and' does in Warren's work.

Rather than moving from the personal to the universal to the imaginary, as Jack does, Jamie's description of the road remains anchored in one time, but her description of the events in her life moves back and forth in time from her immediate past to her anticipated immediate future. At the very end of the excerpt, Jamie foreshadows an idea that she would learn much later and, in so doing, she alerts us to the **symbolic** significance of the elements of the journey she has been describing. Jack's description was literal. The road and the car will, as the novel goes on, take on some symbolic significance, but it has not done so yet.

Jamie's essay digresses from talking about the actual road she was on to the scenery around her and the various events in her life that have brought her to this road. The digressions from the actual journey are central to the meaning in the passage, however. By interpolating bits of the story of her finishing school and starting the volunteer work which will require her to use a trowel (on an archaeological dig) into the detailed description of the ride in the car, Jamie makes the two kinds of journeys parallel: the car journey and the journey into adulthood from the end of school. So we can see, from looking at these two descriptions of journeys, that the key stylistic differences have to do with the length and structure of sentences, the use of description for different purposes, and the attitude towards time. In Warren's novel, the style of the paragraph helps the reader to experience the events being described in a much more visceral way; in Jamie's essay, the style of the excerpt helps the reader to see the interconnectedness and the symbolism of the things she is describing.

Kathleen Jamie

Born in Renfrewshire, Scotland, Kathleen Jamie studied Philosophy in college at Edinburgh University. She describes her background as having been ordinary, Scottish, and non-literary ('About Kathleen Jamie'). She has a deep connection to the world of nature and interest in archaeology, art, and medical humanities, all of which inform her work ('About Kathleen Jamie'). She has written both poetry and non-fiction; her non-fiction includes a travel book called *Among Muslims*, about a journey she took to Northern Pakistan. She has won a number of literary prizes, including the Somerset Maugham Award, a Forward Poetry Prize (which she won twice: once for best poem and once for best poetry collection) and the Scottish Arts Council Best Book of the Year Award in 2005. She says of herself:

'Do you consider yourself a woman writer or a Scottish writer?' is a question I can no longer answer politely. Just last week, in a tiny magazine, I read a description of my work which delighted me. It said 'Kathleen Jamie – somewhere between the Presbyterian and the Tao'.

('Kathleen Jamie')

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A global issue that you might explore in relation to the field of inquiry of science, technology and the environment could be the question of whether the technologies we build have alienated us from nature in ways that are harmful to ourselves, or whether they have allowed us to get closer to nature. Both Kathleen Jamie's essay and Robert Penn Warren's novel show people in the context of human technologies that have allowed them to conquer the land. The vision of those technologies is rather

different however. In Warren's novel, the road poses a danger to humans, while in Jamie's essay, it offers opportunities. When you prepare a global issue, remember that you must be able to discuss it in the context of the entire work, as well as in the context of the particular passage you choose for your individual oral. You must also use one work studied in translation, so you could not use these two works together in your individual oral.

In Chapter 1.3, we looked at how authors use language in order to create characters. That, too, is an aspect of style, but it is style which is deployed deliberately for a particular effect, rather than the author's more personal style. Here, we have considered some additional elements of style, including the level of vocabulary that an author uses, as well as the kinds of sentences he or she favours. Sentence structure is also an element of our next topic: the ways in which the structure of a literary text affects its meaning.

Structure in literary texts

Structure refers to the way a literary text is organized. The term also reminds us of the kind of supporting element of a building or bridge: the structure must be a good one if the building is going to hold together so that people can live and work in it safely. The same is true of the structure of a literary work. The structure isn't just random, nor is it incidental; the structure must hold the text together so that it can do its job effectively. Quite a variety of textual elements can contribute to the structure of a text: the order in which events or topics are presented, formal structural elements such as stanzas and chapters, sentence structure, the use of time (including flashbacks and foreshadowing), even rhyme and **meter** can be important elements of structure. At a minimum, the structure of a literary work guides the reader through the work. At its most sophisticated, the structure of a work contributes directly to its meaning.

■ Structure in poetry

Poetry is unique among the four literary forms you will study in that there are several formal, recognizable forms that poets can choose from when planning their work. These include the:

- sonnet
- villanelle
- ballad
- sestina
- lyric
- ode
- elegy.

But there are many more. Poems can also be written in **blank verse** (as we saw with Shakespeare) or **free verse**, which is poetry without any rules about rhythm or meter. We do not have the space, in this chapter, to go over all the forms in any depth. You should be aware, however, that any poem you approach might have been written in a recognized form and, if so, you will need to find out what the standards are for that form, so that you can understand how that particular poet has chosen to use it – especially if there are deviations away from the standard. In this chapter, we will look at sonnet form, specifically, to demonstrate how poets start with the standard form and then manipulate it to suit their purposes. It is very often in the changes made to the formal structure that the clues to the poet's meaning lie.

Earlier in this chapter we looked at Shakespeare's Sonnet 116, but we did not discuss its structure. The sonnet form was first developed in Italy and was a well-known poetic form by the thirteenth century, made famous by a poet named Petrarch, whose version of the 14-line poem consisted of an octet (an 8-line stanza) followed by a sestet (a 6-line stanza). Petrarch also established a rhyme scheme of ABBA ABBA CDE CDE. Shakespeare took that sonnet and transformed it into what is now known as the English (or Shakespearean) sonnet: three **quatrains** (4-line stanzas) followed by a couplet (a rhyming pair of lines) using the rhyme scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

The following sonnet by Carol Ann Duffy uses the sonnet form for a specific purpose, and the changes that she made to the Shakespearean sonnet for this poem reveal some of the important ideas in the poem. The context of the poem is given in the **epigraph** – the short quotation before the poem starts. An epigraph is not part of the actual poem, but it does provide information that the poet wants us to think of as we read. In this particular case, Duffy wants us to remember that Shakespeare famously did not mention his wife, Anne Hathaway, in his will, except in this one short line at the end. Reams have been written about what that act suggests: some people say that it shows that Shakespeare and his wife did not get on, and some people have argued that the second-best bed would have been the marriage bed and, as such, was a gift of great sentimental value. In this poem, Duffy is going to take a side in the argument by creating Anne Hathaway herself as the speaker of this sonnet.

Anne Hathaway

'Item I gyve unto my wief my second best bed...'
(from Shakespeare's will)

	The bed we loved in was a spinning world	A
	of forests, castles, torchlight, cliff-tops, seas	B
	where he would dive for pearls. My lover's words	A
	were shooting stars which fell to earth as kisses	B
5	on these lips; my body now a softer rhyme	C
	to his, now echo, assonance; his touch	D
	a verb dancing in the centre of a noun.	E
	Some nights I dreamed he'd written me, the bed	F
	a page beneath his writer's hands. Romance	G
10	and drama played by touch, by scent, by taste.	H
	In the other bed, the best, our guests dozed on,	E
	dribbling their prose. My living laughing love –	I
	I hold him in the casket of my widow's head	F
	as he held me upon that next best bed.	F

(Carol Ann Duffy)

Duffy's imaginary Anne Hathaway tells us that the bed was a precious gift, symbolic of all that was wonderful about their marriage. The language of the poem makes her life with Shakespeare, and especially their love life, into a wondrous adventure full of romance and poetry. The beautiful contrast that the imagined Hathaway makes by describing their guests in the best bed as 'dribbling their prose' (line 12) underlines the fact that she experienced her marriage as something extraordinary, well beyond the bounds of what most people get out of a marriage.

● TOK Links: History and the arts

What does this poem reveal to us about the different goals of history and the arts, and what does it suggest about the different methods used in each area of knowledge?

The structure of the poem supports this idea. It is a Shakespearean sonnet; there are 14 lines and some of them, such as line 2, are perfect **iambic pentameter**. As you will know, this is a rhythm consisting of 10 syllables per line, with every other syllable stressed. (For a much more detailed investigation into iambic pentameter and other formal systems of meter, you may wish to read

Literary Analysis for English Literature for the IB Diploma: Skills for Success by Carolyn P. Henly and Angela Stancar Johnson, also published by Hodder Education.)

We can see that line 2 fits the pattern of iambic pentameter perfectly (see below: the **U** indicates an unstressed syllable and the **/** indicates a stressed one).

U / U / U / U / U /
of forests, castles, torchlight, cliff-tops, seas

Some of the lines in the poem, however, do not fit that **meter**. Line 1, for instance, scans this way:

U / U / U U U / U /
The bed we loved in was a spinning world

Other lines which are not fully iambic are lines 4, 5, 7, 11 and 12.

Another way in which Duffy has changed the sonnet form is that the rhyme scheme does not follow the pattern we expect. We have indicated the rhyme scheme of this sonnet in the full text on page 121, and you can see clearly that there are only four rhyming sounds instead of seven, and even those are presented as **slant rhymes** (words which almost rhyme). ‘World’ and ‘words’, ‘seas’ and ‘kisses’, and ‘noun’ and ‘on’ do not really rhyme with each other, though the sounds are close. Only the words ‘bed’ and ‘head’ have a full rhyme, which in total appear on three lines, including the rhymed couplet at the end.

The question for the curious reader then becomes: ‘Why did Duffy make these changes to the traditional sonnet structure?’ We have to assume that Duffy knows perfectly well what the traditional form is and that she could write a perfectly formed sonnet if she wanted to. We also have to consider that in this poem, the speaker is not a generic voice narrating essentially for Duffy; the speaker is Anne Hathaway, the wife of the world’s most famous sonneteer, but not someone who was known to be a poet. She says, at line 8, that she thinks Shakespeare has written her – that is, to some degree, she is his creation. Anne has been shaped by her association with him. Because she lived with him and loved him, she has become something of a poet herself, though not nearly as good a one as Shakespeare was. She has tried to write a sonnet and she has gotten quite a few of the bits right, but not all of them. Significantly, she did get the couplet at the end right. That rhyme is a full rhyme, and so the couplet becomes a **symbol** for the way that this couple got along together in marriage.

Duffy, then, has used the sonnet structure very carefully. She has not written a bad sonnet; she has instead created a narrator who has written the best sonnet that she can because she wanted to pay tribute to her husband. Through the structure of the poem, we see the love that, according to Duffy, Anne Hathaway had for her husband.

ACTIVITY 6

Understanding meter

Before moving on to the next section, which investigates the use of meter, check your understanding of the basic concept by completing these exercises.

This is a line of perfect iambs – that is, alternating unstressed and stressed syllables – and comes from Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 18’. Mark the syllables using a ‘/’ to indicate stressed syllables and a ‘U’ to indicate unstressed syllables:

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?

This next excerpt comes from Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 29’ and is mostly iambs (unstressed/stressed); however, in one place the pattern is reversed (stressed/unstressed). This pattern is called a trochee. See if you can find that one **trochee**. Mark the syllables using a ‘/’ to indicate stressed syllables and a ‘U’ to indicate unstressed syllables:

I all alone beweepe my outcast state

Now try one without being told what the metrical feet are. (All the feet are either iambs or trochees, however – no tricks!)

Twinkle twinkle little star

You can look at the notes on page 421 in order to check your work.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

TRANSFORMATION

In this poem, Duffy has created a **perspective** which is not her own, but which achieves the goal of generating empathy in the reader. She has transformed not only the Shakespearean sonnet form, but also all the negative speculation about Anne Hathaway’s relationship with her very famous husband. This poem is not history; it is art. Duffy imagines a possible reality for Anne Hathaway and William Shakespeare. Since we have virtually no historical evidence to help us know what their relationship was actually like, beyond that one line in Shakespeare’s will, this possibility is no more or less likely than other possibilities. Art allows for this kind of transformation because art does not try to give us the reality of historical fact; it gives us imagined universes that *could* be true.

CAS Links: Creativity

Having studied Duffy’s poem, you could create a film which would transform the poem into a modern form such as a vlog or a newscast. You could then consider how this further transformation – from history to poetry to video – affects the ideas that are portrayed in the new medium.

Duffy’s poem, ‘Anne Hathaway’, is a great example of how we can enrich our understanding of a literary text by paying careful attention to the structure. However, the structure of a poem does not always play as integral a role in conveying meaning. In this next poem, by Boris Pasternak, we can see that there are several elements of structure in play, but that while understanding structure can help us to appreciate some aspects of Pasternak’s meaning, the structure does not reveal as much as it does in the previous poem.

Garden

	The drowsy garden scatters insects	9
	Bronze as the ash from braziers blown.	8
	Level with me and with my candle,	9
	Hang flowering worlds, their leaves full-grown.	8
5	As into some unheard-of dogma	9
	I move across into this night,	8
	Where a worn poplar age has grizzled	9
	Screens the moon's strip of fallow light,	8
	Where the pond lies, an open secret,	9
10	Where apple-bloom is surf and sigh,	8
	And where the garden, a lake-dwelling,	9
	Holds out in front of it the sky.	8

(Boris Pasternak)

This is a **lyric poem**. The speaker is not telling a story; he is recreating the experience of walking in the garden at night. He gives us the sensory detail of what he sees and hears so that we can imagine what it is like to be there with him. We can analyse elements of structure to see what role they play in helping the speaker convey that sense of being out in the dark, among the flowers, trees and insects – in this case, we will focus on stanza structure, rhyme scheme and meter.

We can see right away that this poem is not a sonnet, although it has some similarities. The poem's structure is divided evenly into three **quatrains**. In addition, it consists of only 12 lines instead of the 14 that a sonnet should have.

The rhyme scheme only involves half of the lines of the poem; the second and fourth lines of each stanza rhyme with each other.

The poem is not written in **iambic pentameter**; the number of syllables in each line has been shown to the right of the poem. We see that none of the lines have 10 syllables, but the number of syllables per line is very regular throughout each stanza. However, you do have to pronounce 'flowering' as 'flow'ring' to get the 8-syllable line at the end of the first stanza. 'Flow'ring' is a very natural pronunciation, though, so we do not find it awkward. The **meter** (the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables) is not regular, as we can see when we mark the stressed (/) and unstressed (U) syllables above each word of the poem:

Garden

U / U / U / U / U
 The drowsy garden scatters insects
 / UU / U / U /
 Bronze as the ash from braziers blown.
 / U U / U / U / U
 Level with me and with my candle,

/ / U / U / / /
 Hang flowering worlds, their leaves full-grown.

U / U U U / U / U
 5 As into some unheard-of dogma

/ / U / U / U /
 I move across into this night,
 U U / / U / U / U
 Where a worn poplar age has grizzled
 / U / / U / U /
 Screens the moon's strip of fallow light,

/ U / / U / U / U
 Where the pond lies, an open secret,
 / / U / U / U /
 10 Where apple-bloom is surf and sigh,
 U / U / U U / / U
 And where the garden, a lake-dwelling,
 / / U / U U U /
 Holds out in front of it the sky.

When you don't have a regular meter (such as **iambic pentameter**) to work with, you have to approach the analysis by considering the effect of having certain words and lines stressed and certain ones unstressed, and by looking for any pattern that gets broken. In the case of 'Garden', we see that there is no obvious repeated pattern of syllables from one line to the next, or from one stanza to the next. We will have to look more closely to see if we can discover any patterns.

The poem opens with a perfectly metrical line: four iambs followed by an unstressed syllable. An extra unstressed syllable at the end of a line is called a **feminine ending**. In this poem, all the nine-syllable lines – the first and third lines in each stanza – have an extra syllable at the end, after four two-syllable **feet**. You can see that in each case that syllable is unstressed, so all the nine-syllable lines have feminine endings. We can also see that, regardless of what pattern of stresses the lines have – and they vary quite a bit – all the eight-syllable lines end with a stressed syllable. The poem, then, not only alternates unrhymed lines with rhymed ones, it alternates feminine endings with stressed endings.

If the meter were iambic (unstressed syllables alternating with stressed syllables) or **trochaic** (stressed syllables alternating with unstressed syllables), we would get an even number of each type in every line – except for the **feminine endings**. Only one line has that pattern: the very first, which is made up of iambs. After that, all the lines vary. Some lines, however, have more stressed syllables than we would expect (lines 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10).

Now that we have noticed all of these features, we can try to assess what they might mean in terms of our understanding of the poem.

All three stanzas are the same length, which suggests that, even though the focus of the poet's attention might change, something remains stable. The first stanza focuses on things in the garden providing the action, while the speaker stays still. First the garden 'scatters' insects, then flowering worlds 'hang'. In the second stanza, the speaker moves, but the garden is still taking action – it

screens the light of the moon. We have had the contrast between the speaker's candle and the moon in the first two stanzas. So what stays the same is that the speaker is out in the garden with a small light, trying to see, but the garden is the thing which has power. Based on the events in these two stanzas, we can give them descriptive titles like 'the garden universe' and 'casting shadows'. Those titles are not official, of course, but giving sections of a work a title can help you understand clearly how the piece is developing.

The rhyme words, which are all single-syllable stressed words, are 'blown' and 'grown', and 'night' and 'light.' The stress on those words helps us to notice the important elements of the stanzas – things which are more powerful, or more alive, perhaps, than the speaker. The first three lines of the first stanza each have four stresses, but the last line has five. That pattern makes the last line stand out a little more than the others, and so our attention is focused on the 'flowering worlds' which are 'full-grown'. The garden has been made larger than we normally think of gardens as being. This one contains whole worlds, fully developed. The stresses in that last line point to the fact that this garden is much larger than the speaker, and therefore much more significant.

In the second stanza, the first line has only three stresses, but the second line has five. That is an interesting observation, because that is the line in which the speaker moves out into the garden – his one and only action. The stresses signal this rather bold step on the part of the speaker. In the third line, however, we find four stresses and, in the last line, five. It is as if the pattern of stresses (in line 7) reveals that the speaker's one move fades away. By the last line of this stanza (line 8) the garden has taken charge again. The tree screens the light, so that the speaker is left in shadow.

ACTIVITY 7

Analysing the final stanza

Now that we have worked through the first two stanzas, try analysing the role of structure in the final stanza of Pasternak's poem, and answer these questions:

- 1 This final stanza, too, has four lines. What do you think that suggests about its relationship to the first two stanzas? What remains the same? What sort of descriptive title might you give this last stanza?
- 2 Do you notice anything significant about the rhymed words?
- 3 In the last stanza, the pattern of stresses by line is 5–5–4–4. What do the extra stresses indicate in terms of what is happening in the poem?

When you have answered the questions, you can compare your answers to the notes on page 421.

Boris Pasternak

Boris Leonidovich Pasternak was born in Moscow in 1890. His parents were both artists – his father a painter and his mother a concert pianist ('Boris Pasternak'). Like many young people, Pasternak had some difficulty deciding what to do with his life. He studied music for six years ('Boris Pasternak – Biographical'), but by the time he was 22 he had decided not to pursue that any longer and went to Germany to study philosophy. That endeavour only lasted a few months before he returned to Russia and dedicated himself to literature. It took about a decade before his work attracted critical acclaim ('Boris Pasternak – Biographical'), but after that, he published a long string of successes in various genres, including poetry, essay, memoir and, in 1957, his most famous work, *Doctor*



Zhivago. He is also famous as a translator of works into Russian – perhaps most notably the entire works of William Shakespeare. Pasternak’s life was affected in significant ways by the Bolshevik Revolution: in 1922, his family escaped to Germany and, except for a short visit that year, Pasternak never saw them again, although he tried every year to get permission to go to Germany (‘Boris Pasternak’). After Stalin came to power, the government took control over all the arts and decided what would and would not be published. Pasternak was able to publish poetry, but not prose; *Doctor Zhivago*, which glorified the freedom and independence which had been lost in Russia, was subsequently smuggled out of the country and published in Italy (‘Boris Pasternak’). Pasternak won the Nobel Prize in Literature the year after *Doctor Zhivago* was published. He initially agreed to accept the prize, but then changed his mind and turned it down amid negative reactions (including expulsion) from the Union of Soviet Writers (Shapiro). The Nobel Committee nevertheless officially awarded the prize to Pasternak, without holding a ceremony.

■ Structure in prose

Neither prose fiction nor **non-fiction** has any kind of standard formal structures that writers can call on in the same way that poets can call on structures such as sonnet or villanelle. There are, nevertheless, some elements of structure that recur in many **prose** works which you can look for to help you interpret a text. We cannot, in the space available in this chapter, work through a structural analysis of a whole novel or short story, or even a non-fiction essay. We can, however, name some of the most common elements of structure to help you know what to look for.

Chronological order

A story which is told in chronological order is one which is told, as the saying goes, by starting at the beginning and going on until the end, and then stopping. This structure is not very commonly used, and so it is useful to the reader to look for where this basic story structure is altered.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a fairly common technique, used to alert readers to something that is coming later. Sometimes foreshadowing is given to the reader in a very obvious way – perhaps the narrator will say something along the lines of ‘I came to realize later that this was the moment when I should have known what was going to happen’. Such an announcement alerts the reader to go back and re-read whatever just happened to see if you can pick up the clue that the narrator, when the events actually happened, missed. Sometimes, though, foreshadowing is much more subtle than that. In the passage from Kathleen Jamie’s essay ‘The Woman in the Field’, on page 118, we see in lines 16–19 that she uses the mention of the trowel to foreshadow something that will come later in the essay. When she says that there would be a lot of work with a trowel, we are alerted to keep an eye out for what that work might be and why it is important enough to the essay that we are given early warning of its presence.

Flashback

Flashback is a very common device for organizing the sequence of events in a work of prose. In F Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, for example, we know from the beginning that the whole story is going to be a flashback, because the narrator, Nick Carraway, tells us immediately that he is going to recall the story of events that happened before he came back home, a year ago. Even within the story of that past we get more flashbacks, to a time five years earlier still, when Jay Gatsby first met Daisy Buchanan. When you, as a reader, notice that the structural device of a flashback is being used, you know that you are being shown some event that was part of the cause of what is happening in the narrator’s present day – or at least in the main part of his or her story – so you need to be on the lookout for what the connection is between the old events and the new.

A frame story

Some works, especially novels, will use a frame story as a structural device. This is a story that appears at the beginning and end of a book, but which is not directly part of the main story. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* are great examples of novels with frame stories. In each case, the main story that appears in the middle influences the events in the frame. In Shelley's book, Dr Frankenstein, who has been chasing his monster all over the world, ends up on a ship which, while trying to find the northwest passage, has become frozen in ice. Dr Frankenstein tells the captain and crew the whole story of his experience in creating the monster and watching it turn to evil. The story serves as a model for the captain of the ship, who has to make a decision about whether to forge ahead when the ice melts or whether to turn back. His decision is influenced by what he hears from Dr Frankenstein. That is a very typical use of a frame story, so whenever you encounter one, you should be looking for ways in which the main story parallels the events of the frame, and then look to see if and how the events of the frame are influenced by the central story.

A journey

If you encounter a narrative in which a journey takes place, then you should be asking yourself whether the journey is in fact a quest. In a quest, the person making the journey ventures out thinking that he or she is trying to achieve one thing, but ends up achieving (or failing to achieve, if the story is a **tragedy**) something else. The character will encounter obstacles along the way, and he or she will end up changed in some fundamental way. Any time you encounter any journey – such as the car journeys we looked at earlier in the chapter – you should be asking yourself if that structural device is meant to alert you to some major changes in the character's situation. If you want to learn more about the quest structure, you can read Joseph Campbell's work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. You can also investigate the structure of a full-length **prose** work by looking at the chapter titles and considering what they suggest about any important ideas that are in that chapter. If there aren't chapter titles, or if you are working with a short story or an essay, you can do what we did with Pasternak's poem and figure out where sections of the piece begin and end. Then give them a name for yourself to use as a means of identifying what important ideas are in each section and consider how they develop throughout the whole work.

ACTIVITY 8

Discussion

Think of two novels or short stories with which you are familiar. Discuss with a partner the important elements of structure that the authors of those works used to help represent their meaning.

Structure in drama

Unlike prose, drama does have a recognized structure – at least, many playwrights begin with a recognized structure and then manipulate it to their own needs. The elements of dramatic structure are as follows.

Opening balance

This is the situation in the fictional world at the beginning of the play. People might not be happy, but there is a status quo to which the characters have been accustomed. In Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, for example, the opening balance is a situation in which the best friend of King Leontes, Polixenes, has been visiting Leontes's kingdom, Sicilia, for the better part of a year.

Disturbance

This is something that happens to upset the balance and force the characters to deal with an unexpected problem. In *The Winter's Tale*, King Leontes decides, for pretty much no reason at all, that Polixenes must be the father of Queen Hermione's baby, and Leontes turns hysterical, planning murder and locking his wife up in prison.

Protagonist

This is the character who creates the plan for dealing with the disturbance. The plan:

- contains an objective which is the resolution to the problem, and
- contains steps to be taken.

Interestingly, given that he is the source of the problem, Leontes is also the protagonist here: his objective is to rid himself of all those who he believes have betrayed him. The steps he decides to take are that he will have Polixenes murdered and he will lock his wife up in prison. When the baby is born, he tries to have the baby killed as well, but he settles for having it abandoned in a foreign land. He sends for word from the Oracle at Delphi to justify all of his actions by proclaiming that Leontes is in the right.

Antagonist

Not every play has an antagonist, but many do. Where there is an antagonist, this is the character who is working consciously to stop the protagonist from implementing his or her plan. In *The Winter's Tale*, the antagonist is, rather surprisingly, Paulina, one of Queen Hermione's ladies in waiting. None of the men will stand up to Leontes while he's in his tyrannical rage, but Paulina does.

Obstacles

An obstacle is something which already exists in the fictional situation (the **fabula**) which interferes with the protagonist's ability to implement the plan. There might be one or more obstacles. The significant obstacle to Leontes' plan is that his suspicions are quite false. The Oracle will not send the message that he wishes for, because the Oracle always tells the truth. Another obstacle is that, because Polixenes is innocent, people will come forward to help Polixenes escape. Leontes' son and heir dies, presumably from grief over his mother, and Hermione herself dies when she finds out what has happened to her children. These obstacles, with all their subsequent consequences, turn the direction of the play, because when the Oracle reveals that Hermione is innocent, Paulina takes on the job of punishing Leontes for the death of his wife and children herself and, in doing so, *she* becomes the new protagonist.

Complications

A complication is something that arises as a result of the protagonist's effort to implement the plan and which interferes with the ability to employ the plan effectively. A complication that arises in *The Winter's Tale* occurs when Leontes sends the ship to abandon the baby in a foreign land. While one man, Antigonus, is ashore with the baby, completing this task, a storm rises up and sinks the ship they were on; at the same time, a bear kills and eats Antigonus, so the baby is left alive and is subsequently brought up by a shepherd in Bohemia, where she was abandoned.

Climax

The **climax** is the final complication which tips the balance in terms of whether the plan is going to be successful or not. If the climax can be dealt with effectively, the plan will succeed. If it cannot, the plan will fail. There is an interesting question with *The Winter's Tale* as to what we might call the climax. The puzzle for the audience arises because Shakespeare deftly weaves

the second plot – the story of the daughter growing up in a shepherd’s home in Bohemia, the kingdom over which Polixenes rules – into the first one. We might wish to call the sinking of the ship and the death of Antigonus the climax because, at that point, Leontes’ attempt to rid himself of all the results of the ‘betrayal’ fails. On the other hand, a great many complications arise out of the daughter’s being alive – she falls in love with Polixenes’ son and they have to flee together to Sicilia to escape Polixenes’ wrath. The daughter has no idea, of course, that she was born there. A climactic scene occurs at the end, which ultimately brings to a close all of the different plot lines.

Resolution

The resolution is the outcome of the plan and results in a new balance. If the plan ultimately succeeds in solving the problem, then we are likely to have a happy ending. If the plan did not solve the problem, we are likely to have an unhappy ending. It is a good idea to keep in mind, however, that the protagonist might have had a bad plan and, in that case, even if the plan succeeded, the ending might (ironically) be unhappy. Given that the initial disturbance was Leontes’ jealousy, we know that we have a final resolution (apparently) with the restoration of Leontes’ daughter to him, as well as the restoration of his friendship with Polixenes. There are a few clues right at the end, though, that suggest that this peaceful ending is only temporary, as Leontes, despite sixteen years of penance, seems inclined to return to his tyrannical decision-making.

Conflict

Conflict can arise almost anywhere: it might be conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist, or it might be part of the complications that arise from the effort to implement the plan, or a major conflict might even provide the **climax**. The conflict might be internal to the protagonist as well; it does not have to be a conflict between two different characters. In *The Winter’s Tale*, we have all different kinds of conflicts: we have the conflicts between Leontes and Hermione, between Leontes and Polixenes, and between Paulina and Polixenes. Later, in Bohemia, we have conflicts between Perdita, the daughter, and her father (her foster father, though only he knows that) and between Florizel, Polixenes’ son, and his father. We also have the people versus nature conflicts: the storm and the bear attacking the people who intended to leave the baby to die.

Suspense

Suspense arises when the playwright keeps the audience waiting to see what will happen next and, like conflict, it can occur at various places throughout a play. Every time a problem arises, whether it be the disturbance, an obstacle, or a complication, and we don’t know that the outcome is inevitable, we have suspense. One important moment of suspense in *The Winter’s Tale* comes when we see Perdita and Florizel fleeing Bohemia. We know (what they do not know) that Perdita is Leontes’ daughter and a perfectly acceptable bride for a king’s son, but we don’t know how it is all going to work out.

The structure of drama is most interesting when the playwright has manipulated it to his or her own purpose. We have seen in *The Winter’s Tale* that Leontes functions both as the disturbance and as the protagonist, but when he causes new problems, his antagonist, Paulina, becomes a protagonist for solving those problems. We have seen that Shakespeare has woven two different – but parallel – storylines together and given them one single resolution. When you are studying a play, it will be helpful for you to identify the elements of the structure of drama, but it will be more helpful for you to identify the places where the playwright has done something surprising with them.

For a detailed case study of how a playwright can alter the basic dramatic structure for his own purposes, you may wish to read *Literary Analysis for English Literature for the IB Diploma: Skills for Success* by Carolyn Henly and Angela Stancar Johnson, also published by Hodder Education.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have investigated how being able to recognize two major features of literary texts – style and structure – can help you to improve your ability to interpret those texts. We have seen that style works on a grand scale, each author developing his or her own personal style which is as individual as a fingerprint, and which can be identified across boundaries of different works. We have also seen, however, that style applies on a local scale, where certain stylistic features have been employed for specific purposes. We have investigated some formal and informal structures of poetry, and we have seen several ways in which structure can contribute to meaning. For **prose** and drama, we have identified common elements of structure for you to be on the lookout for as you study works in those two literary forms.

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1.5

How do literary texts offer insights and challenges?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To understand that literary texts offer insights through the use of artistic strategies. A lack of awareness of these strategies can be challenging for the reader
- ▶ To recognize that a lack of relevant vocabulary and historical or cultural context can be a challenge to a reader
- ▶ To appreciate that knowledge and experience of how to approach a literary work helps a reader access the insights in the text
- ▶ To understand that persistence helps a reader access the insights in the text

Introduction

This section of the IB course, **readers, writers and texts**, is all about how a reader communicates with a writer through the medium of the text. We have seen, over the past few chapters, some of the many features of literary texts that result in communication being indirect. The short answer to the question ‘How do literary texts offer insights?’ is ‘by representing them through literary language’. Literary language, as we have seen in Chapters 1.1 and 1.4, is language that shows us ideas through **metaphors, symbols**, scenes between characters, fictional creations, unreliable narrators, and numerous other artistic strategies, rather than simply telling us in the most direct way possible. In order to get to the insights that the author has to offer, we must be able to interpret all those elements effectively. But, as we saw on page 50, as a reader you’re unlikely to be the ‘ideal reader’ the author had in mind when writing. Readers, then, often lack some knowledge, skill or **perspective** that the ideal reader of a literary work would have. The insights that we can get from a text, therefore, require us to navigate obstacles in our ability to interpret effectively. In order to access the author’s insights, each reader must overcome the challenges.

Challenges to effective interpretation

The two overarching challenges to effective interpretation are the need for:

- appropriate background knowledge for the reader to be able to understand the work
- enough of a shared world view between the reader and writer to be able to communicate in the first place.

■ Background knowledge

The knowledge required for a reader to be able to interpret a literary work effectively includes, first and foremost, knowledge of language – vocabulary. We must be able to comprehend the vocabulary of any work before we can even begin to interpret the nuances. The words we know, in turn, are a consequence of our experience with language. Each individual reader develops vocabulary from personal experience. Many things contribute to that experience: are you a native speaker? Do your family members and peers speak the language natively? Do the people around you have an advanced vocabulary? Does your life experience include a wide exposure to places and things outside of your local environment? A study that has been replicated many times shows that background knowledge is more important to reading comprehension than strategies for approaching any text.

What the report failed to mention was the strong evidence showing that the most important factor in comprehension isn't mastering strategies: it's how much knowledge a reader has of the topic. In one widely replicated experiment, students who scored poorly on a reading test but knew a lot about baseball outperformed 'good readers' who knew little about baseball – when the reading passage was about baseball.

(Natalie Wexler)

Knowledge about baseball is a more general kind of background knowledge than simple vocabulary; however, having the vocabulary of baseball springs from having experienced baseball. Consider this paragraph, for example, from 'The Web of the Game', an essay by Roger Angell, one of the great writers in American baseball history. Note that since this is a work of non-fiction, the effect of the narration is going to be the sense that the author is speaking directly to us.

We are almost in the country. Our seats are in the seventh row of the grandstand, on the home side of the diamond, about halfway between third base and home plate. The seats themselves are more comforting to spirit than to body, being a surviving variant example of the pure late-Doric Polo Grounds mode: the backs made of a continuous running row of wood slats, divided off by pairs of narrow cast-iron
5 arms, within which are slatted let-down seats, grown arthritic with rust and countless layers of gray paint. The rows are stacked so closely upon each other (one discovers) that a happening on the field of sufficient interest to warrant a rise or half-rise to one's feet is often made more memorable by a sharp crack to the kneecaps delivered by the backs of the seats just forward; in time, one finds that a dandruff of gray paint flakes from the same source has fallen on one's lap and scorecard. None of this matters, for this view and
10 these stands and this park – it is Yale Field, in New Haven – are renowned for their felicity. The grandstand is a low, penumbrous steel-post shed that holds the infield in a pleasant horseshoe-curved embrace. The back wall of the grandstand, behind the uppermost row of seats, is broken by an arcade of open arches, admitting a soft backlight that silhouettes the upper audience and also discloses an overhead bonework of struts and beams supporting the roof – the pigeonland of all the ballparks of our youth.

(Roger Angell 213–4)

If you are unfamiliar with baseball, many of the words in this passage make little or no sense: 'diamond', 'third base', 'home plate' (line 2), 'Polo Grounds' (line 3) and 'grandstand' (lines 1 and 10), for instance. All of these terms relate to baseball. Even though the author is describing a place to help you imagine it, he is counting on you recognizing those terms so that you can place his seat in your mind as you read. All but 'Polo Grounds' are parts of the stadium in which the game is played and of the field inside the stadium. (Of course, you also have to know what the Polo Grounds was! The Polo Grounds was a famous stadium in Harlem, New York City, in which the New York Giants played – use the QR code to see a photo of it. It was torn down in 1964.)

In addition to the problem of the baseball-specific vocabulary, a reader of this work of literary **non-fiction** is faced with the problem of other vocabulary, such as the word 'penumbrous' in line 11. That word is not one which is widely used or commonly known, even among advanced English speakers. 'Penumbra' is a scientific term that refers to one of the curved, sickle-shaped shadows that is cast during an eclipse (NASA Content Administrator). (Notice, too, that I have assumed that you will know what a sickle is in order to understand my sentence!) The word 'penumbrous', then, refers to that kind of curved shadow. Angell is trying to get his readers to imagine the shadow that is cast onto the field by the posts of the grandstand, which is the place where fans sit to watch the game.



Finally, there is that funny word, ‘pigeonland’, in line 14. ‘Pigeonland’ is not a real word – if you tried to look it up in a dictionary, you would not find it. Angell has made up the word to describe a memory he has of baseball parks: many baseball parks are visited by flocks of pigeons. Baseball fans sit in the stands and eat peanuts and popcorn, which they often drop on the ground. The pigeons await the departure of the fans so that they can help themselves to the detritus left behind. Angell has coined the word ‘pigeonland’ to describe a place in any ballpark where the pigeons gather. The challenge to the reader is to go with the new word and to work out what it means. That is a lot of knowledge that a reader must have in order to understand just one paragraph. We can see, then, that an advanced knowledge of vocabulary arises out of much more experience than just hearing people say words and remembering them.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

REPRESENTATION

Roger Angell’s essay is non-fiction and is, therefore, strongly representational. He is describing an actual seat in a real place, and he is doing it in such detailed terms that the readers (once they have transcended the vocabulary problem) can imagine the place in great detail. The paragraph is in that regard like a very realistic painting and that realism is a method which Angell is using as a means of representing his ideas. Despite that strongly representational flavour, however, we have discovered some elements of the passage that are not representational. We noted the use of ‘pigeonland’, which is not even a real English word, to describe an observation that Angell had about the real world. We noticed, too, the scientific word to describe the shadows cast by the grandstand at the Polo Grounds (‘penumbrous’).

The shadows were real, and therefore the description is, to a significant degree, representational. But the shadows cast by the famous ballpark are also in some way mythological. Angell has equated the ballpark with an occurrence during an eclipse when the Earth is partially blocking the Sun’s light from getting to the Moon. The scientific **allusion** and the symbolism that goes with it suggests that the grandstand at the Polo Grounds is blocking the Sun from the field, where (the shadow reminds us) no one will ever play baseball again. The symbolism, then, is not representational. This is one of the things that makes a non-fiction work literary: it employs the devices that raise the subject up beyond the purely representational.

Roger Angell

Roger Angell had a life of wide-ranging interests and experiences. During the Second World War, he was a machine-gun instructor at Lowry Field, outside Denver, Colorado, and then editor of an armed forces magazine in Honolulu (Treder). He was an avid baseball fan, and played in amateur teams for much of his life, but never managed to make the varsity team in college, much to his personal disappointment (Treder). He also participated in a great many other sports, including tennis and sailing, and although he is best known for his baseball writing, he wrote about a wide range of topics within sports and beyond. For nearly five decades he was a fiction editor at *The New Yorker*. Angell was perhaps destined to be a writer from the start: his mother worked at *The New Yorker* herself for 35 years and, following her divorce from Roger’s father when Roger was only 8 years old, she married Andy White, better known to the world as E.B. White, author of *Stuart Little*, *Charlotte’s Web*, and a long series of literary essays. White, too, worked for *The New Yorker* for much of his adult life. Angell got his start as a baseball writer when editor-in-chief William Shawn sent him to Florida in 1962 to cover spring training. From there he became what one of his biographers calls ‘... the most exquisitely talented writer ever to focus sustained attention on the subject of baseball’ (Treder).

● TOK Links: Background knowledge and perspectives

Background knowledge shapes what you can understand and learn in any situation, not just when reading literary works. In your TOK classes, you have possibly seen examples of people who saw something that others did not (because they knew something that others did not), or understood better than others who did see the same thing. When it comes to studying literature, have you experienced the problem of not having sufficient background knowledge to understand a particular work? What are the mechanisms by which you can overcome that challenge?

■ Cultural and historical knowledge

As we have already noticed, effective reading requires a lot of background cultural and historical information that might, at first, not even seem relevant to a text. The passage on page 134 by Roger Angell, who expected the reader to recognize all the various elements of a baseball stadium, also demands additional cultural knowledge not directly related to baseball of the reader. In line 3, for example, he refers to Doric columns. Doric columns are one of the five classic styles of columns used in ancient Greece and then Rome.

If you know what Doric columns are, you can possibly imagine what the Polo Grounds looked like, but if you do not, you cannot. (We also had to know about eclipses and the shapes of shadows in order to understand all of Angell's imagery.)

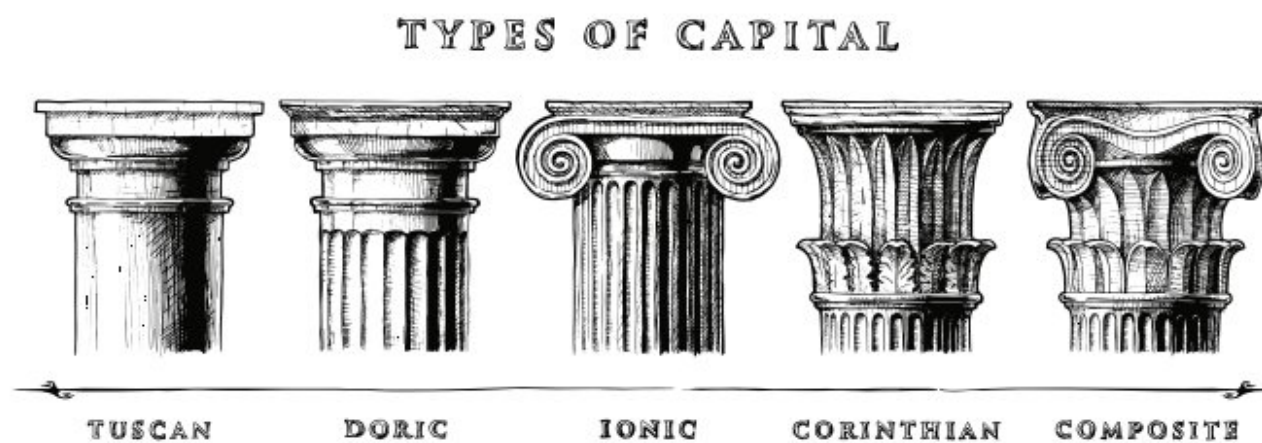
The requirement for historical and cultural background knowledge becomes more challenging the further distant the time and culture is from the reader. As an example, Fadia Faqir's 1996 novel *Pillars of Salt* is the story of two women, both confined to a mental hospital, who share their life stories. One of the women has not been able to get over the death of her beloved husband, and the other has not been able to cope with her husband having brought home a younger, second wife, which feels like an insurmountable betrayal ('Pillars of Salt'). We can see that this could pose challenges for a Western reader, or any reader who has never lived in a place in which polygamy was legal, because there is a cultural divide to overcome. We have the further obstacle of two characters who are confined to mental institutions, which may make demands on the reader for understanding the story through the characters' perspectives.

It may also demand that readers give credence to people whom, under other circumstances, they might discount. This problem is made more complicated by the fact that the story of one of the women, Maha, is told again by a character named Sami El Ajnabi (whose name in Arabic means 'stranger') and he frequently lies (Djafri 535).

Much of the book relies on an understanding of mythology such as *The Arabian Nights* and from elements of both Muslim and Christian culture. Readers may be familiar with some of *The Arabian Nights*, including Scheherazade, the story-teller, Aladdin's lamp, or Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, but in an early reference to *The Arabian Nights*, for instance, one character – Um Saad – refers to some unfamiliar elements:

'I will never be able to get out again. I am not a character from the One Thousand and One Nights. I will never be able to call al-Shater Hasan and wear his Vanishing Cap, I will never be able to roll into another identity, another body, travel to better times and greener places ...'

(Fadia Faqir 19–20)



■ A Doric column is shown second from left

ACTIVITY 1

Discussion

Before you go on to an explanation of the elements in this paragraph, stop and discuss it with a partner. What elements of this passage are unfamiliar to you, if any? What could you do, as a reader, to better understand this paragraph? What does this exercise reveal about the kind of work readers have to do in order to overcome the challenges of works that contain unfamiliar cultural or historical references and difficult language?

Many readers, particularly Western, are likely to have to look up al-Shater Hasan and the Vanishing Cap, and whether the ability to take on another body and travel to better places is from the al-Shater Hasan story or elsewhere in *The Arabian Nights*. (It is from the same story.)

Furthermore, the title of the novel, *Pillars of Salt*, is an **allusion** to an Old Testament story from the Bible in which a woman, Lot's wife, was turned into salt for looking back longingly at her home in Sodom and Gomorrah, which she was fleeing with her family. They had been advised by an angel that the town was to be destroyed because the other townspeople had sunk into debauchery and continuous sin. Readers without broad knowledge of the Christian Bible would not recognize it, and even those with some knowledge may not recognize the allusion right away. Even from this short introduction to the novel, we can see that the historical and cultural knowledge needed for appreciating all the nuances of the author's work is quite extensive.

Fadia Faqir

Fadia Faqir was born in Jordan in 1956, the year the country got its independence. She was educated at the University of Jordan and subsequently worked for *The Jerusalem Star*, a weekly paper published in Jordan in English ('Fadia Faqir Life'). She went to England in 1984 to earn her master's degree and after spending more time back in Jordan, where she worked for the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research, she returned to England to study at the University of East Anglia, where she was awarded the first ever PhD in Critical and Creative Writing in the UK ('Fadia Faqir Life'). She teaches at St Aidan's College, Durham University, and spends her time between Durham, London and Amman ('Fadia Faqir'). She writes in English and her work has been translated into many other languages, including Arabic.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

IDENTITY

According to Faqir's website, her use of multiple narratives and different voices represents the ancient tradition of storytelling in Arabia ('Pillars of Salt'). In a work such as *Pillars of Salt*, in which the author has deliberately provided multiple voices (multiple identities), including at least one who lies over and over, the task of working out the author's identity

can be more difficult than usual. When reading such a book, you must be consciously aware that the many voices do not speak directly for the author. Your job as the reader is to consider how each of the characters and speakers appears. Are they good people? Wicked ones? The identity of the author will come through in her attitude towards the characters.

Historical information can sometimes be a challenge, even if the work reflects a culture which is familiar to the reader. Most of us, for example, are probably comfortable with The Beatles as representative of the culture of England and the West; however, in the song 'Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)', it turns out that there is a significant historical fact that affects the interpretation of the song, and that has to do with the title. Look at the lyrics via the QR code provided before you read the subsequent commentary.



The phrase ‘Norwegian Wood’ is actually an **allusion**; it refers to a kind of furniture made of Norwegian pine that was extremely popular among ‘swinging’ young women in London at the time the song was written (*Rolling Stone*). Where it was once a contemporary allusion, now it is an historical allusion.

An understanding of time and space, then, can help a listener to better understand this song. ‘Norwegian Wood’ is considered a landmark song for The Beatles, moving them into a more personal and introspective kind of songwriting (*Rolling Stone*). Lennon himself admitted that the song was about an extra-marital affair, which shows a clear connection to personal lives. The allusion to Norwegian wood alerts any listener who knows the historical context to the kind of relationship that the speaker had with the young woman in the song. The craft of this lyric can be seen in the unusual rhyme patterns, including rhymed couplets, **slant rhymes** and repeated rhymes. The lyric also relies on allusion and rather mysterious **metaphor**.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

CULTURE

The allusion to Norwegian wood is a good example of how the culture in which a work is created influences its meaning and makes demands on a reader for its accurate

interpretation. The allusion to the wood furniture was of a particular time and place – London of the 1960s – and featured particular behaviours and values.

John Lennon

John Lennon founded the Beatles, first inviting Paul McCartney (with whom he eventually wrote more than 200 songs) to join his school band, the Quarry Men (‘John Lennon’) and then, together, they met the other Beatles and transformed the band into one of the most famous musical groups of all time. Lennon’s life was not easy; his parents’ marriage collapsed when he was very young and he did not see much of his father. He lived with an aunt who taught him to play musical instruments, but she was killed when a car struck her

when Lennon was only 18 (‘John Lennon’). His later life was also marked by drama and trauma. His first marriage ended in divorce after six years, and a second marriage, to Yoko Ono, is said to have contributed to the break-up of the Beatles and that marriage, too, was rocky (‘John Lennon’). He was murdered in New York City in 1980 when he was only 40 years old. Despite the tragedy in his life, John Lennon is beloved by millions of fans and there is no doubt that his contribution to music has seldom, if ever, been surpassed.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

IDENTITY

The symbol of fire in line 24 of the song is mysterious, as Lennon never explained it. An implication, since the reference to Norwegian wood being ‘good’ follows immediately, is that the speaker in the song burned the house down – the wood was good for fire. There is nothing to indicate that John Lennon ever burned down someone’s house, so this song reminds us, as we noted in Chapter 1.1, that with poetry we cannot simply assume that the speaker is the author. In accordance with the usual reader–writer relationship, we assume that Lennon, the author, knows that to burn down someone’s house would be a bad act, so we have to attribute it to the speaker. We can, however, get an idea about Lennon’s identity from the use of the symbol: the fire

can be seen as a symbol of rage – even, potentially, a symbol of hell. If the speaker is enraged at himself for having cheated on his wife, and/or at the ‘other woman’ for enticing him to do so, we can understand that the speaker (and thus also the author) sees the act of adultery as damaging and being deserving of punishment. This realization gives us a hint to a part of the author’s identity, as reflected in this text. Understanding the classic symbolism of fire as an allusion to hell can also give readers an appreciation for Lennon’s skill as a writer: he was able to begin with something in the real world – Norwegian pine furniture – and transform it into a meaningful element of a poem with implications well beyond the real-life situation. That is the artist at work!

● TOK Links: Question of authorship

There is quite a disagreement about whether John Lennon or Paul McCartney wrote the song 'Norwegian Wood'. The official attribution on the album is 'Lennon–McCartney', but both men have taken issue with that attribution. Apparently they agreed when they were young that all their songs would be attributed to both of them, regardless of how much each one contributed (Simon and Wharton), a practice which seems to have eventually led to bad feelings. With regard to the authorship of 'Norwegian Wood', Lennon's version changed over the years. In 1970, Lennon claimed that McCartney helped with the middle eight lines (*Rolling Stone*); however, in a 1980 interview, Lennon claimed that the song 'is my song completely' (Sheff 178), and he did so in the context of going through a whole bunch of songs and attributing them to himself or McCartney. He gave McCartney credit for a lot of other work, such as 'Yesterday', which Lennon said was 'Paul's song and Paul's baby' (Sheff 177). McCartney, however, claimed that Lennon had nothing but the first verse of 'Norwegian Wood' (*Rolling Stone*). This example illustrates the difficulty for historians when trying to establish the truth of events in the past.

It is unlikely that either songwriter was consciously lying about what happened but, as you may know from your Theory of Knowledge work, memory is notoriously unreliable under some circumstances. We think of memory as being like a movie in which all of our experience is filmed and stored, but it does not work that way. Instead, memory is reconstructed – bits of your experience are recorded and then, when you recall a particular incident, your mind recreates it

for you and plays it back like a movie. In the case of Lennon and McCartney, we can see that both men have powerful reasons for claiming authorship of the song. Lennon was admitting to the world a great failing on his part, an extra-marital affair; he would naturally want at least the consolation of knowing that a great song came out of his confession. McCartney was an essential part of the songwriting team for the Beatles; naturally he would want credit for part of one of their landmark songs. Historians, therefore, are left with trying to choose between two very likely stories. As they do not have sufficient evidence to help them make a likely choice, we are left with the historical disagreement as the best conclusion that can be drawn at this point.

Historians only have access to whatever artefacts remain after an event has receded into history and, as in this case, those artefacts often contradict each other. Sometimes those contradictions can be resolved because evidence arises later or new techniques for analysis are invented. Modern mathematicians have, in fact, found a way to establish whether McCartney or Lennon wrote the music on a particular song (Simon and Wharton), but it remains to be seen whether the same thing can be done with lyrics. Textual analysis can be done scientifically – such a study we saw on page 111, which revealed JK Rowling as the actual author of the Robert Galbraith novels through linguistic analysis (Juola) – but given the fact that there are far fewer words in a song than there are in a novel, we can easily understand that such statistical analysis is not likely to be as effective when applied to a song.

ACTIVITY 2

Discussion

Choose a favorite song of yours. What references, allusions, images or language does it have which might prove to be very difficult for a listener from a culture other than yours to understand? Do you understand all of the references? If so, why is that?

■ Knowledge of common symbolism

The example from Fadia Faqir on shows that historical and cultural knowledge includes knowledge of a culture's mythology and religion. Skilled readers also have to meet the challenge of developing wide-ranging knowledge of standard **symbols**, including not just religious symbols, but also elements such as seasons, water, weather, flying and illness or disease. Lack of this knowledge can prove to be a significant obstacle to a reader's ability to interpret a text. Here's a poem called 'The Gift' from Indonesian-American poet, Li Young-Lee:

The Gift

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
 my father recited a story in a low voice.
 I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
 Before the story ended, he'd removed
 5 the iron sliver I thought I'd die from.

I can't remember the tale,
 but hear his voice still, a well
 of dark water, a prayer.
 And I recall his hands,
 10 two measures of tenderness
 he laid against my face,
 the flames of discipline
 he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon
 15 you would have thought you saw a man
 planting something in a boy's palm,
 a silver tear, a tiny flame.
 Had you followed that boy
 you would have arrived here,
 20 where I bend over my wife's right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down
 so carefully she feels no pain.
 Watch as I lift the splinter out.
 I was seven when my father
 25 took my hand like this,
 and I did not hold that shard
 between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
 christen it Little Assassin,
 30 Ore Going Deep for My Heart.
 And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
 I did what a child does
 when he's given something to keep.
 35 I kissed my father.

(Li Young-Lee)

Do you recognize any of the symbolism in the poem? The very first line, with the image of the metal splinter in the palm, can be seen as a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. There is quite a debate over where the nails would actually have been placed – in his hands or in his wrists – but the image of the nails through the palms is a very common one. The reference to the father, too, can be seen as a religious reference, as Jesus is believed to be the son of God in Christian

doctrine. In this poem, the image of the father is particularly interesting, because in lines 4 and 5, the father removes the shard which the speaker ‘thought I’d die from’. But later, in lines 15–16, we get the image of the father planting something in the palm. The Bible story tells us, of course, that God sent his son to die for the sins of humans and, later, it is his father who resurrects Jesus and raises him to heaven. We see that relationship re-enacted here.

We also get the symbol of water in line 8, where the father’s voice is described as ‘a well of dark water’. Water can be symbolic of many things, among them rebirth. That symbolic meaning stems from the fact that human babies are born in water from their mother’s wombs. The ceremony of baptism in many different religions re-enacts that birth by either sprinkling water on foreheads or submerging people in water, to symbolize their spiritual birth into the life of Christ. In this poem, we can see that the father (God) is the source of the rebirth which, for Jesus, was literal.

We would have to study the poem much more carefully before we could be satisfied that we had a rich understanding of all that Li Young-Lee intended, but we can at least see that without knowledge of these symbols, we would miss quite a lot.

ACTIVITY 3

Discussion

The interpretation offered here of this poem relies on traditional Western, Christian symbolism. The author, however, comes from a background in Asia, including Indonesia, Hong Kong and Japan. Might there be another way to interpret the poem that does not rely on those traditionally Western symbols?

Li Young-Lee

Li Young-Lee said in an interview with *Poets & Writers Magazine*:

‘The difficulty for me is, I wake up and I feel a multitude of personalities. There’s a person in me that somehow experiences the entire world as a kind of poem – the whole world around me is saturated with meaning and presence, and even the presence of God. There are connections everywhere, and everything sounds like a poem, everything’s the beginning of a poem ...’

(Logan)

Some of that multitude of personalities may come from his heritage: he is the son of a Chinese doctor who was a physician to Mao Tse-Tung, and who fled from China to Indonesia, where the poet was born. In Indonesia, Li Young-Lee’s father was jailed as a political prisoner for a year, and after this they moved from Indonesia to Hong Kong, Macau and Japan (‘Li Young-Lee’). They settled in the United States in 1964. Li started writing poetry in college and has won a number of awards for his work, including the Poetry Society of America’s William Carlos Williams Award, the Lannan Literary Award and three Pushcart Prizes (Logan).

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: BELIEFS, VALUES AND EDUCATION

This poem might be used in an individual oral with the idea of investigating the global issue of the value of empathy in establishing and maintaining good relationships, which fits in the field of inquiry of beliefs, values and education. This poem suggests the poet’s idea of what it means to be a good father. The relationship between the speaker and his father, and subsequently the speaker and his wife, suggests a value system that includes mercy, kindness, and

empathy. The poem might be paired with a work in translation such as Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. That play actually suggests similar beliefs about the value of empathy and kindness and the qualities that it takes to establish a good relationship, in that case, between a husband and a wife. Investigating such an issue does involve consideration of the multinational, widespread importance of developing effective relationships that sustain the people in them.

Every culture has its own set of symbols. Perhaps a lot of the literature that you read in your class will have its roots in Western culture and Western symbols, but you should be aware that you may have to learn about some of the common symbols from the culture in which the particular work you are studying was created. You will read about this feature of literary texts more in Section 2 of this book.

Some common **symbols** take on different meanings in different contexts. Water, for example, can be a symbol not only of rebirth but also of death (because of the association with drowning). The two ideas are related; the more refined symbol for rebirth is emergence from water (just as the baby emerges from the watery womb). Failure to emerge, then, for humans, results in drowning. In the very beginning of F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby is standing at the edge of his property, gazing across a wide expanse of water toward something he yearns for. The water is symbolic of the divide between him and the new life into which he wishes to be reborn. When he dies, it is not by drowning, but the image of water and death in the scene is a powerful one, as his body is floating on an air mattress, barely kept out of the water, and being carried towards one end of the pool where the water flows down a drain. He is never reborn, and the image of water draining away symbolizes the draining away of his life and his dream.

Not all symbols are recognizable as having standard meanings; they get their meaning in context. In Chapter 1.1 (pages 31–2), we looked at how kneeling, standing and dancing serve as **symbols** in Athol Fugard's *'Master Harold'... and the boys*. The symbolism takes significant meaning from the cultural context: the black population in South Africa was literally and figuratively made to kneel to the white population, but the symbol of standing is not a standard one in the sense that any skilled reader would instantly recognize it or would know to look for it in literary texts. The playwright took something from his personal experience of the culture in which he grew up and made it meaningful by the way he used it.

The challenge to you as a reader, then, is to be alert for symbols and **metaphors** whenever you read. Some of those will be standard symbols that have, over time, taken on fixed meanings, and some will function symbolically only in the context of a single literary work.

■ Knowledge of how to approach a literary text

We have seen that the ideal reader of any literary work has at least as much knowledge as the author of the relevant culture, history, religion and symbolism of the culture in which (or about which) the author is writing. The ideal reader must also have knowledge of all the vocabulary that the author uses. Such a combination of knowledge is unlikely to occur in any one reader, so the challenge of reading is not to begin by knowing all that you need to know, but rather to work, as you read, on gaining the knowledge that you need so that you can become as close to the ideal reader as possible. The two key things needed to undertake that task are knowledge of how to go about reading a literary work and persistence.

One important challenge to a reader's ability to approach a work is the idea that 'I just can't understand this'. We have seen students approach their literary studies with the idea – often unconscious – that the ability to read a literary work is a matter either of some sort of magic or of luck. Sometimes students think that the state of their understanding is a fixed thing, inborn and irremediable. (If you just looked up the word 'irremediable', then you proved that thinking wrong!) In fact, one of the great benefits of studying a book in an educational setting is that the teacher and your classmates are there to help you figure out how to fill in the gaps in your knowledge, so that you can become more like the intended reader of the work and so that your comprehension and appreciation of that work will increase.

All of the problems we have pointed out so far in this chapter are solvable. One of the easiest problems to solve is lack of vocabulary: if you don't know certain words, you can look them up. If you know to look in quality sources – such as the Oxford English Dictionary for most regular English words, rather than a generic dictionary site without a long history of providing sophisticated definitions – then you will get better information about what words mean. We saw that words often have more meaning in them than might appear at first, so if you run across a word such as 'penumbrous', like we did in Roger Angell's work, and you look it up and discover that it has something to do with a shadow on the Moon, you can pursue your understanding by following the trail to the science. You can also look up a great many cultural or historical references, the way we did with reference to Doric columns.

You can also improve your knowledge of common myths and Biblical stories. Some of the Greek and Roman myths that you might want to be sure you know are the story of Cupid and Psyche, the story of Persephone and the story of Icarus. We mentioned in our discussion of Borges' short story 'The Garden of Forking Paths' in Chapter 1.3 (page 96) that any mention of a garden might be a reference to the Biblical Garden of Eden. That Biblical story is one of the most commonly referenced stories from the Bible. Some others you might want to familiarize yourself with are the story of Noah's Ark, the story of the Crucifixion (which we mentioned in the context of Li's poem on pages 139–141), the story of Job, and the story of the Prodigal Son. There are many more Biblical and mythological stories that might be referenced in a work of literature, of course, and the more you know, the more prepared you will be to notice allusions in the works you study. If you add a good collection of myths and one of Biblical stories to your personal library, you will have them to hand when you need to look something up.

The following table gives you some common **symbols** and ways in which they are frequently interpreted:

■ Table 1.5.1

Symbol	Common meanings
Snow	Death
Rain	Rebirth or cleansing
Storm	Trouble or conflict
Water	Rebirth or death, depending on the context
Spring	Rebirth
Summer	Fullness of life; maturity
Fall	Approaching death
Winter	Death
Walls or closed doors	Barriers
Keys, open doors or windows	Escape or freedom
Birds or anything flying	Freedom
Apple or other fruits	Temptation and sin (the fall from grace in the story of the Garden of Eden)
Tree	Knowledge (another reference to the Garden of Eden)

● EE Links: Studying symbols

An examination of the use of symbols in a work can make for an excellent extended essay. You can also do a comparison and contrast study of two different writers, especially two writers who come from different cultural backgrounds and who are, therefore, likely to use different symbolic systems.

You must remember that there are many, many more. The more symbols you know, the more alert you will be as a reader to other objects and references that could be symbolic. For a much more detailed discussion of symbolism, literary strategies and how they are used, you may wish to consult *Literary Analysis for English Literature for the IB Diploma: Skills for Success* written by Carolyn P. Henly and Angela Stancar Johnson, also published by Hodder Education.

ACTIVITY 4

Check for understanding

Read the following short passage, which is the opening of Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Fall of the House of Usher', and see if you can identify some of the symbols from the table on the previous page. When you are done, you can read the notes at the end of the book on page 421.

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy

5 House of Usher. I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural

10 images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping

15 off of the veil.

(Edgar Allan Poe)

Notice that this kind of interpretive work takes effort. At the beginning of this section, we mentioned that an important reading skill is persistence. You need to be committed to learning. People who expect to just look at all the words in a literary work and immediately understand all their implications are not going to overcome the challenge to readers.

Any reader who encounters Dylan Thomas' 'Fern Hill' expecting to just 'get it' is going to be disappointed. Here is the first stanza of that poem (we looked at the last stanza in Chapter 1.2 on page 68):

Fern Hill

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry,
Time let me hail and climb

5 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
Trail with daisies and barley
Down the rivers of the windfall light.

(Dylan Thomas)

We can't just read these lines and understand them straight away. Houses don't, as a rule, lilt, and happiness isn't as green as grass. Wagons don't honour people and we don't know how trees can trail down a river of light. No one has background information in place that would make this poem a quick read-through. Thomas is deliberately challenging his readers to move past the representational, to use their imagination, to think creatively, and to take the poem as a portrait of feelings.

If we start thinking, for example, that green is a symbol of rebirth – because of its association with spring – we can start to understand the kind of happiness that a person who has just been born into a world with starry nights and apple trees and golden light might experience. If we then notice that 'apples' are mentioned twice in this first stanza, we can not only think that this poem might be referring us to the Garden of Eden, but that it might also be pointing us to the fall from grace in the gentlest sort of way. The challenge for readers is that we have to take the poem as it comes to us, and we have to be willing to figure out the best means of finding our way into it.

So a final challenge to a reader in terms of having the necessary knowledge to interpret literary texts is the need to know that texts are deliberately indirect, that authors are artists who deliberately use many tools of the arts and that you, as the audience, must first work out which tools the artist used and then what the use of those tools implies. This seeking is one of the great rewards of studying literature: when you solve the puzzle of any given text, you have truly accomplished something worth doing!

ACTIVITY 5

The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead

Read the following passage and make a list of all the elements that a reader would have to recognize and understand in order to fully comprehend the passage. Look out for references to a specific time and place, including any specialized vocabulary, any other words that might be difficult (but which seem important) and any objects that might have a symbolic significance. Are there any elements which seem to be non-representational and, therefore, which require the reader to use his or her imagination to decipher the meaning? When you have made your list, you can compare it to the suggestions in the notes at the back of the book (page 422).

They waited. At Caesar's request the station agent told of how he came to work for the underground railroad. Cora couldn't pay attention. The tunnel pulled at her. How many hands had it required to make this place? And the tunnels beyond, wherever and how far they led? She thought of the picking, how it raced down the furrows at harvest, the African bodies working as one, as fast as their strength permitted. The vast fields burst with hundreds of thousands of white bolls, strung like stars in the sky on the clearest of clear nights. When the slaves finished, they had stripped the fields of their color. It was a magnificent operation, from seed to bale, but not one of them could be proud of their labor. It had been stolen from them. Bled from them.

5 The tunnel, the tracks, the desperate souls who found salvation in the coordination of the stations and timetables – this was a marvel to be proud of. She wondered if those who had built this thing had received their proper reward.

'Every state is different,' Lumbly was saying. 'Each one a state of possibility, with its own customs and way of doing things. Moving through them, you'll see the

15 breadth of the country before you reach your final stop.'

At that, the bench rumbled. They hushed, and the rumbling became a sound. Lumbly led them to the edge of the platform. The thing arrived in its hulking strangeness. Caesar had seen trains in Virginia; Cora had only heard tell of the machines. It wasn't what she envisioned. The locomotive was black, and ungainly

20 contraption led by the triangular snout of the cowcatcher, though there would be

few animals where this engine was headed. The bulb of the smokestack was next, a soot-covered stalk.

The main body consisted of a large black box topped by the engineer's cabin. Below that, pistons and large cylinders engaged in a relentless dance with the ten
25 wheels, two sets of small ones in front and three behind. The locomotive pulled one single car, a dilapidated boxcar missing numerous planks in its walls.

The colored engineer waved back at them from his cabin, grinning toothlessly. 'All aboard,' he said.

(Colson Whitehead 68–69)

Colson Whitehead

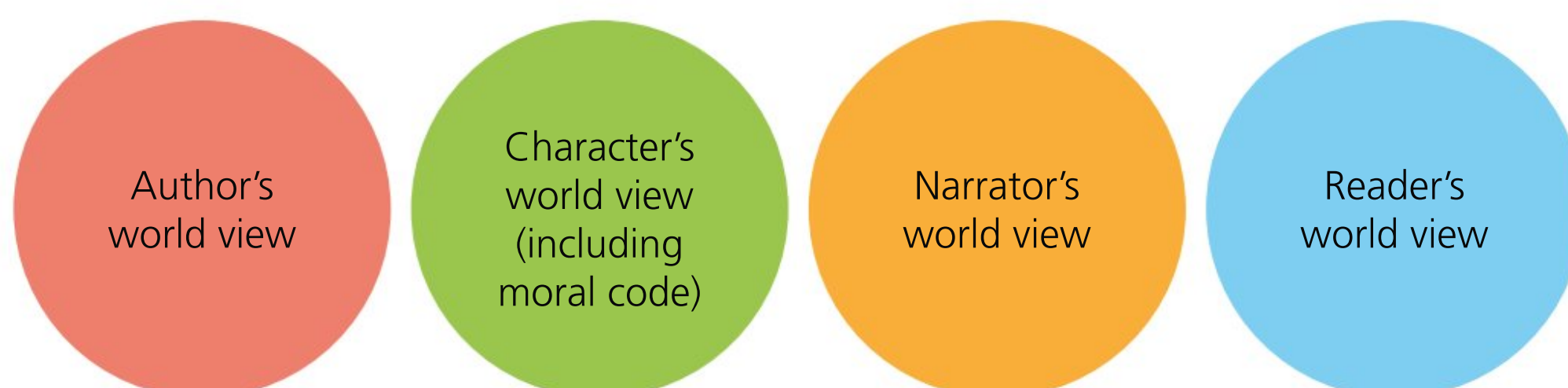
Arch Colson Whitehead was born in Manhattan, New York, and grew up there. He was always a reader and a lover of movies and spent a lot of time as a kid, as he describes it, lying on the carpet in his living room watching horror movies. The first big book he ever read was Stephen King's *Night Shift* (McCarthy). He graduated from Harvard in 1991, having studied English and **comparative** literature (Simms), and went to work for *The Village Voice*, a weekly newspaper in New York. He began writing very soon afterwards, and his first novel was published in 1999. He has become known as a 'literary chameleon' (McCarthy), writing books which are hard to pin into any one genre, but which have included elements of **fantasy**, history, mystery, social realism, absurdism and, perhaps arising from his early interests, a zombie apocalypse. He has won or been a finalist for many major literary awards. He has been the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, the Dos Passos Prize and a Guggenheim Fellowship (McCarthy). For *The Underground Railroad*, he won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award and the Carnegie Medal for Fiction ('Bio – Colson Whitehead').



World view overlap

A final, perhaps more fundamental, challenge to a reader's ability to appreciate the insights in a literary work arises from the need for there to be overlapping world views between the author and the reader. As we have seen throughout this book, and through the concept of communication, the act of literary interpretation is an effort at communication between the reader and writer. Just as in real life, it can be very difficult (if not impossible) for two people who see the world in entirely different ways to communicate – so it is in the world of communication through text.

The course concept of **identity** reminds us that the author's identity is not there on the surface of the work just waiting for us to pick it up. Instead, we have to engage with the author's identity through all the other identities that the author has created. The narrator or speaker has an identity and all the characters have identities, and we have seen through several examples that those identities do not always align with the author's. We can depict the interrelationships in the following diagrams. First, imagine that each person's life experience, and the world view that has arisen from that experience, is represented in one of these circles. (In reality, there might be many green circles, one for each character, but we will just use one to represent the role of all characters):



In one situation, the narrator's world view might seem to be exactly the same as the author's world view. In that case, we can get at the author's identity more directly, as shown in diagram 1.

Diagram 2 represents situations in which the world view of the narrator does not match the world view of the author. This might be the classic unreliable narrator, such as speaker we encountered in Carol Ann Duffy's poem 'Head of English' (page 90) or the depiction of a narrator who is not an admirable character, such as the speaker of 'My Last Duchess' (pages 87–8). Our job as readers is to recognize that the author wants us to understand that the narrator or speaker is in some way flawed. In this situation, we would normally expect our world view to match the author's to a significant degree, but not the narrator's, so we could add ourselves into the third diagram as shown.

Our understanding is similar to the author's, but quite different from the narrator's. We have a meeting of the minds, as it were, with the author in judging the narrator.

If, however, we can see a situation in which the author's world view is different from the reader's, as per diagram 4, then the challenge is greater.

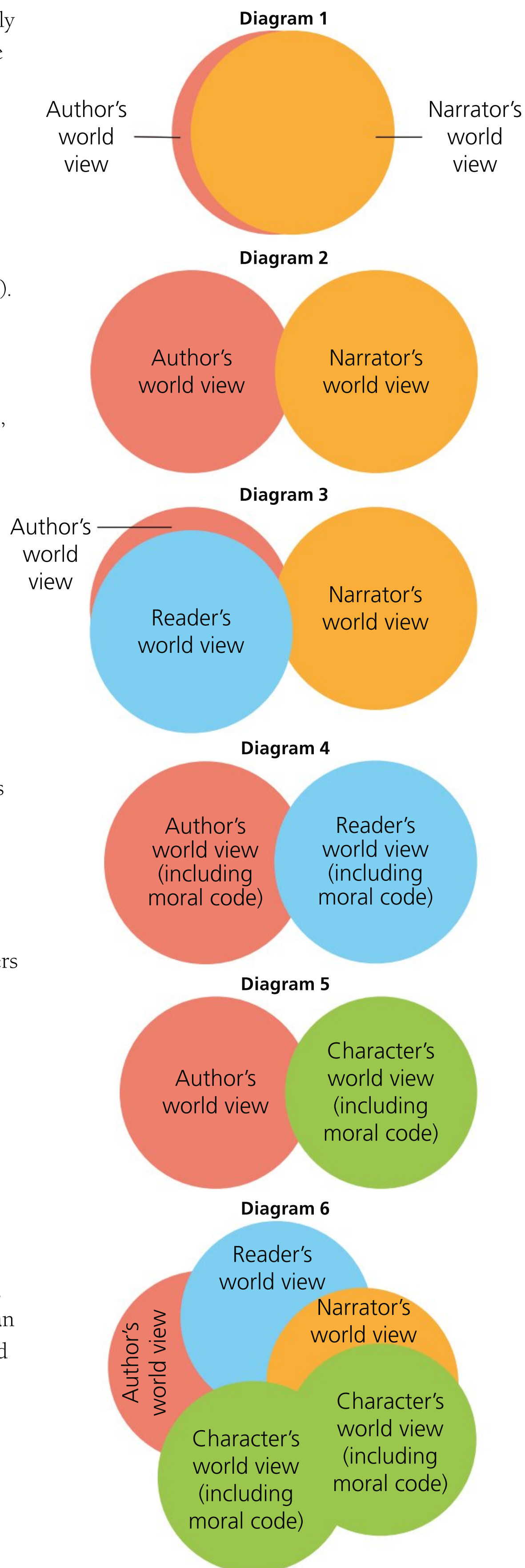
This situation might be deliberate. The author may be trying to push the readers to open themselves up to seeing the world in a new way, or to accept as true something which is very uncomfortable for the reader. The challenge for the reader, then, is to keep an open mind and not simply reject out of hand what the literary work seems to be saying.

A similar situation can exist between the author and one or more characters. This is shown in diagram 5.

This diagram shows that readers need to work out which characters we are meant to admire and which we are meant to distrust.

Now we can imagine what it might look like if we bring all these world views together – some may overlap and some may not, but it is your job as a discerning to reader to try and work this out.

Diagram 6 represents a situation in which the author's world view and the reader's world view overlap strongly. Some characters represent the author's world view much more directly than others. There is a strong affinity already between reader and writer; however, the narrator's world view is quite different. This diagram would represent a situation, then, in which the author is expecting the reader to understand that the narrator is not representative of an admirable person. We would be able to ascertain the author's world view through contrasting those characters who are admirable to those who are not.



In this essay by Ijeoma Oluo, for example, she intends for the readers she is addressing (white people who want to give her the ‘white perspective’ that they feel she misses in her work, we can surmise) to be shocked and upset by what she says.

I know right now why so many of you will feel compelled to make me understand that I’m not talking about you here before you will consider reading further.

And to know all of that about you, I had to learn how race was invented as a function of capitalism to justify the brutality of genocide and forced free labor. I had to learn how slavery was repurposed into the prison industrial complex and the school-to-prison pipeline. I had to learn how your police force was created to return black people to slavery and maintained to control brown and black populations to manufacture a false sense of white security. I had to learn how the Southern Strategy was able to capitalize on the racism that you dared not see in yourselves, even though we could see it clear as day. I had to learn how the Irish became white when we could not. I had to learn how you could claim to rightfully own stolen land and how you still can today.

You have not had to know these things; even if you studied some of these topics in school, you did not have to know them. People of color, on the other hand, have lost so much when we’ve gotten it wrong. We have been fired for wearing our hair in ways you don’t like, for not hiding our bodies that you decided to hypersexualize, for having too many opinions, for answering too honestly, for using our own accents and dialogue instead of yours, for believing you when you said you didn’t tolerate racism in the workplace, for teaching history you refuse to acknowledge, for celebrating our beauty that you don’t want to see. We have died for walking with a certain swagger, for reaching for our wallets, for asking for help, for speaking with the wrong tone, for giving a menacing look, for playing our music too loud, for not walking away, for walking away, for marching in peace.

Your survival has never depended on your knowledge of white culture. In fact, it’s required your ignorance. The dominant culture does not have to see itself to survive because culture will shift to fit its needs. This shift is cheaper and easier when you don’t look too closely at how it’s being accomplished – if you never ask who is picking up the check. And no, you hardly see us at all – even if you love us. You can’t; we don’t exist as whole people in most of the places that you have been getting your information from.

And as much as I’d like you to see me – as much as I’d like systemic racism to simply be a problem of different groups not seeing each other – I need you to see yourself, really see yourself, first. This is the top priority.

Because I and so many people of color have had to stand by and watch you declare we live in a post-racism world when Obama was elected, when we could see how much of the legacy of slavery and brutality was still lodged deep in your bones. I had to watch the Tea Party rise from your fear of losing the centuries-long promise that you’d always get more because we’d always get less, all while you brushed it off as fringe lunacy. I had to watch you high-five each other and celebrate an election already won while I could see that your parents, your uncle, maybe even your spouse was going to vote for White Supremacy, because deep down part of them knew that they didn’t earn all that they enjoy in this world, and in a couple of years they wouldn’t have the votes to protect the parts they stole.

(Ijeoma Oluo)

Tone is one of the most important literary strategies Oluo is using here. She is deliberately forceful – angry. She wants the reader to understand and empathize with the anger that she and the ‘people of color’ she speaks of have felt all their lives. Another important strategy she is using is detail: she has included lists of facts and descriptions of events that have actually happened. Her objective is to make the honest reader admit that what she is saying is true. Even the title of the essay is designed to unsettle readers: ‘White People: I Don’t Want You To Understand Me Better, I Want You To Understand Yourself’. (The challenge built into the title suggests that white people do not know themselves.) Many readers will take this demanding title as an affront, but the essay makes a pretty good case for the claim. This essay will likely be a difficult one for many white readers if they are reluctant to be pushed so far into a world view which is quite different from their own. You can imagine some readers claiming that Oluo is exaggerating, that she is not reasonable, or that, as Oluo herself points out in lines 1 and 2, what she is saying is generally true, but does not apply to the *me*, the individual reader.

This essay is an example of the kind of challenge that demands readers make the effort to be open to different ideas; that some ‘truths’ they have always believed are actually not, after all, true, and that another **perspective**, however painful or uncomfortable it is to admit, might just be more accurate than the readers’ own. Only by being willing to be open to ideas that are not familiar or comfortable can we gain the insight that is offered by some literary works. Your job as the reader, in such situations, is to be aware of the causes of your reaction and then to see if you can put yourself in the author’s shoes long enough to look for the ideas and experience he or she is offering.

Ijeoma Oluo

Ijeoma Oluo was born to a white mother and a Nigerian father in 1980. Her father returned to Nigeria when Oluo was two, and, although the family expected him to return, they lost touch with him shortly after, and Oluo was subsequently raised by her single mother in a suburb of Seattle, Washington (Bardi). Oluo earned a Political Science degree from Western Washington University, but turned to activism and writing after the shooting and death of Trayvon Martin in 2012 (‘Ijeoma Oluo’). She felt the need to speak out publicly as she was surprised by the silence of her community in the face of such a terrible injustice (Bardi). She identifies herself as a writer, speaker, and ‘Internet Yeller’ (Oluo) – she has chosen not to remain silent. She is perhaps best known for her 2018 book *So You Want to Talk About Race*, about which the National Review said that it gives us the: ‘... language to engage in clear, constructive, and confident dialogue with each other about how to deal with racial prejudices and biases’ (Bhatt). Oluo has won a number of awards for her writing and her social activism, including a 2017 ‘100 Most Influential African Americans’ award from *The Root*, one of the Most Influential People in Seattle award from *Seattle* magazine, and she was named one of the 50 Most Influential Women in Seattle by *Seattle Met* (Oluo). She also won the 2018 Feminist Humanist Award from the American Humanist Society (Bardi).

CAS Links: Discussion group

You could develop your reading skills by organizing a discussion group focused on one or more works that pose this kind of challenge to readers. You could consider discussing some of Ijeoma Oluo’s columns or her book *So You Want to Talk About Race*. Other books that many people find difficult to read because of the way they challenge preconceptions are Ta-Nahisi Coates’ book *Between the World and Me* and *There There* by Tommy Orange.

ACTIVITY 6**'Dog Eat Dog' by Joni Mitchell**

Look at the lyrics to Joni Mitchell's song 'Dog Eat Dog' via the QR code provided, and read the first three verses carefully. Then answer the following questions:



- 1 Identify any features of this song which might pose obstacles to the listener understanding it thoroughly.
- 2 How does your world view align with the speaker's? Explain why it is similar or different.
- 3 Do you think some listeners could be offended by the lyrics to this song? Why?

When you have answered the questions, you can review the notes available on page 422.

Joni Mitchell

Joni Mitchell was born Roberta Joan Anderson in Fort McLeod, Alberta, Canada, in 1943 to a father who was in the Royal Canadian Air Force and a mother who was a teacher (Scott). She was a tomboy as a child, but her pleasure in athletic pursuits was cut short by polio when she was 9. She recovered the use of her legs, but one of her hands was permanently damaged, which would ultimately result in her developing her highly characteristic style of using non-standard guitar tunings, which she called 'Joni's weird chords' (Waddacor). Unable to pursue more boisterous activities, Mitchell turned to art – painting initially. Despite the wide fame she eventually garnered as a musician, she maintains that painting was her true love (Scott). She learned to play the piano as a child, but was disciplined for playing her own compositions rather than the lessons she was supposed to learn, so she gave it up (Scott). She is otherwise self-taught, beginning with the ukulele when she was a teenager (Scott). Mitchell gave birth to a daughter out of wedlock when she was 21, and despite hopes that she would be able to take custody of the child after she married folk singer Chuck Mitchell, the Mitchells did not take the child in, and she was given up for adoption. Mitchell suffered from this decision all her life (Prose). Her marriage broke up after a few years and she subsequently had several love affairs, often with other singers, and often resulting in powerful songs. Mitchell has won nine Grammy Awards, including a lifetime achievement award. She was awarded the Order of Canada and the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have looked at the many challenges that may hinder readers when faced with a literary work that is new to their experience. We have seen that it takes perseverance to overcome those challenges, that readers cannot simply read through the words and expect to understand them, and so they must be willing to look things up, ask questions, pursue possibilities, be curious and learn as much as they need to before they can gain a deeper understanding. It might seem obvious to ask why all this effort is worth it, but it is for the valuable insights that literature gives us, in the same way that all art is worth the effort for the insights it gives us.

We saw in Chapter 1.1 that the function of the arts is to give us access to other people's perceptions of the world. Those perceptions are the insights that reward our willingness to work through the challenges that literature brings. In Chapter 1.2, we saw that literature brings us insights about other times and places and gives us insight into human nature. We find out what others think is right and wrong and what it means to live well. We make emotional connections to others who see the world as we do. Perhaps, above all, we gain the insight that others still believe that goodness is possible – even tragedies show us the way the world ought to be. Literature helps us develop empathy; it humanizes us. Literature brings us hope.

ACTIVITY 7**Memorable works of literature**

Think of a book, story, song, poem or play that is memorable to you personally. Why did it touch you? Why do you still remember it after however much time has passed? What insights did it give you about the world and the people in it? Did it change your view about anything?

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1.6

In what ways is meaning constructed, negotiated, expressed and interpreted?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To recognize that meaning arises from the interaction between a reader and the text
- ▶ To understand that the reader and writer must necessarily understand a literary work differently
- ▶ To appreciate that different readers will inevitably come up with different interpretations of the same text
- ▶ To understand that constructing meaning from a literary work is a process of thinking in which one idea leads inevitably to another
- ▶ To appreciate that any interpretation must be faithful to the facts of the language of a literary work in order to be considered legitimate

Introduction

In the introductory chapter to this book, we considered in some detail the concepts that shape the way that meaning is constructed, negotiated, expressed and interpreted in literary texts. Sections 2 and 3 of the book will look at how different approaches – the **contextual** and the **comparative** – help to shape a reader’s understanding of texts. Throughout this first section, we have been exploring an **immanent** approach to interpreting literature. The immanent approach is fundamentally focused on the individual reader and how he or she can construct meaning through studying a literary text. In this chapter, we will examine how all the ideas we have looked at so far come together in the interpretation of whole texts.

Negotiating meaning

The question, ‘In what ways is meaning constructed, negotiated, expressed and interpreted?’ offers four different elements of the communication between an author and a reader. ‘Constructed’ and ‘expressed’ can be seen to refer to the author’s role in transferring a meaning from author to reader. The author constructs the text (and ‘constructs’ is an important word, because it implies a conscious and deliberate process. Writers don’t just fling down on to the page whatever happens to come to mind). Authors also *express* their ideas through all of the literary techniques we have been looking at: the use of a particular narrator, the choice of a particular setting, the ordering of plot elements and the kinds of images, **symbols**, sentence structures, tones and other uses of language that they choose in order to convey an intended effect.

The fourth term in the question, ‘interpreted’, refers to the reader’s role in the transaction between author and reader. We have to interpret the author’s intentions by working at understanding what the author has done in order to construct meaning.

The second term, ‘negotiated’, is an interesting concept. To call something a negotiation is to suggest that two parties work together, or back and forth, to come to an agreement about something. Clearly this does not happen in any literal sense when it comes to interpreting literature. Readers almost never have a chance to talk to an author about what the author intended, and even if they do – or if they can read something about what the author intended – an author is not looking to change his or her meaning based on a negotiation with a reader. Instead, we can think of the job of creating a bridge between reader and writer of any work as a negotiation in the sense that the author lays down his or her version of the story and its implications, and then the reader engages

with that version in an effort to understand it. What makes the process like a negotiation is that we can be certain that the author's intention will never be fully realized exactly as he or she thought it in his or her head. Such an outcome is actually impossible, because no reader is the author, which means that no reader has exactly the same life experiences that shaped the knowledge and world view of the author. Authors and readers, therefore, always differ in what they know and how they will experience the world. The meaning, then, that any given reader will construct from a literary work is going to be different to some degree from what the author meant to express.

We can see how this negotiation works by looking at two interpretations of the following passage from Yann Martel's *Life of Pi*.

The ship sank. It made a sound like a monstrous metallic burp. Things bubbled at the surface and then vanished. Everything was screaming: the sea, the wind, my heart. From the lifeboat I saw something in the water.

I cried, 'Richard Parker, is that you? It is so hard to see. Oh, that this rain would stop! Richard Parker?

5 Richard Parker? Yes, it is you!'

I could see his head. He was struggling to stay at the surface of the water.

'Jesus, Mary, Muhammad and Vishnu, how good to see you, Richard Parker! Don't give up, please. Come to the lifeboat. Do you hear this whistle? TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! You heard right. Swim, swim! You're a strong swimmer. It's not a hundred feet.'

10 He had seen me. He looked panic-stricken. He started swimming my way. The water about him was shifting wildly. He looked small and helpless.

'Richard Parker, can you believe what has happened to us? Tell me it's a bad dream. Tell me it's not real. Tell me I'm still in my bunk on the Tsimtsum and I'm tossing and turning and soon I'll wake up from this nightmare. Tell me I'm still happy. Mother, my tender guardian angel of wisdom, where are you? And you, 15 Father, my loving worrywart? And you, Ravi, dazzling hero of my childhood? Vishnu preserve me, Allah protect me, Christ save me, I can't bear it! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE!'

I was not wounded in any part of my body, but I had never experienced such intense pain, such a ripping of the nerves, such an ache of the heart.

20 He would not make it. He would drown. He was hardly moving forward and his movements were weak. His nose and mouth kept dipping underwater. Only his eyes were steadily on me.

'What are you doing, Richard Parker? Don't you love life? Keep swimming then! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! Kick with your legs. Kick! Kick! Kick!'

He stirred in the water and made to swim.

25 'And what of my extended family – birds, beasts and reptiles? They too have drowned. Every single thing I value in life has been destroyed. And I am allowed no explanation? I am to suffer hell without any account from heaven? In that case, what is the purpose of reason, Richard Parker? Is it no more than to shine at practicalities – the getting of food, clothing and shelter? Why can't reason give greater answers? Why can we throw a question further than we can pull in an answer? Why such a vast net if there's so little fish to catch?'

30 His head was barely above water. He was looking up, taking in the sky one last time. There was a lifebuoy in the boat with a rope tied to it. I took hold of it and waved it in the air.

'Do you see this lifebuoy, Richard Parker? Do you see it? Catch hold of it. HUMPF! I'll try again. HUMPF!'

He was too far. But the sight of the lifebuoy flying his way gave him hope. He revived and started beating the water with vigorous, desperate strokes.

35 'That's right! One, two. One, two. One, two. Breathe when you can. Watch for the waves. TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE!'

My heart was chilled to ice. I felt ill with grief. But there was no time for frozen shock. It was shock in activity. Something in me did not want to give up on life, was unwilling to let go, wanted to fight to the very end. Where that part of me got the heart, I don't know.

40 'Isn't it ironic, Richard Parker? We're in hell yet we're still afraid of immortality. Look how close you are! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! Hurrah, hurrah! You've made it, Richard Parker, you've made it. Catch! HUMPF!'

I threw the lifebuoy mightily. It fell in the water right in front of him. With his last energies he stretched forward and took hold of it.

45 'Hold on tight, I'll pull you in. Don't let go. Pull with your eyes while I pull with my hands. In a few seconds you'll be aboard and we'll be together. Wait a second. Together? We'll be together? Have I gone mad?'

I woke up to what I was doing. I yanked on the rope.

'Let go of that lifebuoy, Richard Parker! Let go, I said. I don't want you here, do you understand? Go somewhere else. Leave me alone. Get lost. Drown! Drown!'

50 He was kicking vigorously with his legs. I grabbed an oar. I thrust it at him, meaning to push him away. I missed and lost hold of the oar.

I grabbed another oar. I dropped it in an oarlock and pulled as hard as I could, meaning to move the lifeboat away. All I accomplished was to turn the lifeboat a little. Bringing one end closer to Richard Parker.

I would hit him on the head! I lifted the oar in the air.

55 He was too fast. He reached up and pulled himself aboard.

'Oh my God!'

Ravi was right. Truly I was to be the next goat. I had a wet, trembling, half-drowned, heaving and coughing three-year-old adult Bengal tiger in my lifeboat. Richard Parker rose unsteadily to his feet on the tarpaulin, eyes blazing as they met mine, ears laid tight to his head, all weapons drawn. His head was the
60 size and the colour of the lifebuoy, with teeth.

I turned around, stepped over the zebra and threw myself overboard.

(Yann Martel 97–100)

■ Interpretation 1

The fact that the name of the tiger in this passage is Richard Parker represents quite a fascinating decision on the part of the author, Yann Martel, because it is an historical **allusion**. The real-life Richard Parker was a cabin boy on an English yacht called *Mignonette* in 1884 (Spilman). The *Mignonette* sank and Richard Parker was adrift in a lifeboat with three of the ship's sailors. They had managed to save almost no food, and after many days with no food at all, two of the sailors agreed between themselves to kill and eat Richard Parker, the youngest and weakest among them and the one with no family at home (Sandel). The argument that the two sailors' lawyer subsequently brought to the court when they were tried for murder was the claim that the act of killing Parker was an act of necessity. In a long and thoughtfully argued response, the judges found that there was no necessity of killing Richard Parker over any of the others, and the two sailors were found guilty of murder (Sandel).

In naming the tiger Richard Parker, then, Yann Martel has made an historical **allusion** to a ship sinking and its aftermath for the survivors. In doing so, however, Martel has turned the allusion on its head. In *Life of Pi*, Richard Parker is not the weakened cabin boy, victim to humans larger and stronger than himself; instead, Richard Parker is a Bengal tiger, bigger by far than Pi, the small, lonely human. The ethical situation, furthermore, is also inverted. Whereas the murder of a young man for the purposes of preserving oneself suggests a certain kind of selfishness, the court ruling said, in part:

Though law and morality are not the same, and many things may be immoral which are not necessarily illegal, yet the absolute divorce of law from morality would be of fatal consequence; and such divorce would follow if the temptation to murder in this case were to be held by law an absolute defence of it. It is not so. To preserve one's life is generally speaking a duty, but it may be the plainest and the highest duty to sacrifice it. War is full of instances in which it is a man's duty not to live, but to die. The duty, in case of shipwreck, of a captain to his crew, of the crew to the passengers, of soldiers to women and children, as in the noble case of the Birkenhead; these duties impose on men the moral necessity, not of the preservations but of the sacrifice of their lives for others, from which in no country, least of all, it is to be hoped, in England, will men ever shrink as indeed, they have not shrunk.

(Sandel)

The court ruled, in other words, that the moral duty in the case was for the sailors to work for the preservation of the young man's life, and if sacrifice was to be made, it should have been a voluntary sacrifice, not a decision imposed upon the boy.

In the passage from *Life of Pi*, the tiger cannot be seen as a creature with any moral duties. If it had, indeed, eaten Pi (possibly a pun there, intended by the author), we would not have held the tiger in contempt for having failed to act in an ethical manner. We would see the tiger eating a man as being in the nature of the tiger.

Martel has further reshaped the moral picture in the novel from what it was in the historical event by giving us a sailor, Pi, whose instincts were all about saving Richard Parker, even though to do so might bring on his own death. Admittedly, when Pi realizes what he's doing, he tries to keep Richard Parker from boarding the lifeboat, but that was an afterthought – and, if he had killed the tiger to save his own life, we would likely have accepted that as self-defence. Instead, Martel gives us a character whose heart was where the sailors' hearts in the historical case most definitely were not. Given how hard he worked at trying to bring it about,

Pi's initial and very powerful wish was to save the life of a fellow living creature, a survivor – like Pi himself – of a catastrophic shipwreck.

In this passage from *Life of Pi*, then, Martel has used an historical allusion in which two humans failed to live up to their better nature to give us a portrait of what the human spirit ought to be about: doing good for others.

■ Interpretation 2

Pi is a number in mathematics that most people will most readily associate with circles. I don't see that the specific mathematical formula, πr^2 , has anything much to do with this passage from *The Life of Pi*; however, the reference to the circle seems highly appropriate, given the fact that the passage travels full circle from the first line, in which 'the ship sank' to the last line, in which the narrator '... threw myself overboard'. That full circle from sinking to sinking incorporates a number of other half-circle transitions, beginning with the passage in a lifeboat and then ending with his abandoning what has now become the 'death-boat'. Life itself is commonly conceived of as a cycle, so the linking of 'Life' and 'Pi' in the title seems suggestive and, indeed, one of the most interesting things about this passage is the way it seems to embody, in both content and structure, cycles of life and death.

The fact that Richard Parker – a name repeated thirteen times in the passage – turns out to be a tiger and not a person comes as a shock to the first-time reader of the passage. The author has constructed the passage in such a way that we assume, both because of the use of the human name – first and last names, even – and because of the narrator's passionate efforts to save him, that Richard Parker is an equally unfortunate traveler cut adrift from the same shipwreck that left the narrator in the lifeboat. The language with which the narrator exhorts Richard Parker to keep swimming exudes hope and encouragement – 'Swim, swim! You're a strong swimmer. It's not a hundred feet' (lines 8 and 9) and 'Don't you love life?' (line 21) and '... how good to see you, Richard Parker' (line 7) – and conveys the narrator's joy, his concern, and his deep determination to help this hapless character survive the catastrophe. Our passions are thus raised, along with the narrator's, and we, naturally, find ourselves rooting for the narrator to save this Richard Parker.

Our concern is further solicited by the suspense (that the author has created) that it appears, through most of the passage, that Richard Parker isn't going to make it. We are told he looked 'small and helpless' (line 11), that he was 'struggling to stay at the surface of the water' (line 6), and that 'his nose and mouth kept dipping underwater' (line 20). We are drawn in to share every moment of fear and hope. The intimations that Richard Parker will drown are alternated with the narrator's renewed efforts to save him; thus, the early part of the passage is structured in cycles of hope and fear, oscillating like the very waves in the sea pulling the swimmer towards the boat and then pushing him away. Through this careful manipulation of our emotions, the author binds us to the narrator's cause and ensures that when we realize that Richard Parker is not a person but a tiger, we will suffer some of the same shock that the narrator suffered when he abruptly comes to realize the potential outcome of this heroic act. The readers too, then, are transformed, in much the same way the narrator is, from wishing that Richard Parker would live, to horror at the thought that he will and, as a result, this good-hearted narrator will be killed.

The passage emphasizes the idea of a good heart, and uses it to generate in the reader the same sympathy that the narrator has for Richard Parker. We are told, on line 18, that the narrator has never had such a terrible 'ache of the heart'. This ache results from the loss of his beloved family, to be sure, but it also results, as we see in the very next line, from his fear that Richard

Parker will die: 'He would not make it. He would drown. He was hardly moving forward and his movements were weak'. The prospect of the loss of one more life weighs heavily on the narrator as a terrible thing, and we are naturally drawn to appreciate and admire someone with such a capacity for caring for others.

The narrator's heart led him to save the tiger because, flooded with sympathy, he saw a fellow frightened creature deserving of life. We admire the heart, even as we realize that the injection of reason into the situation doesn't seem to serve him much better. After all, it is only rational to understand that jumping overboard to get away from the tiger might save him from a probable and unpleasant death as the tiger's next meal – but reason, too, would appear to condemn our narrator to death by the sea instead. The crux of the matter is that the tiger cannot process this on a human level. The tiger experienced fear and desire to live, and was able to respond to the encouragement and the hope offered by that tweeting whistle and the lifebuoy, but once the danger was past and the tiger felt himself to be safe, he was incapable of fellow-feelings like empathy or gratitude. While a human 'Richard Parker' might see the narrator as saviour, the tiger does not and cannot, and it is the narrator, and neither nature nor the tiger itself, who confused the tiger with Richard Parker.

At the beginning of the passage, a ship sinks, Richard Parker is in the water and near to death, and the narrator is in a 'hell' (line 25) of pain and loss. He takes the suffering of the moment, however, and turns it into a supreme act of love, encouragement and teamwork. He wants to live and he wants Richard Parker to live. By the end of the passage, however, all of those elements have been transformed: Richard Parker isn't just the helpless and small fellow-sufferer any more, but a Bengal tiger, 'all weapons drawn' (line 59). The tiger, now enemy to the narrator, is in the boat and the narrator has thrown himself into the water. The positions have reversed, as have life and death themselves.

The religious underpinnings of the passage raise the ideas in it to a philosophical level and ask us to question what is important in life. The narrator's openness to seeing the tiger as a person mirrors his openness to different gods and faiths. In his moments of trouble, the narrator calls on the gods of three major religions: Christianity, Islam and Hinduism (lines 7 and 15–16). This suggests a liberal capacity for acceptance of any pathway to understanding, transcending the common understanding that there can be only one true religion.

We are, therefore, asked to see this narrator as someone special, someone less prejudiced and more giving than many. Surrounded as he is by an endless sea, stranded on a lifeboat with a zebra (line 61), trying to salvage the life of a terrified and exhausted tiger, this narrator can be seen as a sort of Noah figure, the one person judged good enough to be spared the global destruction God brought down on the Earth. We are asked, however, to see, in this sparser version of the flood story, what the journey might have looked like from the perspective of a Noah who has to deal with the reality of the animals on his boat in all their animal nature, rather than considering them as rather tidy and antiseptic pairs. Martel's Noah-like figure is faced with a problem even more immediate than the destruction of all life on Earth other than that on his boat: he is faced with the destruction of his own life.

The life cycle is mirrored in the overall structure of the passage because the energy and the focus at the beginning is on life, but shifts dramatically to death by the end. The word 'life' in some form – 'life', 'lifeboat' or 'lifebuoy' – appears seven times during the time that the narrator is trying to save Richard Parker. During this section, life is the goal and all of the effort – both narrator's and tiger's – is focused on hanging onto life. After line 47, however, the narrator's attention is turned abruptly to death, once he realizes that he is on the verge of sharing his

lifeboat with a Bengal tiger. At line 47 the narrator ‘woke up to what I was doing’, and shifted his activity abruptly from trying to save Richard Parker to trying to kill the tiger. At line 49 he exhorts the tiger to ‘Drown! Drown’ and, failing to command the tiger to death, decides to take an active part by hitting the tiger with the oar. When he fails, and the tiger ends up in the lifeboat, it is the boy who must choose either lifeboat or drowning, but now the choice is not actually between life and death; rather, it is between two different versions of death.

The passage as a whole, then, makes one wonder what it must have been like to be Noah, sharing his lifeboat with not only tigers but a whole raft of other wild animals. Martel gives us a more dramatic, rawer version of the classical Biblical flood story that reveals not only how quickly we can go from safety to danger and life to death, but also reminds us that it is humanity alone that is capable of developing a true feeling of unity with those fundamentally unlike us. His portrait of a narrator who passionately works to save a tiger from drowning reminds us of our capacity for empathy, our inclination to bestow dignity on any creature we find sharing our hells with us. That capacity, he seems to suggest, is one of our most divine traits, but it can also lead us into grave danger.

ACTIVITY 1

Discussion

Before you go on to read an analysis of these two interpretations, discuss with a partner whether or not you think both of these interpretations are reasonable. Is one better than the other? Why or why not?

Notice that both of those interpretations make good sense out of the text. The first reader misses the religious implications that the second reader sees, and the second reader apparently had no knowledge of the historical event that the first reader dwelt on, but neither reader distorted the language of the work in any way. Nor did either one try to force some meaning on it that isn't there. Because the one reader looked at the work through the lens of a Christian story, that of Noah's Ark, and the other looked at it through the lens of an historical event, the cannibalism of a real Richard Parker, the two readings are very different. Both are almost certainly different in fundamental ways from what the author had in his mind when he wrote. In an interview, Martel did explain a little of his thinking with regard to the naming of the tiger, saying that he had read about a series of coincidences involving sailors named Richard Parker, and he did mention the incident of the Mignonette; however, he did not say anything about intending to use an historical **allusion** to comment on morality or human nature. He said, ‘I liked that coincidence, that name that kept on coming up in my research. I decided that would be the tiger's name’ (ABC News). We have no information, furthermore, about his familiarity with or intentions regarding the Biblical story of Noah's Ark. We cannot, therefore, know how much either of the two interpretations here differs from Martel's intentions. This is a perfect example, then, of the way that meaning is negotiated in literature or any art: the recipient of the art is an integral part of what meaning in a work can possibly convey. What a reader knows or does not know shapes the meaning into something which is likely to be rather different from what the author might, working alone at his or her writing, have intended. The meaning that was negotiated came out of the facts of the work and the knowledge of the reader. In a very real way, then, that term ‘constructs’, in the chapter question, applies to the reader as well as to the writer.

Yann Martel

Yann Martel was born in Spain in 1963 while his parents were doing graduate work. They subsequently joined the foreign service, and Martel grew up traveling to many countries including Costa Rica, France, Spain, Mexico and Canada ('Yann Martel'). He went to college in Canada, studying philosophy (Pratt). After graduation, he had many different jobs including a security guard, tree-planter, and dish-washer ('Yann Martel') before deciding to take up writing full time. *Life of Pi* was his second novel and it made him world-famous. He has published four novels, a collection of short stories, and an interesting compilation of 100 letters that he wrote to the Prime Minister of Canada, recommending books for him to read (Pratt). Martel has won a number of literary awards including the Mann Booker Prize for *Life of Pi*.

Constructing meaning

We have seen the outcome of the process of creating and negotiating meaning, but we have not looked closely at *how* that process takes place. Writing is a process that takes place inside a writer's mind. Ted Hughes wrote a poem called 'The Thought Fox' which gives us an image of what it is like to get an idea. It suggests that the formation of an idea is like a fox in winter, creeping around the edges of the wood. We get little glimpses of it – a flash of colour, a footprint, the glint of an eye – until finally it bursts all at once into the clearing. You probably know something about what it is like to go through the process of writing from your own experience of writing essays and other texts for school. Next time you have to write something, try to notice what that process looks like inside your head.

To understand the writer's process, we need access to a writer's mind, which is not so easy to come by; however, a writer can give us a portrait of what reading is like inside a reader's head, because writers are readers too, and they have the gift for writing it down for us. 'Poem' by Elizabeth Bishop, takes us on the journey through the mind of a person engaging, in an immanent way, with a work of art:

Poem

About the size of an old-style dollar bill,
 American or Canadian,
 mostly the same whites, gray greens, and steel grays
 –this little painting (a sketch for a larger one?)
 5 has never earned any money in its life.
 Useless and free, it has spent seventy years
 as a minor family relic handed along collaterally to owners
 who looked at it sometimes, or didn't bother to.

It must be Nova Scotia; only there
 10 does one see gabled wooden houses
 painted that awful shade of brown.
 The other houses, the bits that show, are white.
 Elm trees, low hills, a thin church steeple
 –that gray-blue wisp – or is it? In the foreground
 15 a water meadow with some tiny cows,
 two brushstrokes each, but confidently cows;

two minuscule white geese in the blue water,
back-to-back, feeding, and a slanting stick.
Up closer, a wild iris, white and yellow,
20 fresh-squiggled from the tube.
The air is fresh and cold; cold early spring
clear as gray glass; a half inch of blue sky
below the steel-gray storm clouds.
(They were the artist's specialty.)
25 A specklike bird is flying to the left.
Or is it a flyspeck looking like a bird?

Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!
It's behind – I can almost remember the farmer's name.
His barn backed on that meadow. There it is,
30 titanium white, one dab. The hint of steeple,
filaments of brush-hairs, barely there,
must be the Presbyterian church.
Would that be Miss Gillespie's house?
Those particular geese and cows
35 are naturally before my time.

A sketch done in an hour, 'in one breath',
once taken from a trunk and handed over.
Would you like this? I'll probably never
have room to hang these things again.
40 Your Uncle George, no, mine, my Uncle George,
he'd be your great-uncle, left them all with Mother
when he went back to England.
You know, he was quite famous, an R.A. ...

I never knew him. We both knew this place,
45 apparently, this literal small backwater,
looked at it long enough to memorize it,
our years apart. How strange. And it's still loved,
or its memory is (it must have changed a lot).
Our visions coincided – 'visions' is
50 too serious a word – our looks, two looks:
art 'copying from life' and life itself,
life and the memory of it so compressed
they've turned into each other. Which is which?
Life and the memory of it cramped,
55 dim, on a piece of Bristol board,
dim, but how live, how touching in detail
–the little that we get for free,
the little of our earthly trust. Not much.

About the size of our abidance
 60 along with theirs: the munching cows,
 the iris, crisp and shivering, the water
 still standing from spring freshets,
 the yet-to-be-dismantled elms, the geese.

(Elizabeth Bishop)

The speaker of the poem is someone who has just come across a small painting that was painted by one of her distant relatives. She speaks in **stream-of-consciousness**, which means that we see her in the moment that she is holding this painting and looking at it, and we get all of her thoughts as she examines it. Essentially, we live the experience of discovering the painting from within her own mind at the moment that she lives it. We can watch her ideas about the painting unfold as we read the poem.

ACTIVITY 2

Interpreting 'Poem'

Before you read the interpretation of this poem, answer the following questions:

- 1 To what is the speaker comparing the painting in lines 1–5?
- 2 At line 9, the speaker changes tactics, and starts thinking about something else with regard to the painting. What conclusions does she start to draw and based on what evidence does she draw them?
- 3 What is the sudden idea that the speaker has at line 27? How does this idea affect what she starts noticing about the painting?
- 4 Where does the speaker's thinking shift from the painting itself to the painter? What ideas does the speaker have about her relationship to that painter?
- 5 This type of narrative is called 'stream-of-consciousness', which means that the speaker just says whatever is in her mind as it occurs to her. The narrative is not shaped in the way that stories are shaped. What does the use of this kind of speaker reveal to you about the meaning of the poem?

Now go on and read the interpretation provided below. Does that interpretation differ greatly from yours?

In lines 1–5, the speaker notices the painting in terms of money. It looks like it is the size of a dollar bill. This observation makes her think about the fact that the painting has never made any money. She explains, in lines 6–8, that she knows this because it has been passed around the family for seventy years. Because it is still in the family, it can never have been sold. We get an interesting little sidetrack at line 4, when it occurs to the speaker to wonder if this painting was actually a sketch for a larger one. She doesn't follow up on that thought, however.

In line 9, she makes an observation based on what she is seeing in the painting – that this must be Nova Scotia. She abandons the thought about what the painting is worth in monetary terms and starts focusing on what is in the painting. She has noticed houses painted in a particular shade of brown, and she recognizes that colour from her own personal experience. She has seen houses of that colour only in Nova Scotia, so in her mind, the painting can only be of a town in Nova Scotia. She is very sure about her observation, claiming that 'only there' does one see houses of that colour. That is a very strong claim and not, if we take it in purely rational terms, very logical. It is highly unlikely that someone invented a colour of brown and made paint to be sold only in that one place

on all the planet. (We might notice here, as readers, that a different person looking at those brown houses might think of an entirely different town where that viewer has seen houses of that colour!) From there, in lines 12–15, the speaker simply catalogues the things that she sees in the painting: white houses, elm trees, a church steeple, and cows. At line 16, we see another interesting shift in her thinking: she starts noticing not just what the objects are, but also how they have been made by the painter. She notes, for example, that the cows were made with two brushstrokes each, but she is certain that those two brushstrokes indicate cows. Her certainty is once again interesting, because, if we stand back and consider the situation logically, it is hard to imagine how one could make a cow out of just two brush strokes. Still, this might be due to the skill of the painter. In Vermeer’s very famous painting *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, the earring, a huge and striking pearl which is the subject of the painting, is almost entirely made up of two brushstrokes of white paint. Look closely at the image (via the QR code to the right) and you will see that Vermeer did not paint a pearl; he painted two white shapes which would make your eye see a pearl. Perhaps that is what is happening with the cows in the painting that the speaker of Bishop’s poem is observing. That observation has shifted focus to include more than just the facts of the painting; the speaker is now noticing the painter’s artistic technique.



Once she has noticed the way the cows were constructed, the speaker of the poem notices how other features of the painting were constructed. In lines 19–24 she notices how squiggles of paint became flowers and how the clouds in this painting were a specialty of this painter – a fact she presumably knows from knowing other paintings he made, and which have passed through the family as well. In line 27, she has a sudden realization that not only does she recognize Nova Scotia, but she actually recognizes the very spot in which this painting was painted. The painting suddenly comes alive for her. She thinks she almost knows the name of the farmer whose barn she now notices. She starts looking for things that she thinks, from her memory of the place, should be there. And she finds them. She finds a dab of titanium white and determines that it is the back of the farmer’s barn. She sees a little brush of paint, ‘barely there’, in line 31 and assumes it must be the steeple on the Presbyterian church. Not ‘a’ Presbyterian church, but ‘the’ Presbyterian church. Once this speaker has located the painting in Nova Scotia with such a high degree of certainty, we can see that she proceeds through her observations with that understanding in her mind. Everything she sees starts to slot into that framework. Her idea about Nova Scotia has become a force that shapes her expectations about what else she will find in the painting, and the more elements that she can fit into her image of the place, the more she looks for (and finds) confirmation of her idea.

Once the speaker has determined that she knows the very place that this painting must have been painted, she begins to think about her relationship to the painter. She remembers, in lines 38–43, the conversation that she had with the person who gave her the painting. That person, who must be the speaker’s mother or father (since that person’s Uncle George would be the speaker’s Great Uncle George), told the speaker that he was a member of the Royal Academy of Arts in England. The speaker, who has discovered a personal connection to the painting, is now rediscovering her personal connection to the artist.

In line 44, she acknowledges that she never knew her Great Uncle George, but she realizes that they both knew the very same place. In lines 44–49, she thinks about the somewhat amazing fact that two people who never met each other could have visited the same place and then shared that memory through a painting. She realizes that the painting is a ‘copy’ from life and, therefore, it is also a memory of that place. The physical memory of the place lines up with her personal memory of that same place, inside her mind, as she points out in lines 54–55. And in this section of the poem, she makes the rather striking discovery that in turning a real place into art, the painter has made it difficult to tell what is more real – the memory of the place or the depiction of the place as represented in the artwork.

We journey with the speaker as she makes meaning of this painting. She starts with something more or less outside the painting – its potential monetary value – and then moves to the actual details of the painting, then she begins to notice how the artist creates his effects, and then she makes the important personal connection to the painting and, through it, to the artist. At the end of that journey, she realizes that her connection to the painter through the artwork has revealed something to her about the importance of art in preserving memory and even reality.

Bishop, the poet, has given us a beautiful look at the mind of a viewer of art as it goes through the process of negotiating meaning from the work. In doing so, she has also given us a beautiful portrait of how minds work on texts. The poem is called ‘Poem’. In giving the poem that title, Bishop calls to us to notice that, as readers, we stand in relationship to her, as the poet, in exactly the same relationship that the speaker of the poem stands in relationship to the painter. Elizabeth Bishop is not our great aunt, of course, but we can make a personal connection to her, a person we have never met, just as the speaker of the poem made a connection to her great uncle, also a person she never met. We approach the poem – this poem or any poem, or any literary text – in the same way that the speaker approached the painting. We notice the details and we notice the craft, and the more we think we know what is going on, the more we find evidence to confirm our ideas. In the end, we create a meaning. In this case, the meaning was about the important role that art plays in human experience. In other texts, the meaning will be about something else, but we will take the same journey through facts and technique to ideas that transcend the artwork itself.

This poem also demonstrates the importance of the personal experience of the reader to understanding the text. This speaker has been to Nova Scotia and has been to a place in Nova Scotia where a farmer’s barn backs up to a field and where someone named Miss Gillespie has a house. A different viewer might, as we noted, associate those brown houses with a different place and time. Yet another viewer might have no association with brown houses but might have an association with irises in a field and find a way into the painting that way. This is the same process that got us those different interpretations of *Life of Pi*. One reader of that passage put the brown houses in Nova Scotia and another could put them somewhere else. But both interpretations are viable and both are, therefore, meaningful.

ACTIVITY 3

Check for understanding

In pairs or small groups, discuss how a reader’s personal experience might shape his or her understanding of a literary text. Can you bring any examples of how your own experiences shaped your interpretation of a particular text?

CONCEPT CONNECTION

TRANSFORMATION

The process depicted in ‘Poem’ demonstrates very clearly how a work is transformed by the act of interpretation. We saw the same thing with the two interpretations of the passage from *Life of Pi*. The reader, in engaging with the text, transforms it to some degree from what it was on the page to something new. This process is normal and natural, so long as the transformation occurred as the result of interpretation based on the actual facts of

the literary work – or of any artwork. We cannot read this poem and claim that because of our life experience we see it as being about war or conflict. It is not. There is nothing in the language of the poem that can be taken to stand for war in any rational reading. Such a claim would not be interpretation, and so would not be a legitimate example of what we mean when we talk about the way a reader transforms a text.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: ART, CREATIVITY AND THE IMAGINATION

Elizabeth Bishop's 'Poem' could be used as one text in an individual oral with a focus on a global issue related to the field of inquiry of art, creativity and the imagination, such as what constitutes value in art. This poem explores the idea that the painting in the poem has no value in the world until the speaker, observing the painting for the first time, invests it with value. 'Poem' would have to be paired, of course, with a work in translation that also has as a subject the value of literature or art. One possibility would be 'Poetry' by Pablo Neruda. That poem describes the effect of a first encounter

with poetry on the speaker. The two poems share the viewpoint that one way to consider the value of art is the degree to which it affects the reader or viewer. Remember that for all your assessments you must use works that you studied in your course, so the works presented here are examples only, to show you how a global issue might be developed. You will also have to explore how the global issue you chose is reflected in the work as a whole, so you would have to be able to discuss this global issue in relation to all the poems you read by Bishop and Neruda – if you studied those poets.

Elizabeth Bishop

Elizabeth Bishop's life was never easy. Her father died when she was only a few months old, and in the aftermath of that, her mother experienced a psychological collapse that led to a series of stays in psychological hospitals and left her permanently institutionalised by the time Bishop was five. Bishop never saw her mother again (Colwell). She lived for a few years with relatives in Nova Scotia, but her father's parents eventually took her to live with them in Worcester, Massachusetts, where she was very unhappy (Colwell). After becoming extremely ill from eating a cashew nut on a trip to Brazil, Bishop was stranded in a hospital there. She ended up falling in love with Maria Carlota Costellat de Macedo Soares, known as Lota, and remained in Brazil for 18 years. Eventually the political situation destabilized to the point where Bishop returned to the United States, living in New York. Soares joined her there, but committed suicide the very first day, leaving Bishop to grieve for a great loss (Colwell). A lifetime of so many losses – father,

mother, grandparents, country and lover – caused her to be often very ill and, later in life, brought her a struggle with alcoholism (Pierpont). Despite all the obstacles, and despite the fact that she published only five books of poetry over a span of nearly 40 years, Bishop won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for her poetry, and she became the first American and first woman ever to win the Books Abroad/Neustadt International Prize for Literature. The acclaim did not fill the holes in Bishop's life, however. She said to poet Robert Lowell, a lifelong friend, 'When you write my epitaph, you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived' (Pierpont).



CONCEPT CONNECTION

REPRESENTATION

Bishop's 'Poem' is a good example of how we cannot expect literature to represent authors' lives exactly. Bishop did live in Nova Scotia for a few years in her early childhood, so we can see that she had experience that would allow her to give the poem's speaker old memories of Nova Scotia; however, the rest of the poem does not fit Bishop's actual life story. Bishop had an Uncle George with whom she lived for a time in Boston (Pierpont), but he was

her uncle, not her great uncle, and she obviously knew him well. Her relationship with her uncle was not represented by the speaker's relationship with the Great Uncle George, whom she never met. The characters in the poem, on the other hand, have been created as the means by which Bishop wished to represent her ideas about art and the ways in which it can connect people across boundaries of time and place.

● TOK Links: Expectations and knowledge

The odds are that the painting the speaker was examining was not, in reality, a painting of the particular spot that she had in mind. Such a connection would not be impossible, but we saw how the speaker's observations led her to conclusions; her assumptions led to seeking out specific evidence to support those assumptions. The interpretation of the painting is legitimate because the observer did use actual elements of the painting as evidence for her claims. This process

was perhaps made easier by the impressionistic nature of the painting. The speaker did what people observing art do: she interpreted facts, but she did not make up things that weren't there. This process of allowing our expectations to shape what we pay attention to functions in all situations in our daily lives. How do your expectations as a reader shape what you notice in a text? What are the best ways for you to broaden your mind so that you are open to as many possibilities as possible?

A final case study

Now that you have finished reading most of this chapter, we will undertake one final activity in order to review all of the elements of the **immanent** approach to literature. We will work through the following very short story several times. Each time, we will point you to some different elements to consider, so that you can see how your reading might change as you learn more about what is contained within the story – as you become, in other words, more like the ideal **implied reader** of this text.

First, it is very important that you read the story for yourself, and answer the questions which follow it. Do not look anything up; do not discuss your reading with anyone else. You need to notice what you can do with the story relying solely on the knowledge and experience you have right now. The piece is called 'The Story of an Hour' and is by Kate Chopin.

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

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

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of
10 grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

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

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

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

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob
20 came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

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

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

30 Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will – as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: ‘free, free, free!’ The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

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

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

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

45 ‘Free! Body and soul free!’ she kept whispering.

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

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

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

55 She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

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

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

(Kate Chopin)

ACTIVITY 4**'The Story of an Hour' by Kate Chopin****First reading**

Write down your answers to the following questions:

- 1 Having read this story, what would you say is Chopin's meaning? What point is she making about human experience?
- 2 Did you find anything difficult about reading this story? Any vocabulary you didn't know? Did you think there was any cultural reference that was unfamiliar? Describe any challenges you had while trying to interpret 'The Story of an Hour.'
- 3 Which of the literary techniques that we have explored during this section of the book did you look for?

Second reading

Now read the story again, and this time, pay attention to the means by which Chopin reveals to us Mrs Mallard's grief.

- 1 Make notes identifying the evidence we have that she is grieving.
- 2 Did you notice all of these elements on your first reading?
- 3 What do you think accounts for the fact that you did (or did not) notice them?
- 4 Which of the literary techniques that we have explored during this section of the book did you look for during this second reading?

Third reading

Read the story one more time. Locate as many symbols as you can.

- 1 List all the symbols with the line numbers.
- 2 Explain what you think each symbol means.
- 3 Did you notice all of these symbols during your first two readings?
- 4 What do you think accounts for your noticing (or not noticing) the symbols?
- 5 How does noticing the symbols change your interpretation of the story?

Fourth reading

Review the story again, and this time focus on the last line.

- 1 What do you think the last line tells us about Chopin's point?
- 2 Is there anything difficult about interpreting that last line? If so, why? If not, why not?
- 3 Finally, did the questions in these activity boxes cause you to notice anything you did not notice in your first reading? What? And why do you think you missed it the first time?

Do not go on to the next section of the chapter until you have read the story and answered these questions for yourself. The point of an immanent approach to studying a literary work is for you to engage on your own with the text. The point of this textbook, of course, is to help you be able to do that more effectively; so at this point, we want you to notice what you can do on your own.

Kate Chopin

Kate Chopin was born Catherine O’Flaherty in St Louis, Missouri, in 1850. Much of her early life was affected by living in Missouri during the Civil War – St Louisans fought on both sides of the war, and her family had slaves in the house (‘Biography, Kate Chopin’). At age 19, she met and married Oscar Chopin, a resident of Louisiana. They travelled around the US and through Europe for several months and then returned to Louisiana – it was to be Chopin’s only trip abroad (‘Biography, Kate Chopin’). Together the Chopins had five children, but Oscar died early, leaving Kate a widow at age 32. She moved back to St Louis for better opportunities for her children, and it was there that she began to write. She had some success in her lifetime, especially with publishing short stories, but her second novel, *The Awakening*, caused a furor and was widely banned for what was perceived to be its shocking content. The novel is in essence a portrait of the experience of a woman whose outer life in conforming to societal expectations is dramatically at odds with her sense of her inner self, which includes her sexual desires. The content does not seem nearly so shocking now, but the book garnered Chopin a great deal of public condemnation. When she died in 1904, her work was largely forgotten for many years, until a revival 50 years after her death (‘Biography, Kate Chopin’), and *The Awakening* is now considered a seminal work in American **fiction** – particularly in terms of portraying a woman’s **point of view**.



EE Links: Cultural contexts

You could read Kate Chopin’s novel *The Awakening*, which is quite short, and study it for your extended essay. You could investigate it in terms of the cultural context in which it was written, or in terms of the use of narration to portray the **point of view** of the main character, Edna Pontellier, or you could write a comparison/contrast essay about *The Awakening* in conjunction with another book about women’s roles in society from a different time period, such as one of Jane Austen’s novels, or a modern work such as Margaret Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale*. Remember that you may not write about a book you read for your Literature course, but you may write about another book written by an author whose work you have studied.

Now that you’ve worked through the story on your own, let’s work through it again. We will point out as many of the significant interpretive elements as we can, and you can see if and how your reading of the story changes as we go.

Many readers, upon encountering this story for the first time, find it to be terribly sad and ironic. They are struck by the **irony** of the last sentence, which they take to be an accurate judgment of the cause of Louise Mallard’s death, and they find the irony of her dying on the return of her beloved husband to be sad and terrible because she will now not have the happy life with him that his return, not dead after all, should have meant for her.

Such a reading, however, misses the point of the story. As we shall see, such an interpretation is actually a misreading, as opposed to a legitimate alternate reading arising from a reader’s individual point of view. This is the last important lesson of the section on **readers, writers and texts**: while it is possible for viable alternate readings of any literary work to exist side by side, it is also possible for an interpretation to be wrong, because it ignores parts of the work or significantly misunderstands something that is in the text. Any legitimate interpretation of a literary text – or other work of art – must account for all of the facts of that text. You cannot ignore some of the work and create a reading on just one part.

Read the following interpretation of the story. It takes you through the thinking process that a very skilled reader might go through as he or she reads. The terms in bold remind you of all the conceptual elements of the reader–writer–literary work relationship that we have investigated in this section of the coursebook. See how much of this interpretation you noticed. If you feel that you missed a lot, do not worry! Sophisticated reading takes practice. You will be a better reader for noticing what you missed, and you will know better how to approach the task with another work at another time.

■ Interpretation

As we start reading, we notice that the narrator of ‘The Story of an Hour’ begins by showing us Mrs Mallard from the **perspective** of other characters. Those other characters – her sister, Josephine, and her husband’s friend, Richards – clearly believe that they must break the news of Mr Mallard’s death very gently. Their friend has a heart problem (line 1), and they are clearly afraid that if they shock her, she will die of a heart attack. So we are given, right from the first sentence of the story, an **image** of a frail woman about to be stricken with grief, who must be treated very gently. Our idea of Mrs Mallard is thus formed through the eyes of the characters around her. Because this **viewpoint** is conveyed through a **third-person omniscient narrator**, it is easy to assume that this view of Mrs Mallard is factually correct. Very often, in fact, a third-person narrator is highly **trustworthy**; however, we do need to be careful to determine whether the narrator is giving us facts or a character’s **point of view**.

We must remember, furthermore, that **we cannot presume that all the characters speak for the author**. The concept of **perspectives** reminds us that many perspectives appear in any literary work – even in a work of **fiction** – so we must be alert to any sign that the narrator or the characters see things differently than the author does. At this point, we do not have enough information to determine **whether the author (the implied author) thinks the way the characters do** about Mrs Mallard, but **we should not rush to the conclusion** that she does.

If we are **paying careful attention** then we notice that the narrator tells us, in the third paragraph, that Mrs Mallard’s reaction is not the same as the reaction of many other women in this situation, which is perhaps a clue that Mrs Mallard **might not be what readers expect her to be**. The narrator also tells us, however, that Mrs Mallard’s storm of weeping is grief (lines 9–10), **which is, of course, what we expect** in this situation. The fact that the storm of grief spends itself, however, is another little indication that we are seeing something unusual. We would not expect a loving wife to get over her grief quickly, **but we might also reason** that this is not the end of grief, just a momentary lull. We must continue to be vigilant to discover what is going on in Mrs Mallard’s mind.

At the end of that third paragraph, we have a change of scene. Now we need to **consider what the change of setting means**. We know from the end of the story that Mrs Mallard’s room is upstairs. So we have movement from a group scene downstairs to a scene in which Mrs Mallard is alone upstairs. We also know that her window is open. We must now think about the **symbolic elements of the setting**. The fact that she is upstairs puts Mrs Mallard above the others – and being higher up than someone is often a setting of some kind of superiority. In this case, it is perhaps more a matter of being apart from the others, particularly since the door is closed and locked (as we find out in line 46, where Josephine is trying to talk to her through the keyhole). Mrs Mallard’s being above and apart physically suggests that she is also apart from them in other emotional or psychological ways. **The author has created this opportunity** so that, since we are going to see the character away from the people who have opinions of what kind of person she is and of what her feelings and reactions might be, we can have the chance to see Mrs Mallard as she is. This symbolism is an important tool in helping us to see what the author is up to.

From lines 11 through 18, we notice a cluster of symbols related to freedom. Although the door to her room is locked, Mrs Mallard is not trapped in there. The window is open (a **classic sign** of freedom), the trees outside the window are ‘aquiver with the new spring life’, and ‘the delicious breath of rain was in the air’ (line 14). **Spring is a classic symbol of rebirth**, and we saw in Chapter 1.5 (page 141) that **water is also a sign of rebirth**. Rain could, of course, be a symbol of grief or trouble, but this is not the rain of a storm – this rain is ‘delicious’. This rain, then, seems to be a cleansing rain, the rain of rebirth. (The storm occurred downstairs in the early paragraphs when Mrs Mallard experienced that ‘storm of grief’. This rain is in direct contrast to that **metaphor**.) Birds are twittering (line 16) and birds, too, **are symbols of freedom** because they can fly. Mrs Mallard herself is referred to as a child in line 20. **Against our expectations**, we are being told that in the aftermath of her husband’s death, Mrs Mallard is being reborn. Her friends feared that the result of Brently Mallard’s death would mean Mrs Mallard’s death, but here, in this scene in which she is alone and unobserved by those friends or anyone she knows, Mrs Mallard’s true feelings are revealed to the reader.

The narrator gives us a much more direct clue as to Mrs Mallard’s feelings in line 24: ‘There was something coming to her ...’; ‘something coming’ is the opposite of loss. We are seeing that the import of the event of her husband’s death is not that she sees her life in some way diminishing or going away; the import is that she sees something new coming. It frightens her at first, as we are told in line 24, so if we are not careful, we might fall into the idea that she is afraid of life without her husband. But such an interpretation of her fear does not fit with the symbolism of this scene, so we need a better explanation. We get that explanation a few lines later when we see that she ‘abandoned herself’ (line 29) to the new idea – but that idea is the idea of freedom. She repeats it to herself three times, in the privacy of her room: ‘free, free, free!’ (line 30). That moment of discovery to which **we are witness, but none of the other characters in the story are**, is followed immediately by the description of what happens inside her body. Her blood courses through her, warming ‘every inch of her body’ (line 32). Blood used in this way, as something which is filling and animating her, also functions as a **symbol of life**.

So far, our understanding of how **authors use language to create effects** has been very important in our ability to interpret the story. **Creativity** has played an important role in our thinking; we are having to **observe the facts of the work and then imagine** what they could mean. Our **background knowledge of standard symbols** has been very useful.

We should now consider **the role of the narrator in this story**. Chopin has chosen a third-person omniscient narrator. The narrator sees all the events and knows how all of the characters feel. In the opening paragraph of the story, she gives us Mrs Mallard through the eyes of her sister and friend. In this middle section of the story, the narrator gives us Mrs Mallard as she truly is. The narrator is not making any judgments; just describing how characters feel. Line 33 is particularly interesting **from the perspective of understanding the narrator**. The narrator tells us that Mrs Mallard did not ‘stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her’. The narrator tells us directly, here, that Mrs Mallard is feeling joy and that she knows that that is what she is feeling. We know, too, that the fact that some people might see Mrs Mallard’s feelings as being monstrous is completely irrelevant to Mrs Mallard. She feels what she feels and she is, for the moment, reveling in that feeling. She understands that she is going to be alone for the many years to come and, instead of finding that prospect frightening or painful, she is happy. The image of her standing at her window and holding her arms out in welcome to the coming years is a powerful indicator to us of her feelings. **We can understand her feelings because we know what it is like to embrace something**.

As readers, we are now at a critical point in the story in terms of **our ability to communicate with the author through this text**. The narrator has mentioned something that the character does not know: Mrs Mallard's feelings are not at all what society would expect and, in fact, others would very likely be quite horrified at the fact that Mrs Mallard feels joy because of her husband's death. In fact, **many readers, too, might be horrified at this idea**. If Kate Chopin thinks that Mrs Mallard's feelings are good and natural, but we think that they are horrible and unnatural, **we are not going to be able to appreciate the author's point of view**, and the image we develop of her **identity** is going to be a negative one. We are at the point at which it is crucial for us to ascertain what the author's position is on this social and moral question, so that we can determine whether or not **we share enough of the author's world view to appreciate the story**.

Chopin clearly understands the point to which the reader has been led, because in the next paragraph she shows us why Mrs Mallard feels the way she does: in lines 38–41, **we are given access to Mrs Mallard's private experience** of her marriage. Without, apparently, intending to be cruel, Brently Mallard has treated Mrs Mallard not as a person in her own right, but as a creature existing to serve his purpose. She has experienced him as a 'powerful will' intent upon forcing her into a form that he wished her to take. **In 1894, when the story was first published, readers might have found it more difficult than we do today** to appreciate that – from the perspective of this story, women have a right to be themselves, rather than being moulded into something that serves someone else. But probably a great many women at the time would have understood perfectly the desire to be themselves. **Chopin, we have discovered, does think** that Louise Mallard's joy is natural, but she justifies that feeling by showing us that Mrs Mallard's life has been one of entrapment in a bad marriage. And at this point, we might remember that **heart disease is another one of those classic symbols**: a physical problem with the heart very often signifies a real problem with the love in a character's life. We were warned in the first sentence of the story, if we were paying attention, that Mrs Mallard's marriage was not what others assumed it to be; it was diseased at its heart.

Understanding that Kate Chopin has sympathy for Louise Mallard, and other women who are trapped in a marriage with a man who does not appreciate his wife's rights as an individual person, **we can identify with her point of view**.

By now we understand enough to appreciate the string of ironies that Chopin gives us between lines 46 and the end of the story. Josephine wants desperately to get to Louise because she fears Louise is making herself ill, but we know that Louise is in better health, physically and emotionally, than she has been for years – at least for as long as her marriage has lasted. Another **irony** is one that Mrs Mallard notes for herself: only 'yesterday' (line 51) she was wishing that her life might not be a long one, and now she is overjoyed at the thought that it might be. Since we have read the story before and we know what is coming in the end, we can appreciate the irony that only moments after she thrills at the idea of a long life, she will be dead.

If we are paying careful attention to **structure**, our understanding of the ways in which **structure contributes to meaning in literary works** can alert us to the fact that a bad end is coming. The story started out downstairs, and then Mrs Mallard rose above it all into her room, where new life came in and where she could see her future unfolding in a way she had never anticipated. But on line 55 she starts back down the stairs. Down is a direction symbolic of danger and evil: the 'underworld' is a term signifying all the horrors of hell. At the bottom of this staircase, in fact, death awaits in the form of Brently Mallard's return – not from actual death, but from the death in which his wife, his friends and her family had believed. The shock upon seeing him come in the door does, after all, cause her heart to fail completely.

Even if you were to read this story without knowing some of the standard symbolism associated with relationships in space, you can notice the change in location, and you can **engage creatively with the text to imagine the possibilities**. Symbols become standard because they make sense. Once you visualize in your head that movement from down and in company, to up and alone, to back down in company, and once you notice that the bad things happen downstairs and the promise of the future happens upstairs, **you can appreciate what Chopin did with structure**, whether you had the specific meaning in your toolkit or not.

The last sentence of the story is the most ironic of them all. The obvious irony is the idea that joy could kill, but that is the irony that the characters in the story – Josephine, Richards, Brently Mallard and the doctors – can see, because they did not know the truth. The real irony is that it was not joy that killed Louise Mallard, but rather the shock of despair, of the realization that, after all, she would not have that beautiful life free of constraint that she had so recently seen coming. We can appreciate this greater irony **because we have knowledge, given to us by the narrator, which the other characters do not have**.

That last sentence is a beautiful example of **how an author communicates with her readers**. Chopin **trusts us to understand** that the narrator is neither telling the truth nor lying. The narrator, instead, is telling us the literal truth about what happened: ‘When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease – of the joy that kills’. The doctors came, that is what they thought, and that is what they said. That literal truth about the doctors, however, has embedded in it the fact that the doctors were wrong. **Chopin is counting on us to know** that the doctors were wrong, because they made their assumptions based on the common societal view of marriage and on the assumption that naturally a wife would be devastated at the news of her husband’s death and so, when that news was abruptly proved to be false, the shock of the sudden great happiness was too much for her weak heart. **The characters in this story do not share Chopin’s perspective, or ours**.

Our careful reading shows us that an interpretation of this story which credits the last sentence as being absolutely true is a misreading because it ignores the whole middle section of the story in which we are shown the truth of Mrs Mallard’s experience and feelings. **It is possible that different readers might see the story differently**. There could certainly be readers who just can’t accept that Louise Mallard’s view of her marriage could possibly be right. They might think that a woman in a marriage does exist to serve her husband. Or they might think that only someone who is not mentally stable could feel herself trapped inside a marriage. If that were the case, such an interpretation would be legitimate in the sense that **it would acknowledge the facts of the story**. It would account for Mrs Mallard’s joy, but it would reject the implied premise that Mrs Mallard’s joy is understandable. In such a case, there would be **too great a divide between the world view of the reader and that of the author for true communication to take place**. Most readers, however, especially **in the twenty-first century**, will find it easy to understand that a woman trapped inside a marriage with no way out would feel the way Louise Mallard feels. Kate Chopin was, in many respects, a writer well ahead of her time.

ACTIVITY 5

Discussion

Now that you’ve read this interpretation of the story, what can you say about the role played in interpretation of literature by the many concepts that are built in to the IB Literature course? Have these concepts helped you find new ways to approach your reading of literary works?

Conclusion

Our study of ‘The Story of an Hour’ took us back through many of the elements of the relationship between readers, writers, and written works that we have looked at throughout the six chapters in this section. We considered:

- the role of different viewpoints
- the role of the narrator
- the function of a variety of symbols, including classic symbols particularly of Western literature
- the function of setting
- the structure of the story
- the need for there to be enough overlap in the world view of the reader and the writer for communication to take place.

We did not consider all of the literary elements from the story that we might have considered. We ignored, for example, the symbolism of the keyhole, of Brently Mallard’s umbrella (an umbrella keeps characters from getting wet and, therefore, from being reborn), and we did not consider the **allusion** to the goddess of Victory. We did not look at style. If you were to go back and re-read the story now, you would no doubt begin to see the significance of these, and other elements of the story. So that is the final point that we will make in this section: literary works are crafted so richly that no single reading can reveal all there is to know about them. If you re-read a text, you will find more than you did the first time. If you re-read it after a significant amount of time has passed, you will probably know significantly more about the world, and you may very well see the work in a new light. If you discuss it with others who read it from their perspectives out of their life experiences, you will hear about ideas that you did not find for yourself. Because it is the nature of literature to be resilient, it allows for an ever-expanding vision to arise out of our approach to it. That makes it an art form, and that is what makes it a joy to study.

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Time and space

2.1

How important is cultural or historical context to the production and reception of a literary text?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To define 'context of production'
- ▶ To define 'context of reception'
- ▶ To understand the difference between cultural and historical contexts
- ▶ To explore how cultural and historical contexts can shape meaning in a work of literature

Introduction

In the first section of this book we looked at the **immanent** approach, which focuses only on the literary features of a work; that is, what makes a work of literature a work of art. Indeed, there are some critics who believe that a literary work should be judged on its own, without considering cultural, historical or biographical forces which might have shaped the work's creation.

Formalists assume that the keys to understanding a text exist within 'the text itself'.

(Lab)

However, most modern critics appreciate that literary works are not created in a vacuum and, as such, recognize that certain cultural and historical factors will indeed have varying influences on writers. This section of the book is concerned with how the culture and context of a work of literature affects how it was produced and how it is received by audiences throughout time and space; we call this the **contextual** approach.

What is context?

Context refers to the circumstances that surround creation and reception of a work – all of the external factors that shape or influence its meaning. The context of composition (or production) refers to the author's circumstances at the time of writing or composing a work. The context of production is fixed; a writer will have created his or her work at a specific point in time and certain cultural, historical and/or biographical elements will have influenced that creation. The context of interpretation (or reception), however, is fluid; different audiences will respond to a work in different ways at different points in time.



When the context of production and the context of the reception overlap, it is easier for readers to assess the work's historical and cultural circumstances and the external factors that shape or influence its meaning. The further apart these occur, the more difficult it becomes for readers.

An example of a work whose reception has changed over time is Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. At the time of its original production, towards the end of the nineteenth

century, audiences were shocked at the ending, which sees the central character, Nora, leave her husband and two children. The reaction was so negative that Ibsen's German agent even suggested that Ibsen write an alternative ending. Most modern Western audiences do not see Ibsen's ending as so controversial, perhaps because attitudes to divorce – and the resulting laws concerning a woman's status within marriage and rights to property – have relaxed. We will explore how the meaning and impact of a literary work changes over time in more detail in Chapter 2.4.

Contextual factors

There are many **contextual** factors that shape a text's meaning. These factors can be categorized into cultural context and historical context.

■ Cultural context

Cultural context refers to the values, beliefs and attitudes that are shared by a group of people of a particular time and place. Societal forces such as social or economic status or class, education, politics, religion, family structure, gender roles, language, shared beliefs and customs all play a role in shaping cultural values; these values affect an individual's world view. Cultural context is reflected in a work of literature through narrative elements such as characters (including their relationships with other characters), their environments, conflicts, narrative events, **symbols**, and themes.

Cultural context in *Othello*

Shakespeare's *Othello* is an example of a work that relies heavily on cultural context. One of Shakespeare's most well-known tragedies, the play is set in Venice and Cyprus during a time when Venice was a powerful colonial and trading empire. The play's action revolves around Othello, a general in the Venetian army. Iago, resentful that he has been passed over for the position of lieutenant, plots to destroy Othello by making him think that his wife, Desdemona, has been unfaithful. Throughout the work, we can see cultural aspects such as social and economic status, politics, race, gender roles and attitudes to marriage reflected in various characters and situations. We will focus here on contextual clues that suggest different characters' attitudes to marriage:

■ Table 2.1.1

Excerpt	Analysis
<p>BRABANTIO O, thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter? Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her! For I'll refer me to all things of sense, If she in chains of magic were not bound, Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy, So opposite to marriage that she shunned The wealthy curled darlings of our nation, Would ever have, to incur a general mock, Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom Of such a thing as thou – to fear, not to delight! Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense That thou hast practiced on her with foul charms, Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals That weaken motion.</p> <p>(Act 1 Scene 2, lines 62–75)</p>	<p>In this speech from Act 1, Brabantio accuses Othello of 'stealing' his daughter, Desdemona, suggesting that he views her as property.</p> <p>We can also see here that Brabantio views his daughter as innocent and that, in his mind, Othello could only have 'won' her through manipulation and trickery: by using 'charms' (i.e., spells or witchcraft) and abusing 'her delicate youth with drugs or minerals / That weaken motion'.</p> <p>There is a subtle reference to race here as well when Brabantio states that, if Desdemona were thinking clearly, she would run from Othello's 'sooty bosom' – implying that he disapproves of the interracial relationship between him and his daughter. Othello, although a respected general, is referred to throughout the play as 'the Moor', reflecting his status as an outsider. The word 'Moor' has its roots in the name of a people originating from North Africa, but in Shakespeare's time it could have been used to describe anyone from the African continent.</p>

ACTIVITY 1

Check for understanding

What is the difference between the context of production and the context of reception?

Excerpt	Analysis
<p>IAGO Now, I do love her too, Not out of absolute lust (though peradventure I stand accountant for as great a sin) But partly led to diet my revenge, For that I do suspect the lusty Moor Hath leaped into my seat – the thought whereof Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards, And nothing can or shall content my soul Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife, Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor At least into a jealousy so strong That judgment cannot cure.</p> <p>(Act 2 Scene 1, lines 272–283)</p>	<p>Iago states that he suspects that Othello has slept with his wife (Emilia), so he is going to use Othello's wife, Desdemona, to get even. Iago suggests here that wives are nothing more than pawns for husbands to use to get what they want.</p>
<p>IAGO She did deceive her father, marrying you, [...]</p> <p>OTHELLO And so she did.</p> <p>(Act 3 Scene 3, lines 238, 241)</p>	<p>Here, as part of his manipulative plans, Iago reminds Othello that Desdemona deceived her father by marrying Othello, implying that Othello should therefore have expected Desdemona to deceive him as well.</p>
<p>OTHELLO O curse of marriage, That we can call these delicate creatures ours And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad And live upon the vapor of a dungeon Than keep a corner in the thing I love For others' uses. Yet 'tis the plague of great ones; Prerogated are they less than the base. 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death. Even then this forked plague is fated to us When we do quicken.</p> <p>(Act 3 Scene 3, lines 270–279)</p>	<p>In one of only two soliloquies, Othello reveals that he sees adultery as the curse of marriage. This attitude is reflective of contemporary views on marriage, especially a woman's role within a marriage versus a man's. Traditional roles may have evolved over time in many cultures, but modern audiences can still relate to the emotions that Othello displays here.</p>
<p>DESDEMONA I have heard it said so. O, these men, these men! Dost thou in conscience think, – tell me, Emilia, – That there be women do abuse their husbands In such gross kind?</p> <p>EMILIA There be some such, no question.</p> <p>DESDEMONA Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?</p> <p>EMILIA Why, would not you?</p> <p>DESDEMONA No, by this heavenly light!</p> <p>EMILIA Nor I neither by this heavenly light; I might do't as well i' the dark.</p> <p>DESDEMONA Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?</p>	<p>In this scene, we see Desdemona's and Emilia's contrasting views of marriage and fidelity. Emilia reveals that she would commit adultery for her husband's gain. Desdemona, however, cannot accept this and maintains that there is nothing in the world that would cause her to commit 'such a deed'. Emilia blames husbands for their wives' indiscretions and argues for equal status between men and women in marriage.</p>

Excerpt	Analysis
<p>EMILIA The world's a huge thing: it is a great price. For a small vice.</p> <p>DESDEMONA In troth, I think thou wouldst not.</p> <p>EMILIA In troth, I think I should; and undo't when I had done. Marry, I would not do such a thing for a joint-ring, nor for measures of lawn, nor for gowns, petticoats, nor caps, nor any petty exhibition; but for the whole world, – why, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for't.</p> <p>DESDEMONA Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong For the whole world.</p> <p>EMILIA Why the wrong is but a wrong i' the world: and having the world for your labour, 'tis a wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right.</p> <p>DESDEMONA I do not think there is any such woman.</p> <p>EMILIA Yes, a dozen; and as many to the vantage as would store the world they played for. But I do think it is their husbands' faults If wives do fall: say that they slack their duties, And pour our treasures into foreign laps, Or else break out in peevish jealousies, Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us, Or scant our former having in despite; Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace, Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell And have their palates both for sweet and sour, As husbands have. What is it that they do When they change us for others? Is it sport? I think it is: and doth affection breed it? I think it doth: is't frailty that thus errs? It is so too: and have not we affections, Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have? Then let them use us well: else let them know, The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.</p> <p>(Act 4 Scene 3, lines 56–99)</p>	

ACTIVITY 2

Identifying cultural aspects in *Like Water for Chocolate*

The following extract is from the opening chapter of the 1989 novel *Like Water for Chocolate* by Mexican author Laura Esquivel. The novel's action is set against the historical backdrop of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) and focuses on the de la Garza family: Tita (the protagonist) and her older sisters, Gertrudis and Rosaura, and their mother, Mama Elena. The novel is structured in a unique way, with each of the twelve chapters divided by month (from January to December) and beginning with a recipe which serves as a symbol for the action and conflicts presented within the chapter. As you read, take note of all of the cultural aspects that are present, then compare your answers to the notes on page 422.

... Tita made her entrance into this world, prematurely, right there on the kitchen table amid the smells of simmering noodle soup, thyme, bay leaves and coriander, steamed milk, garlic and, of course, onion.

5 ... Thanks to her unusual birth, Tita felt a deep love for the kitchen, where she spent most of her life from the day she was born.

When she was only two days old, Tita's father, my great-grandfather, died of a heart attack and Mama Elena's milk dried up from the shock. Since there was no such thing as powdered milk in those days, and they couldn't find a wet nurse anywhere, they were in a panic to satisfy the infant's hunger. Nacha, who knew everything about cooking – and much more that doesn't enter the picture until later – offered to take charge of feeding Tita. She felt she had the best chance of 'educating the innocent child's stomach', even though she had never married or had children. Though she didn't know how to read or write, when it came to cooking she knew everything there was to know. Mama Elena accepted her offer gratefully; she had enough to do between her mourning and the enormous responsibility of running the ranch – and it was the ranch that would provide her children with the food and education they deserved ...

15 From that day on, Tita's domain was the kitchen ... This explains the sixth sense Tita developed about everything concerning food.

20 ... for Tita the joy of living was wrapped up in the delights of food. It wasn't easy for a person whose knowledge of life was based on the kitchen to comprehend the outside world. That world was an endless expanse that began at the door between the kitchen and the rest of the house, whereas everything on the kitchen side of that door, on through the door leading to the patio and the kitchen and herb gardens was completely hers – it was Tita's realm.

(Laura Esquivel 9–11)

Laura Esquivel

Laura Esquivel is a Mexican novelist, screenwriter and politician. Her most notable work, *Like Water for Chocolate*, uses **magical realism**, in the style of Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez (*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*) and Chilean author Isabelle Allende (*The House of the Spirits*), to combine the ordinary with the surreal or fantastical. The novel was made into a successful film, for which Esquivel wrote the screenplay.

Historical context

Historical context refers to the historical events, attitudes and trends which define a particular era or period of time and how these aspects shape a work of literature. Many writers are influenced by the political and social climate in which they live.

Emily Brontë, for example, lived a very insular life on the Yorkshire moors, and this directly influenced the narrative and characters of her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*. The novel deals with the social and economic inequalities of the Victorian Age, which Brontë herself would have experienced. The narrative revolves around two families, the Earnshaws and the Lintons, who inhabit Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, respectively. The Earnshaws adopt Heathcliff, who is of unknown parentage and had been abandoned on the streets of Liverpool; his description suggests that he is of Romany origin; thus, he is never truly accepted by the Earnshaws or society at large. As the adult landlord of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff is described by the

frame narrator, Lockwood, as a misanthrope. Some critics theorize that Heathcliff was inspired by Emily's brother, Branwell Brontë; others suggest that Heathcliff is representative of Emily herself.

Nobel-Prize-winning author William Faulkner is another writer who was composing his work within the context of his own experience. Faulkner's *Light in August*, published in 1932, takes place in and around the fictional Jefferson, Mississippi, and centres around Joe Christmas, a mixed-race man who passes for white in the repressive, rural society of the American South of the 1920s and 30s. The story is a Christian **allegory** and deals with themes of race, sex, class and religion and is considered by many critics as one of the most important novels of the twentieth century.

Nadine Gordimer, another Nobel Prize winner, was also influenced by the social and political climate of South Africa during apartheid (the government-sanctioned racial segregation that took place between 1948 and 1994). Gordimer herself was active in the anti-apartheid movement, and her novel *The Conservationist*, joint winner of the Booker Prize in 1974, 'evokes the sterility of the white community ... Mehring, the Afrikaner antihero whose farm is as barren as his life, conserves both nature and the apartheid system, the one to keep the other at bay' ('The Nobel Prize in Literature 1991').

ACTIVITY 3

Reflection and inquiry

- 1 Consider some works you are familiar with – either through previous study or your own personal reading. In what ways has your understanding of the work been enriched by knowledge or research of the historical context of the work?
- 2 Singer-songwriter Bob Dylan, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016, is well known for his songs of protest. Consider the lyrics from his 1964 song 'The Times They Are a-Changin'' through the QR code on the right, paying close attention to the third verse.

Do some research on this song and the period during which it was written. How does knowing some of the historical context and Dylan's inspiration for writing the song enhance your understanding of the lyrics? Would the lyrics have the same emotional impact if you didn't know this information? Do you think the lyrics still have relevance today? Are they relevant in a different way?

Once you have finished, compare your answers to the notes on page 422 of the book.



Historical Context in 'London'

The poem 'London' by William Blake is a good example of a work which was directly influenced by the political, social and economic issues of its time, as we can see in the following table.

■ Table 2.1.2

Excerpt	Analysis
London	The poem's title is rooted in a specific geographic location: London. Blake wrote this poem in 1794, during the Industrial Revolution, when the city saw vast differences in wealth and class. This poem was included in the collection <i>Songs of Innocence and of Experience</i> ; it is the only poem in <i>Songs of Experience</i> which does not have a corresponding poem in <i>Songs of Innocence</i> .
I wander thro' each charter'd street, Near where the charter'd Thames does flow, And mark in every face I meet Marks of weakness, marks of woe.	Here, the speaker, who we can assume is Blake himself, comments on the devastating conditions that he sees before him; the verb 'wander' suggests an aimlessness, as if the speaker is walking through the city with no purpose. The monotonous rhythm and regular rhyme scheme emphasises the oppressive atmosphere of the city.
In every cry of every man, In every Infant's cry of fear, In every voice, in every ban, The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.	Blake continues his observations of Londoners in the second stanza. The use of hyperbole ('in every cry of every man') heightens the feeling of shared misery; these conditions are not just experienced by a few citizens at the margins of society. The reference to the 'mind-forg'd manacles' means that the residents of London feel shackled by their circumstances, unable to escape their poverty-stricken lives.

Excerpt	Analysis
How the Chimney-sweeper's cry Every blackening Church appalls; And the hapless Soldier's sigh Runs in blood down Palace walls.	In this stanza, Blake criticises the practice of child labour ('the Chimney-sweeper's cry'), condemning the Church of England ('the blackening Church' could be taken both literally and figuratively) for its failure to protect the children, many of them orphans, against such abuse. Blake was against the Church because he saw the institution as hypocritical. The final two lines of this stanza use the 'Palace' (where the royals lived) as a symbol for corruption: he is accusing the higher classes of allowing soldiers' blood to be spilled in order to maintain their levels of comfort.
But most thro' midnight streets I hear How the youthful Harlot's curse Blasts the new-born Infant's tear, And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.	The last stanza is a final attack on the conditions that the speaker witnesses. He comments on 'the youthful Harlot' (young prostitute), who seems to be cursing the child she has given birth to (implicitly) out of wedlock. He makes implicit reference to venereal disease ('blights with plagues') and suggests that prostitution makes a mockery of marriage. He also condemns the institution of marriage, comparing marriage to death. Blake seems to be commenting on the cyclical nature of poverty here: through the birth of the infant, a new generation will have to endure the same hardships that Blake has described throughout the poem.

Blake is often compared with William Wordsworth, who was a contemporary of his. Wordsworth's 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge', written in 1802, presents a different, more romanticised view of London. Blake was a London resident and saw the city in a different light than Wordsworth, who was from the Lake District and therefore viewed London through more of a 'tourist' lens.

William Blake

William Blake (1757–1827) was an English poet, painter and printmaker. Blake was a prominent figure of the Romantic Age; his most notable works include *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, along with his illustrations of Dante's *Inferno*, which he was working on at the time of his death. Blake lived and worked in London during a time of historic, social and political change, and this coloured his view of the city, as seen in 'London'. Although he considered himself a Christian, Blake was against organized religion and was critical of the Church of England. Blake was also against the monarchy and, although he did not necessarily advocate for tyranny, he celebrated the principles of revolution that he witnessed through the American and French Revolutions.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: POLITICS, POWER AND JUSTICE

Blake's view of London highlights the social, political and economic issues that Londoners faced in the late-eighteenth century. While there is an immediacy to the speaker's experience, the conditions he describes and the issues he raises transcend time and space. We can see reflected here the field of inquiry of politics, power and justice and the narrower global issue of poverty and/or the distribution of wealth and resources.

EE Links: Cities through time

An interesting idea for an extended essay could be to look at how London – or any city – has been characterized throughout time. You could examine two different works of different literary forms and explore how the writers have used different techniques to present similar (or differing) views of the same city. For example, you could look at Blake's vision of London compared with George Orwell's in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Or you could focus on how different authors treat the same historical event, such as the holocaust (or, to take a more conceptual focus, genocide). In either case, you would need to ensure a literary treatment focusing on elements of style; otherwise, you run the risk of your essay becoming too much like a history essay.

Not all works of literature are set within the same time period as that from which the author is writing. *The Crucible* is an example of a work in which the author's historical context differs from that of the work itself. The play is set against the backdrop of the Salem witch trials, which took place in Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, but the story itself is an **allegory** for the political climate of 1950s America. Arthur Miller was writing during a time of heightened paranoia around the communist 'witch hunts', also known as McCarthyism (in reference to US senator Joseph McCarthy, who was a key figure in this period of history).

George Orwell was also influenced by the political events that were unfolding around him in post-Second World War Britain, yet he chose to set the events of his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in a dystopian future. The rise of totalitarian governments in Spain, Germany and the Soviet Union inspired Orwell to issue a kind of warning against the dangers of a totalitarian society. Although Orwell's vision of the future did not pan out exactly as he wrote it, many of the issues that he presents in his novel, such as a lack of individualism, privacy and surveillance, manipulation of language and 'truth', still have relevance for many readers today. Contemporary political leaders and public officials use Orwellian tactics such as attempting to control the flow of information (or transmitting false information), interfering with online discourse or influencing elections. The ideas that Orwell presented in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have become such a part of our collective cultural consciousness, even people who have never read the novel seem to know who or what 'Big Brother' is.

The time period in which a reader approaches a text is also relevant, but this will be covered in more detail in Chapter 2.4.

● TOK Links: Comparing writers' methodologies across time, space and form

How might the approaches to a given time and place differ between a poet, a playwright or novelist and a historian? We can consider how our knowledge of a particular time or place may be shaped by the methodology that is used within the arts and history. Poets and fiction writers can exercise artistic licence to capture the spirit of an age, whereas historians will be more concerned with recording facts and events that define a time or place.

ACTIVITY 4

Considering historical context in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The terrorist attacks on the 'Twin Towers' of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, known as 9/11, was one of the most defining moments in modern American history, yet most students will be too young to have first-hand knowledge of the event. The following extract is from the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which was published in 2007 and written by Mohsin Hamid. It includes a scene in which the main character, Changez, a Pakistani man living and working in the United States, witnesses the collapse of the Twin Towers. The extract here focuses on his reaction to the event and the immediate aftermath.

Answer the questions that follow and then compare your responses with the notes at the end of the book (page 422).

The following evening was supposed to be our last in Manila. I was in my room, packing my things. I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news.

5 I stared as one – and then the other – of the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased.

10 ... at that moment, my thoughts were not with the victims of the attack – death on television moves me most when it is fictitious and happens to characters with whom I have built up relationships over multiple episodes – no, I was caught up in the symbolism of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees.

15 ... I was not at war with America. Far from it: I was the product of an American university; I was earning a lucrative salary; I was infatuated with an American woman. So why did part of me desire to see America harmed? I did not know, then; I knew merely that my feelings would be unacceptable to my colleagues, and I undertook to hide them as well as I could.

20 ... We were unable to leave Manila for several days, on account of flights being canceled. At the airport, I was escorted by armed guards into a room where I was made to strip down to my boxer shorts – I had, rather embarrassingly, chosen to wear a pink pair patterned with teddy bears, but their revelation had no impact on the severe expressions of my inspectors – and I was, as a consequence, the last person to board our aircraft. My entrance elicited looks of concern from many of my fellow passengers. I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty; I tried therefore to be as nonchalant
25 as possible; this naturally led to my becoming stiff and self-conscious.

(*Mohsin Hamid 82–85*)

- 1 How does this historical event, which is of national (and global) significance, affect Changez on a personal level?
- 2 How does Hamid evoke empathy for Changez in this extract?
- 3 In interviews, Hamid has stated that he had completed a draft of the novel before the terrorist attacks. By the time the novel was published in 2007, the narrative had changed shape and he had incorporated the event. How does knowing this detail about the context of composition change your interpretation of the extract? In what ways would readers’ ability to empathize with Changez have been different if this event had not been included?

Mohsin Hamid

Mohsin Hamid is a Pakistani novelist who has also lived in the United States and the United Kingdom. He graduated from Princeton University in 1993 and Harvard Law School in 1997. Hamid’s novels have won several awards; both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Exit West* (2017) were shortlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize.



CONCEPT CONNECTION

IDENTITY AND PERSPECTIVE

In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the narrator, Changez, struggles with his identity as a Muslim trying to assimilate within America, in the competitive environments of Princeton University and Wall Street in particular. The title itself is suggestive of Changez's unwillingness, or reluctance, to accept an identity that has been projected onto him by society. The structure of the novel, which is written as a dramatic **monologue** delivered to an unnamed American, limits our perspective as readers because we only see things from Changez's point of view.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

The Reluctant Fundamentalist explores issues related to nationality, religion and class, which relates to the field of inquiry of culture, identity and community. We can further narrow this to the specific global issue of Islamophobia and/or cultural assimilation. As an immigrant from a Muslim country, Changez finds it difficult to be fully accepted by American society. Even his girlfriend, Erica, finds it difficult to connect with Changez because she is still attached to the memory of her late boyfriend, Chris. Changez's relationship with Erica symbolizes his relationship with America; one in which he will always be viewed as 'other'. This marginalization leads Changez to feel disillusioned with the America he has idealized.

● TOK Links: Understanding literature – personal versus shared knowledge

How far can a reader understand a literary text that was written in a context different from his or her own? Must a reader have first-hand knowledge of a time or place, or is second-hand knowledge sufficient to be able to understand a work of literature? These questions relate to the idea of personal and shared knowledge: is collective knowledge of the French Revolution, for example, enough for twenty-first-century readers to understand the struggles of Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*? Can readers truly empathize with Sethi from *Beloved* if they have no personal knowledge of slavery in the American South?

■ Biographical context

Elements of an author's biography may be an important consideration when approaching a work of literature, but it is important to remember that neither the narrator, nor a character in a work of **fiction**, nor the speaker in a poem, is the author. Therefore, the ideas and opinions coming through, though undoubtedly influenced by the author's background and **point of view**, will not necessarily be representative of the author's own personal beliefs.

F Scott Fitzgerald drew heavily from his own life in the creation of the character of Jay Gatsby for his novel *The Great Gatsby*. Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald hailed from the midwest US, made his way east, and effectively reinvented himself following the success of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*.

The income that Fitzgerald generated from the success of this novel allowed him to win over Zelda Sayre, a debutante from Montgomery, Alabama. Initially, Zelda broke off their engagement at the encouragement of her family and friends, who did not believe that Fitzgerald could support her in the manner to which she was accustomed. Many readers will naturally draw a parallel between Scott and Zelda's love story and Gatsby and Daisy's. However, much as Fitzgerald may have been inspired by events in his own life, Gatsby is a fictional construct, and as readers we cannot assume that the attitudes projected by the characters are Fitzgerald's own.

Another writer whose work is often viewed in light of her biography is Sylvia Plath. In fact, Plath's life has taken on a mythology of its own, almost overshadowing the work itself. Plath was famously married to British poet laureate Ted Hughes, who left her and their two young children for another woman. She committed suicide in January 1963 at the age of 30. *Ariel* was her final work, a collection of poetry, published posthumously. Students often like to try to connect everything in Plath's poems to her husband's infidelity or to her depression, while overlooking elements of language and technique. In many of the poems, Plath creates personae, so we cannot assume that the speaker is Plath herself, despite being labelled a 'confessional poet' (a term that Plath herself took issue with, as we saw in Chapter 1.1).

Plath is most known for her poetry, but she was also a writer of **fiction**. Her only novel, *The Bell Jar*, written under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, was inspired by events from her own life. The novel chronicles the mental breakdown of protagonist Esther Greenwood after a summer internship at a prominent New York magazine. The 'bell jar' of the title refers to Esther's feelings of suffocation as she attempts to live up to society's expectations of women, and her own internal expectations or standards of success and happiness. Esther makes multiple suicide attempts (much like Plath herself) but ultimately regains her sanity through therapy and medication. Like Gatsby, Esther Greenwood is a fictional construct but, unlike Fitzgerald's novel, *The Bell Jar* is widely accepted as a **roman-à-clef**; that is, a novel in which real people or events appear with invented names.

An author's biographical context is shaped by both cultural and historical factors, as we can see in Ocean Vuong's poem 'Aubade with Burning City'. Vuong's poem captures the fall of Saigon, juxtaposing the lyrics of the song 'White Christmas' with images of bombs falling on the city; the song was used as a code for the Americans to evacuate. Vuong has stated in interviews that his intention in writing the poem was to preserve his grandmother's memory and to honour the oral tradition which is so much a part of his cultural heritage. This in turn affected the way that he structured the poem:

'When my grandmother passed away in 2008, and I wanted to preserve that memory landscape on paper, I was faced with where to break her lines. And, of course, the oral tradition doesn't offer a page. In a way, I was collaborating with this – with my grandmother beyond her life ...'

(PBS NewsHour)

If you scan the QR code on the right, you can watch Vuong explain his inspiration for the poem on PBS News Hour.



Aubade with Burning City

South Vietnam, April 29, 1975: Armed Forces Radio played Irving Berlin's 'White Christmas' as a code to begin Operation Frequent Wind, the ultimate evacuation of American civilians and Vietnamese refugees by helicopter during the fall of Saigon.

Milkflower petals on the street
like pieces of a girl's dress.

May your days be merry and bright ...

5 He fills a teacup with champagne, brings it to her lips.
Open, he says.

She opens.
Outside, a soldier spits out
his cigarette as footsteps
fill the square like stones fallen from the sky. *May all*
10 *your Christmases be white* as the traffic guard
unstraps his holster.

His hand running the hem
of her white dress.
His black eyes.
15 Her black hair.
A single candle.
Their shadows: two wicks.

A military truck speeds through the intersection, the sound of children
shrieking inside. A bicycle hurled
20 through a store window. When the dust rises, a black dog
lies in the road, panting. Its hind legs
crushed into the shine
of a white Christmas.

On the nightstand, a sprig of magnolia expands like a secret heard
25 for the first time.
The treetops glisten and children listen, the chief of police
facedown in a pool of Coca-Cola.

A palm-sized photo of his father soaking
beside his left ear.

30 The song moving through the city like a widow.
A white ... A white ... I'm dreaming of a curtain of snow
falling from her shoulders.

Snow crackling against the window. Snow shredded

with gunfire. Red sky.

35 Snow on the tanks rolling over the city walls.
A helicopter lifting the living just out of reach.

The city so white it is ready for ink.

The radio saying run run run.

40 Milkflower petals on a black dog
like pieces of a girl's dress.

May your days be merry and bright. She is saying
something neither of them can hear. The hotel rocks
beneath them. The bed a field of ice
cracking.

45 *Don't worry,* he says, as the first bomb brightens
their faces, *my brothers have won the war*
and tomorrow ...

The lights go out.

I'm dreaming. I'm dreaming ...

50 *to hear sleigh bells in the snow ...*

In the square below: a nun, on fire,
runs silently toward her god—

Open, he says.

She opens.

(Ocean Vuong)

Ocean Vuong

Ocean Vuong is a Vietnamese-American poet whose debut book, *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*, won him the TS Eliot Poetry Prize in 2017; at 29, he was the youngest poet to win the prestigious award. Vuong's poetry is influenced by his experiences as a refugee and immigrant. He is an Assistant Professor in the MFA Program for Writers at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.



Conclusion

We have explored a variety of literary works in light of their cultural or historical contexts, including a Shakespearean **tragedy** set in the Mediterranean, a modern Mexican novel set during the Mexican Revolution, a Romantic poem presenting a grim view of Industrial-Age London, a twenty-first-century novel which shows the impact of the September 11th World Trade Center attacks on a Pakistani narrator living in the United States, and a contemporary poem by a Vietnamese-American refugee. In each of these works, understanding the context allows us as readers to better appreciate the physical or temporal setting, the characters' motivations or the relationships between characters.

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2.2

How do we approach literary texts from different times and cultures to our own?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To recognize patterns in narrative
- ▶ To recognize archetypal characters
- ▶ To explore universal themes which transcend time and place
- ▶ To identify standard conventions of form across time and place
- ▶ To interpret certain culturally-specific symbols
- ▶ To consider the impact of translation on meaning

Introduction

When we read a text from a different time or culture to our own, the experience can sometimes feel unfamiliar, perhaps even ‘foreign’. There will inevitably be **contextual** elements that we will not understand, such as historical references, cultural practices or aspects of the literary tradition of the author’s and/or work’s time or place which are distinct from the traditions that we know. However, literature is a universal art form, and there are certain aspects of literature which cross geographical, cultural or linguistic borders. We will explore some of these universal aspects in this chapter.

Recognizing common features across time and place

Whether you are reading a work written by a British author in the eighteenth century or a Nigerian author in the twenty-first, there are certain universal features which will connect those works. Some of those features are outlined over the next few pages. The aim is to view these features as tools, or lenses, with which to approach literature from different times or cultures to your own. The specific connections between different texts will be explored in more detail in the third section of the book, **Intertextuality: connecting texts**.

ACTIVITY 1

Discussion

Before reading the following sections, consider some of the universal features of literature that you are familiar with.

Familiar stories

At the core of most literary forms, perhaps with the exception of some lyric poetry, is a narrative. Around the world, people are captivated by stories. Stories form part of our everyday lives, and the act of storytelling connects us as individuals and societies. In his book *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we tell stories*, British journalist and author Christopher Booker claims that there are seven basic plots that recur, in different guises, throughout time and across space. These can be seen, in very simplistic terms, in the diagram on the following page.

Booker was not the first to recognize patterns in narrative. Preceding him was Georges Polti, who aimed to categorize every possible dramatic situation that might occur in a narrative or performance in *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations* (1916). Similarly, Vladimir Propp, in

Overcoming the monster

The protagonist (the main hero/heroine of the narrative) conquers a threatening, antagonistic force. Examples: *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, *Dracula*

Rags to riches

The protagonist gains wealth and/or power, often losing it before finally regaining it. Examples: *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations*, *The White Tiger*

The quest

The protagonist and companions set out to achieve a priceless goal, encountering and defeating obstacles and temptations along the way. Examples: Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*

Voyage and return

Similar to the quest, the protagonist journeys to a strange land, overcomes the threats that it poses, and returns to his or her homeland having gained wisdom and experience along the way. Examples: *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Comedy

Booker's definition of comedy is not simply a story that generates laughs. In plot terms, a comedy involves a 'chaos of misunderstanding', which ultimately gets sorted out and leads to a happy ending. Examples: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Marriage of Figaro*

Tragedy

The protagonist has a tragic flaw which inevitably leads to his or her downfall. Examples: *Anna Karenina*, *Madame Bovary*, *Hamlet*

Rebirth

The protagonist falls under a 'dark spell' (literal, in the case of some fairy tales, or metaphorical), trapping him or her in a death-like state. A miraculous event or twist of fate occurs, liberating the hero or heroine from the depths of darkness. Examples: *A Christmas Carol*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Silas Marner*

■ **The seven basic plots as originally suggested by Christopher Booker**

his *Morphology of the Folktale* (originally published in Russian in 1928 and translated into English in 1958), suggested thirty-one common functions which occurred, generally in a particular order, in Russian folklore and fairytales. Joseph Campbell developed the theory of the monomyth (more commonly known as the hero's journey) in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). According to Campbell, certain patterns exist within myths and stories, regardless of the context of production; one of the most common structures is the hero's journey or quest. There are many websites that explain the hero's journey; a useful one can be found at the University of California at Berkeley (scan the QR code to visit). You can trace most narratives through the lens of the hero's journey, as with the story of Odysseus from Homer's *Odyssey*, pictured on the next page.



It is important to remember that the patterns that Booker – and his predecessors – suggested are not steadfast rules. Good writers will work within an established structure and then adapt certain conventions to suit their individual style, audience and purpose. But as Booker notes:

... the more familiar we become with the nature of these shaping forms and forces lying beneath the surface of stories ... the more we find that we are entering a realm to which recognition of the plots themselves proves only to have been the gateway. We are uncovering nothing less than a hidden, universal language: a nucleus of situations and figures which are the very stuff from which stories are made. And once we become acquainted with such symbolic language ... there is literally no story in the world which cannot then be seen in a new light: because we have come to the heart of what stories are about and why we tell them.

(Booker 6)

ORDINARY WORLD	CALL TO ADVENTURE	REFUSAL	MENTOR / HELPER
			
King Odysseus is at home, in Ithaca, with his wife, Penelope, and newborn son, Telemachus.	Odysseus is called to fight the Trojans by King Menelaus.	He does not want to leave his family and sail to Troy; he knows it will be a long trip. He pretends to have gone mad, until Palamedes, sent to retrieve Odysseus, puts Telemachus in front of Odysseus' plow. Odysseus had to reveal his sanity in order to save Telemachus.	Athena, the goddess of wisdom, crafts, and war is Odysseus' guide. She wants to help Odysseus, though she has been instructed not to by Zeus. She takes pity on him while other gods forsake Odysseus, constantly saves him from death, and gives him guidance.
CROSSING THE THRESHOLD	TESTS / ALLIES / ENEMIES	APPROACH	ORDEAL
			
After the war, the gods become angry with the Greeks for their prideful ways. A great storm emerges and throws them off course.	Odysseus is thwarted with many tests as he travels back to Ithaca.	Odysseus nearly makes it home, but his crew opens a bag, given to Odysseus by Aelous, god of the winds. When the bag is opened, it releases a wind that blows them far away from Ithaca.	Odysseus is sent to the underworld seeking information from the blind prophet, Tiresias, to guide him home. This quest brings him to the verge of death.
REWARD	ROAD BACK	ATONEMENT	RETURN
			
The King of Phaeacia gives Odysseus passage home.	Unlike other heroes, Odysseus was not in search of treasure. Instead, he was desperately trying to reach his home. Once he returns, he finds out that his house has been overrun with suitors trying to steal his wife and palace.	Instead of rushing in and killing the suitors, Odysseus is patient, wishing to learn if his wife has been faithful.	Odysseus, dressed as a beggar, completes a final challenge, and is restored to his rightful place.

Create your own at [Storyboard That](https://www.storyboardthat.com)

- The story of Odysseus, shown through the lens of the hero's journey

(Storyboard of hero's journey infographic © 2019 www.storyboardthat.com)

ACTIVITY 2

Memorable stories

Consider some of the literature that you are familiar with – works that you have either studied in class or those you have explored on your own. Which works follow Booker's seven basic plots?

■ Archetypal characters

Just as stories can follow certain narrative patterns, literary characters can also be categorized by common ‘type’. Recognizing certain ‘familiar’ characters can help us to connect with works from other times and places. For example, we can relate just as much to a character like Pip from Dickens’s *Great Expectations* as we can to a more contemporary character like Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye* by JD Salinger.

The concept of the **archetype** can be traced to Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, who proposed that everyone’s personality is composed of four common archetypes which provide models for our behaviour and influence the way we think and act:

- the self (represented by a wise man/woman)
- the persona (the mask: how we present ourselves to the world)
- the shadow (the darker side of the psyche)
- the anima/animus (the balance of masculine and feminine energies within the psyche).

Literary critics used Jung’s theories to develop a set of archetypal characters that can be found throughout literature. These literary archetypes are represented in the figure below.



■ Character archetypes

© 2019 Visual Capitalist

Recognizing certain familiar character types can make a work from another culture or time period more accessible for the reader. For example, we can recognize Romeo as the archetypal lover, the titular character from Thomas Hardy’s novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* fits the classic mould of the innocent, and Robinson Crusoe could be considered both a hero and an explorer.

■ Universal themes

At the heart of any work of literature is a theme or central message. Many themes transcend culture or time period, reflecting the universal nature of the human experience. Timeless ideas such as jealousy, revenge, ambition and greed are why Shakespeare's plays are just as relevant to today's audiences as they were over four hundred years ago.

It is impossible to list every possible theme that you may encounter as a reader, but there are certain themes that crop up time and again in literature from all countries, cultures and languages. Some of these include:

- the **conflict** between good and evil
- an individual's search for **identity** or self-awareness
- the transition from the innocence of childhood to the disillusionment of adulthood
- an individual's struggle against the odds (physical or emotional)
- the inevitability of fate.

Some works are timely, provoking different responses from audiences at different points in time. An example of a work of literature with a timely theme is Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, which you encountered in Chapter 1.3 as an example of how description can be used symbolically. Atwood produced the work, which focuses on issues of power, oppression and gender inequality, within the context of the politically and religiously conservative climate of North America in the 1980s. The novel saw a resurgence in popularity around the time of the election of US President Donald Trump in 2016, and a television series based on the work was released in 2017. Women in the United States showed up at political protests dressed in handmaid's uniforms, and references to Atwood's novel were made across media platforms, drawing similarities between events in the novel and topical political issues that were unfolding across America. Over thirty years after its initial publication, the work found a new audience who felt that Atwood's themes were just as relevant as they were when she had originally conceived the story.

The Greek drama *Medea*, originally produced around 431 BC, is an example of a work with timeless themes. At its heart is a story that never grows old: one of betrayal, passion and revenge. The titular character, Medea, could be considered the original 'woman scorned'. The play focuses on the breakdown of the marriage between Medea, an enchantress of divine descent, and the hero Jason (of the Golden Fleece myth). Jason, seeking power and status, abandons Medea and their children for the daughter of King Creon of Corinth, leaving Medea isolated from society. In the ultimate act of revenge, Medea eventually kills the princess and her own two children.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: POLITICS, POWER AND JUSTICE

Despite being composed approximately two thousand years and over five thousand miles apart, both *Medea* and *The Handmaid's Tale* deal with the global issue of gender equality, relating to the field of inquiry of politics, power and justice. The protagonists of both works, Medea and Offred, rebel against an oppressive system that marginalizes them, albeit in different ways. Can you think of any other works that grapple with similar issues? In what ways are they similar or different?

The following extract is taken from Medea's first **monologue**, early in the play. We can see many universal themes reflected here. For example, the revelation that Jason is not the man Medea thought he was reflects the broad theme of appearance versus reality; more specifically, we could

say that betrayal can uncover dark truths about a person's character. We could also say that this passage highlights a broad theme of gender inequality. If we zoom in further, we could identify double standards that might exist between men and women within a relationship.

Medea

This blow, when it came, came from nowhere,
knocking me down,
crushing my faith in all that's good and kind.
I am lost, and floundering. The joy
5 has gone from my life,
and I see no reason, now, to carry on.
My husband, my companion, the man
I thought I knew so well – in whom I'd invested
everything – has revealed himself to be
10 the most contemptible of men.

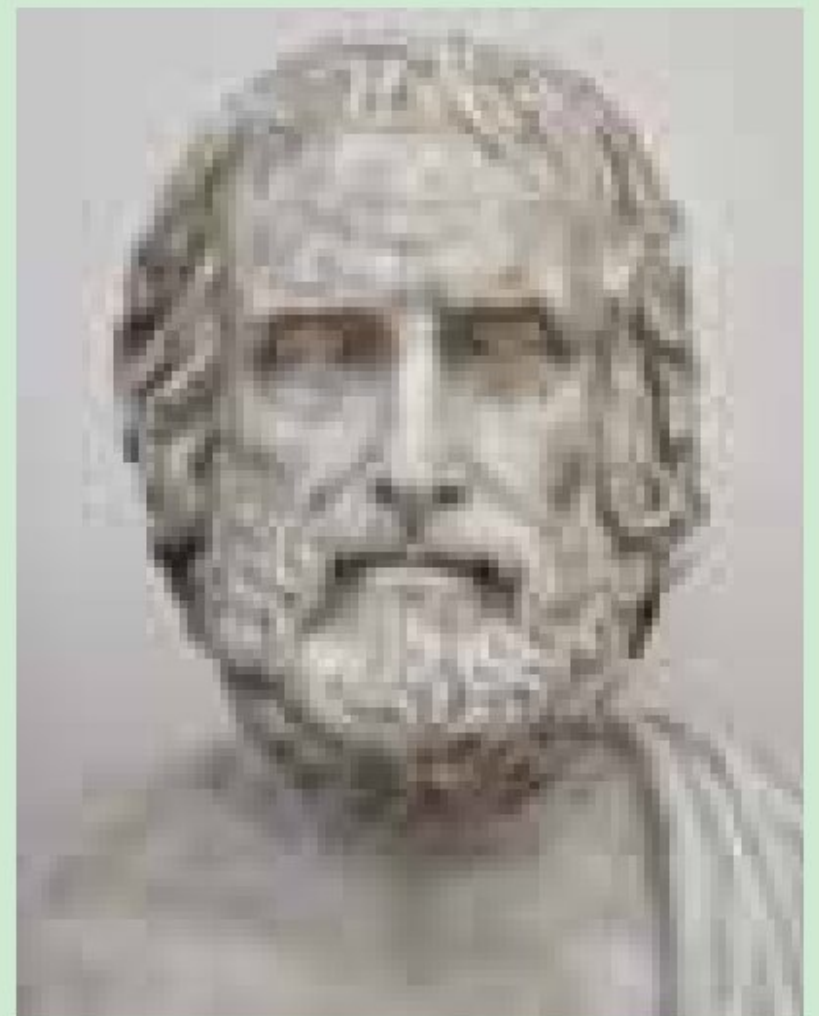
Of all living, sentient creatures,
women are the most unfortunate.
We must save and save to raise a dowry;
then the man that agrees to marry us
15 becomes master of our bodies:
a second burden greater than the first.
Loss and insult: that is all we have.
Everything hangs on his character:
is the master good or bad?
20 We can refuse him nothing, but if we divorce
we are seen as somehow soiled, as damaged goods.
Innocents and strangers, we enter our husbands' houses,
with all these new laws and customs to deal with;
we need to use our intuition to teach us
25 how best to please our man.
If we do well in our duties, and don't let him
ever think he's trapped in the marriage,
everything's fine. If not, it's death in life.

When a man's bored of what he has at home
30 he goes elsewhere: finds someone else to amuse him.
The woman must wait, for she is allowed
to look at one face only: his.
Men tell us that we are lucky to live safe at home
while they take up their spears and go to war.
35 Well, that's a lie. I'd sooner stand behind a shield
three times in battle than give birth once.

(Euripides)

Euripides

Along with Sophocles and Aeschylus, Euripides (c. 480–406 BC) was one of the most prominent dramatists of ancient Greece. Renowned for his tragedies, such as *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *The Trojan Women* and *Orestes*, Euripides' plays often featured classical heroes, humanising them in a way that made the audience relate to their suffering.



CONCEPT CONNECTION

TRANSFORMATION

Canadian-born writer Rachel Cusk's version of *Medea*, produced in 2015, transforms Euripides' tale, updating the setting to a modern London home. Some of the plot details differ in Cusk's version (for example, this Medea does not kill her children in the end), but the same themes resonate. Writing about Cusk's **adaptation** for *The Guardian*, Lyn Gardner offered the following review:

This Medea speaks to the injustice of a world where men abandon their children all the time, largely with impunity, but the woman who dares not to put her children before herself, and who speaks of the exhaustion, the isolation and sheer slog of being a mother, is deemed to be unnatural. To remain silent and accept the dominant narrative is to perpetuate the myth that motherhood is always rewarding.

(Lyn Gardner)

Identifying and appreciating timeless and timely themes allows readers to connect with virtually any text, regardless of its place in time or space. This is why readers of Joyce's *Ulysses* can also appreciate Homer's *Odyssey* and the parallels between them, or why playwrights like Chekhov, Ibsen and Eugene O'Neill may share a similar audience.

■ Conventions of form

While the context of a literary work from another time or place may be unfamiliar, form itself will be fairly standard. However, you should bear in mind that certain literary forms may have enjoyed a higher cultural status than others at various points throughout history. For example, the ancient Greeks saw drama as the most sophisticated form of storytelling. French poetry was the dominant literary form until the nineteenth century, when novelists like Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, Gustave Flaubert and Marcel Proust began to explore narrative possibilities. However, form itself, despite authors' attempts to experiment with specific conventions (an idea which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.2), remains largely unchanged. In other words, a poem will look like a poem whether it is written in English, Russian or Italian.

This familiarity with literary conventions means that we can approach a work from another time or place with a common framework in mind. It may take some effort to decipher some of the cultural or historical references within the work, but at least the structure of a novel or play has remained fairly constant throughout time.

● EE Links: Literary movements

A Category 2 extended essay affords you an opportunity to compare a work in translation against a work originally written in English. You could compare two literary works of the same movement (for example, **romanticism**, realism, the Gothic) but from different places. An interesting extended essay could investigate the ways in which two novels, such as Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*, conform to postmodern conventions.

■ Universal symbols

We can also look to **symbols** to help us gain an understanding of literature from different times and places. We touched on the role of symbolism in Chapter 1.5. Symbolism acts as a sort of universal language; writers will use common objects or abstractions to represent certain ideas.

Many symbols contain a similar meaning in different cultural contexts. Some symbols, however, will be culturally specific, and it will take a bit more work on the part of the reader to uncover their meanings. Some common universal symbols and their meanings are listed here. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it is a starting point for approaching literature from a variety of time periods and places. Further symbols can be found in Michael Ferber's *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*.

Seasons

Writers will often use seasons to represent a central **conflict** or a character's state of mind. Spring represents new life, hope and new beginnings; summer represents warmth, joy and fullness; autumn represents a maturity before a decline or mellowness; and winter represents death, despair, loneliness or old age.

Weather

Weather functions similarly to seasons and is often used to reflect a character's mood or to symbolize internal or external conflicts. When Lear goes out into the storm in *King Lear*, this is a reflection of his declining state of mind. In *The Great Gatsby*, there is a direct parallel between the literal atmosphere on the hottest day of the year and the intensity of the situation within the Plaza Hotel, where the confrontation between Gatsby and Tom Buchanan takes place which triggers a chain of events that ultimately leads to Gatsby's downfall.

Colours

Colours can also be used symbolically. In most Western cultures, white represents purity or goodness; black represents death, darkness or fear; red represents passion or danger; green represents nature, youth or innocence; yellow represents joy, warmth or cowardice; gold represents money or power; and purple represents royalty or wealth.

Animals

Certain animals can also be used in a symbolic way. Lions often represent power or pride; owls represent wisdom; ravens represent death and often serve a prophetic function; cats symbolize cunning and intelligence; while dogs symbolize companionship and protection.

Dogs are used symbolically in both *Disgrace* by JM Coetzee and *The Thief and the Dogs* by Naguib Mahfouz. In *Disgrace*, dogs are used to symbolize guardianship. The novel is set within post-apartheid South Africa and centres around the main character, David Lurie, and the consequences of his sexual transgressions with one of his university students. Dismissed and disgraced, as the title suggests, Lurie retreats to his daughter Lucy's isolated farm. Soon after his arrival, he asks her if she feels safe. She replies, "There are the dogs. Dogs still mean something. The more dogs, the more deterrence ... I have a rifle ..." Dogs and a gun' (Coetzee 60).

In *The Thief and the Dogs*, Said Mahran re-emerges into Cairo society after four years in prison. What he finds upon his release is both a public world changed by revolution and a private life in turmoil, for his wife and daughter have left him for a man who used to be his trusted ally, and his former mentor has rejected him. Thus begins Said's quest for revenge. Mahfouz uses dogs to highlight his main character's sense of betrayal and submission: 'Have you forgotten, Ilish, how you used to rub against my legs like a dog?' (Mahfouz 14) and 'And what about my wife and my fortune, you mangy dogs! I'll show you. Just wait' (Mahfouz 19).

Religious symbols

There are many symbols that are associated with Christianity. The serpent, for example, is seen as a figure of temptation, representative of Satan; the lamb, on the other hand, is a **symbol** of

innocence and sacrifice. A garden symbolizes the Garden of Eden, a tree symbolizes the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and an apple or other fruit (such as the pomegranate) can symbolize the temptation of Eve (the original sin); closely associated with these images is the fig leaf, which represents shame. Water symbolizes cleansing or new life; wine represents the blood of Christ and symbolizes death, sacrifice and forgiveness. Certain numbers are also symbolically significant within a religious context: one represents unity, three represents the Holy Trinity, seven signifies the creation of the world (for God made the world in seven days), while ten represents the ten commandments, and twelve reflects the twelve disciples of Christ. The symbolism of Christianity is just one lens – there are many other prominent religions with corresponding symbols that you can look for in an author’s work. For example, trees and water represent similar ideas in Islam to those represented in Christianity.

Many works of literature draw from the Bible; indeed, some works function as allegories (for example, *Light in August*, which was referred to in the previous chapter). *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* can also be read allegorically: many of the female characters conform to the virginal stereotype, which reflects the cultural norms of the time and place depicted in the novel, and the death of Santiago Nasar itself is similar to the crucifixion of Jesus. Christianity is just one religious culture with associated symbols – you may, however, be reading a work set in a Muslim, Hindu or other religious culture, in which case you will have to do some additional research to find out what those symbols or allusions signify. Read carefully and rely on **contextual** clues to try to uncover meaning.

Approaching translation

Another consideration when approaching a literary work from a different time or place is language. Even works originally written in English may look vastly different from the English that you are familiar with today, depending on the time or place in which they were written. For example, we can see from just the first three lines of the Old English epic *Beowulf* that the language bears little resemblance to Modern English. The modern translation by Irish poet Seamus Heaney is provided alongside the original for comparison’s sake.

*Hwæt. We Gardena in geardagum,
þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.*

*So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by
And the kings who ruled them had
courage and greatness. We have heard
of those princes’ heroic campaigns.*

This extract from Chapter 3 of the 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë shows the distinctive Yorkshire dialect of Northern England spoken by the character Joseph:

‘T’ maister nobbut just buried, and Sabbath not o’ered, und t’ sound o’ t’ gospel still i’ yer lugs, and ye darr be laiking! Shame on ye! sit ye down, ill childer! there’s good books enough if ye’ll read ‘em: sit ye down, and think o’ yer sowl!’

(Emily Brontë 21)

This example looks slightly more recognizable than the *Beowulf* example, but it is probably still difficult for most English-speakers outside of the Yorkshire region to understand Joseph’s speech.

Works in translation feature prominently within the IB Language A syllabus, and it is important when approaching these works to remember that you are not reading the author’s words; you are reading a translator’s version of the work. The translator serves as an intermediary; his or her job is to convey the author’s ideas, and in doing so, he or she must adapt the words to suit the cultural context of the receiving audience.

ACTIVITY 3

Discussion

Before reading further, consider some of the challenges of reading a work in translation. What works in translation have you read and how did you overcome any of the challenges you faced when reading?

Reading translated texts presents a number of challenges, as Isabel Garayta notes in her essay “‘Toto, I’ve a Feeling We’re Not in Kansas Anymore’: Reading and Presenting Texts in Translation from ‘Familiar’ Cultures”:

The challenges presented by texts in one’s native language, written as they are within a culture and literary tradition in which one has grown up and been educated, almost inevitably multiply in the case of a text from a foreign culture and language, for in addition to the distance that must be traversed between any reader and a text written in her own language, the reader of a translation will almost certainly find herself separated from the source text by further distances – of geography, language, culture, historical viewpoint, and literary genre and its expectations, to name only a few types of ‘alienation’. Thus, readers of translations can be said to be at two removes of foreignness from the original text.

(Isabel Garayta)

One of the challenges that Garayta implies is a lack of understanding of cultural or historical references in the original work on the part of the reader. Another challenge is in understanding and interpreting literary allusions and cultural **symbols**. Finally, a reader of a translated work will not have the cultural knowledge of the literary canon or an understanding of hierarchies or prestige of specific literary forms.

Translating poetry presents further linguistic challenges, as we can see in the work of poet Wisława Szymborska. Even if you are unfamiliar with the Polish language, you can see that it is “briery”, the exact word for the stroked, accented, and curling-tailed letters, the spiky brambles of lines on the page, and the sweet/sharp images they evoke. I imagine it sounds thorny too, those wild consonantal roses’ (Adams 2017).

In the translated version (to the right) by Joann Trzeciak, the language is softer, characterized by sound devices such as **sibilance** and assonance.

Pod jedną gwiazdką

Przepraszam przypadek, że nazywam go
koniecznością.

Przepraszam konieczność, jeśli jednak się mylę.

Niech się nie gniewa szczęście, że biorę je jak swoje.

5 Niech mi zapomną umarli, że ledwie tlą się w pamięci.

Przepraszam czas za mnogość przeoczonego
świata na sekundę.

Przepraszam dawną miłość, że nową uważam za
pierwszą.

Under a Certain Little Star

My apologies to chance for calling it necessity.

My apologies to necessity in case I’m mistaken.

May happiness not be angry if I take it for my own.

5 May the dead forgive me that their memory’s but a
flicker.

My apologies to time for the multiplicity of the world
overlooked each second.

My apologies to an old love for treating the new one
as the first.

- 10 Wybaczcie mi, daleki wojny, że noszę kwiaty do domu. 10 Forgive me far-off wars for taking my flowers home.
Wybaczcie, otwarte rany, że kłuję się w palec. Forgive me open wounds for pricking my finger.
Przepraszam wołających z otchłani za płytę z
menuetem.
Przepraszam ludzi na dworcach za sen o piątej rano. 15 My apologies for the minuet record, to those calling
out from the abyss.
15 Daruj, szczuta nadziejo, że śmieję się czasem. My apologies to those in railway stations for sleeping
comfortably at five in the morning.
Darujcie mi, pustynie, że z łyżką wody nie biegnę. Pardon me hounded hope for laughing sometimes.
Pardon me deserts for not rushing in with a spoonful
of water.
I ty, jastrzębiu, od lat ten sam, w tej samej klatce, And you O hawk, the same bird for years in the same
zapatrzony bez ruchu zawsze w ten sam punkt, 20 cage,
odpuść mi, nawet gdybyś był ptakiem wypchanym. forever still and staring at the same spot,
20 Przepraszam ścięte drzewo za cztery nogi stołowe. absolve me even if you happened to be stuffed.
Przepraszam wielkie pytania za małe odpowiedzi. My apologies to the tree felled for four table legs.
Prawdo, nie zwracaj na mnie zbyt bacznej uwagi. My apologies to large questions for small answers.
Powago, okaż mi wspaniałomyślność. 25 Truth, do not pay me too much attention.
Ścierp, tajemnico bytu, że nie mogę być wszędzie. Solemnity, be magnanimous to me.
Endure, O mystery of being that I might pull threads
from your veil.
25 Przepraszam wszystkich, że nie mogę być każdym
i każdą.
Wiem, że póki żyję, nic mnie nie usprawiedliwia,
ponieważ sama sobie stoję na przeszkodzie.
Soul, don't blame me that I've got you so seldom.
30 My apologies to everything that I can't be everywhere.
My apologies to all for not knowing how to be every
man and woman.
Nie miej mi za złe, mowo, że pożyczam
30 patetycznych słów,
a potem trudu dokładam, żeby wydały się lekkie. I know that as long as I live nothing can excuse me,
because I myself am my own obstacle.
35 Do not hold it against me, O speech, that I borrow
weighty words,
and then labor to make them light.

(Wisława Szymborska)

(Trans. by Joanna Trzeciak)

Wisława Szymborska

Wisława Szymborska (1923–2012) was a Polish poet, essayist and translator. Born in Krakow, Szymborska was involved in socialist political activities early in her career as a member of the Polish United Workers' Party, but she later renounced these views and campaigned openly for freedom of speech. Szymborska was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1996. Her work defies conventional categorization, but the Nobel Prize website describes the prize motivation as 'for poetry that with ironic precision allows the historical and biological context to come to light in fragments of human reality' ('The Nobel Prize in Literature 1996').

Linguistically-speaking, we can see that the English version of Szymborska's poem differs greatly graphologically; that is, the written word just *looks* different in each language, which impacts the phonology (sound) of the poem.

Beyond the linguistic level, we can see translation's effect on meaning in the following versions of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. The novella, a magical realist tale about a man who transforms into a giant insect, begins with one of the most memorable lines in modern literature.

■ Table 2.2.1

Original German: Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt.			
As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. <i>Trans. by Edwin and Willa Muir</i>	When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. <i>Trans. by Stanley Corngold</i>	One morning, upon awakening from agitated dreams, Gregor Samsa found himself, in his bed, transformed into a monstrous vermin. <i>Trans. by Joachim Neugroschel</i>	When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself changed into a monstrous cockroach in his bed. <i>Trans. by Michael Hofmann</i>

The creature into which Gregor Samsa has transformed is referred to as an ‘insect’, a ‘vermin’ and a ‘cockroach’ in each version. ‘Insect’ is a fairly neutral term; ‘cockroach’ is a more specific type of insect, perhaps suggestive of a pest; ‘vermin’, however, has a more negative **connotation** and conjures images of a disease-spreading parasite. Three of the translators have used the word ‘monstrous’ to describe the creature, which gives it almost supernatural qualities; one of the translators has opted for the word ‘gigantic’, which denotes its size over its appearance. Each of the translations make use of a different adjective to describe Gregor’s dreams: ‘uneasy’, ‘unsettling’, ‘agitated’ and ‘troubled’ all carry slightly different connotative meanings. Finally, we can see that two of the translators have chosen to use the word ‘change’ to characterize Gregor’s metamorphosis, while two of them have chosen ‘transformed’, which suggests a more radical mutation.

ACTIVITY 4

Translation’s effect on meaning

Read the following two translations of Anna Akhmatova’s poem ‘Petrograd, 1919’. Consider how the different translators’ choices in **diction** convey a distinct mood and sense of place, and then compare your responses to the notes on page 423.

Petrograd, 1919

Caged in this savage capital,
We have forgotten forever
The townships, the lakes, the steppes,
The dawns, of our great motherland.
5 In the circuit of blood-stained days and
nights,
A bitter languor overcomes us ...
No one wishes to come to our aid,
Because we choose to remain here,
10 Because, in love with our city,
More than the wings of liberty,
We preserved to ourselves,
Its palaces, flames, and waters.

Now another time draws near,
15 The wind of death chills the heart,
And Peter’s sacred city,
Will be our unsought monument.

(*Trans. by AS Kline*)

Petrograd, 1919

And we’ve forgotten till doomsdays,
In the wild capital – our prison –
The towns, steppes, dawns and lakes
Of our great land, as if in treason.
5 In a bloody circle, day and night,
We’re pined by the abusive leisure ...
And none to help us in our plight,
Because we’ve stayed at Home, treasured,
Because, with love fully obsessed,
10 Instead of liberty, that honors,
We have preserved for ourselves
Its palaces, its flames and waters.

They’re closer – the other times.
And deathly wind cools hearts, our own,
15 But Peter’s-city, to all us,
Will be the sanctified tombstone.

(*Trans. by Yevgeny Bonver*)

Anna Akhmatova

Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966) is considered one of Russia's greatest poets. Many of her earlier poems bear witness to the effects of the Russian Revolution; 'Petrograd 1919' is one such poem. Akhmatova had the opportunity to flee Russia during this time, but she chose to stay. Later poems, most notably her longer poem 'Requiem', focus on the suffering of the Russian people under the Soviet Great Terror. Akhmatova was shortlisted for the Nobel Prize in 1965, a year before her death, and is seen as a voice for the dissident movement.



There is no set formula for bridging the gaps in your cultural understanding of a translated work, but a good starting place is in simply acknowledging that you are not reading a work that has originally been written in English.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

CREATIVITY

The process of translation is itself a creative act. In fact, an argument could be made that, through the translator's manipulation of words, phrases and cultural idioms, the resulting work, especially in the case of poetry, is more **pastiche** than translation. David Barber, writing about Wisława Szymborska for *The Atlantic*, states that 'to the purist there is no such thing as poetry in translation: the poetic by definition is that which cannot survive the confounding of tongues' (Barber 1997).

● TOK Links: Is knowledge lost in translation?

What is lost in translation from one language to another? Conversely, can anything be gained through translation? Can a translator truly preserve the original meaning of a work of literature if he or she has to alter word choice or sentence structure to suit a foreign audience? When translating a work of literature, who is the 'author' of the translation – the original author or the translator? Is a translation a work of art of its own merit? These are all questions one must ask oneself when approaching a work in translation.

● CAS Links: Translation

An interesting CAS opportunity would be to organize your own poetry in translation competition within school. Or you could put together a showcase of mother-tongue language poems, written by students in your school and judged by teachers of other Language A programmes. Tap into the diverse linguistic backgrounds and creative talents of your student body!

Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter how we can use certain universal features, such as narrative elements, character **archetypes**, theme, conventions of form, and symbols, to approach literature from different times and cultures. We have also considered translation's effect on meaning. This is where the **contextual** and the **comparative** approaches overlap, for we often look to our own context to make sense of others'. Section 3 on intertextuality, especially Chapter 3.3, will explore

this overlap in more depth. Now that you have the tools to approach works from different times and cultures to your own, we will consider in the next chapter the insights we can gain into some of those times and cultures.

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2.3

To what extent do literary texts offer insight into another culture?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To define 'culture'
- ▶ To examine insights into artistic and literary culture
- ▶ To examine insights into beliefs and values
- ▶ To examine insights into social organizations
- ▶ To examine insights into gender roles

Introduction

Each of us has a connection to at least one culture: either geographical, linguistic or religious. For many of us, our culture helps to shape our individual **identity**. Literature, which can be seen as a window to the world, can give us great insights into other cultures. In the last chapter, we looked at the importance of cultural and historical context in shaping meaning. In this chapter, we will explore to what extent literary works offer insight into other cultures.

What is culture?

In order to understand the insights into other cultures that literature offers us, we must first establish a definition of culture. The English anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) is widely considered the authority on culture. He defined the concept of culture in these terms:

'Taken in its wide ethnographic sense, [culture] is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.' Culture is understood here as all human traits that are not the result of instinct – in other words, as a synonym for nurture as opposed to nature. Culture thus encompasses all aspects of our behaviour that have evolved as social conventions and are transmitted through learning from generation to generation.

(Guy Deutscher 8–9)

ACTIVITY 1

What is culture?

- 1 Examine the images on the next page. What elements of culture are depicted in each image?
- 2 What are the three most important elements of your own culture(s)?

When you have answered these questions, compare your answers to the notes on page 423 at the end of this book.



CONCEPT CONNECTION

CULTURE AND PERSPECTIVE

Tylor's anthropological definition of culture is universally accepted, but Guy Deutscher, in his book *Through the Language Glass*, points to the differences in the English, German and French dictionary definitions of culture as indicative of how our culture itself determines the way we understand the concept of 'culture':

Culture: Cultivation, the state of being cultivated, refinement, the result of cultivation, a type of civilization. (from Chambers English dictionary)

Kultur: The totality of intellectual and artistic achievements of a society. (Störig German dictionary)

Culture: The collection of means employed by man to increase his knowledge, develop and improve his mental faculties, notably judgment and taste. (ATLIF French dictionary)

Is the Chambers definition not the quintessence of Englishness? Rather amateurish in its non-committal list of synonyms, politely avoiding any awkward definitions. And what could be more German than the German? Mercilessly thorough, overly intellectual, knocking the concept on the head with charmless precision. And as for the French: grandiloquent, hopelessly idealistic, and obsessed with le goût.

(Guy Deutscher 8)

We can use some of the basic tenets of cultural studies to guide us in our examination of the role of culture in a work of literature. Stephen Greenblatt, who is considered an authority on new historicism and cultural studies, identifies six key questions which can help readers consider some of the cultural insights that a text offers:

- 1 What kinds of behavior, what models of practice, does this work seem to enforce?
- 2 Why might readers at a particular time and place find this work compelling?
- 3 Are there differences between my values and the values implicit in the work I am reading?
- 4 Upon what social understanding does the work depend?
- 5 Whose freedom of thought or movement might be constrained implicitly or explicitly by this work?
- 6 What are the larger social structures with which these particular acts of praise or blame might be connected?

(Stephen Greenblatt 226)

In the following sections, we will examine some of the insights we can gain into particular aspects of culture in selected literary works. We gain these insights through a combination of techniques that writers may use: for example, form and structure, depiction of setting, characterization, or treatment of themes. Of course, many works allow us to gain multiple insights into many different aspects of a culture or cultures, so although we will focus on specific aspects within the following examples, you may indeed pick up on others.

Artistic and literary culture

Some works provide us with an insight into the artistic or literary period from which they emerged. For example, Allen Ginsberg's long-form poem 'Howl' reflects the spirit of the 'beat generation'. The beat generation (a term coined by beat writer Jack Kerouac) arose after the Second World War, during a period when writers and intellectuals began to question the conventional structures and materialistic attitudes of society. The 'beats' looked to break from what they viewed as the moralism that they felt was representative of their parents' generation and sought to break many taboos.

The Beats stood in opposition to the clean, almost antiseptic formalism of the early twentieth-century Modernists ...

(Rahn)

The publication of 'Howl' in 1956 was a major turning point in American literature and is now considered representative of the Beat Movement as a whole. The poem 'is intended to be read aloud, almost chanted, a sort of return to an oral tradition that had been neglected in literature for a long time' (Rahn). The poem was highly controversial to 1950s audiences because of its graphic sexual content, depiction of drug use and criminality, and its use of profanity. This controversy resulted in an obscenity trial; Ginsberg won his case, challenging American censorship laws.

Another example of a distinct literary culture is the Harlem Renaissance, an intellectual and artistic movement of the 1920s. At the time, it was known as the New Negro Movement and was a reflection of African-American racial and cultural pride. Although it was mostly centred around Harlem, New York, the movement spread to other parts of the nation and ever further around the world. Writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Richard Bruce Nugent and Aaron Douglas were all prominent figures within the Harlem Renaissance. In 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers', a poem which many critics have come to characterize as Langston Hughes's signature poem, the first-person speaker is an embodiment of the African-American race as a whole. Although the singular pronoun is used, Hughes conveys a shared experience and invokes a bluesy type of rhythm in the poem.

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

5 I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen
its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

10 Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

(Langston Hughes)

In his critique of the poem, Adrian Oktenburg notes:

'The Negro Speaks of Rivers', then, is only the beginning of a long chain of poems by Hughes which confront, distill, extend, and transform the historical experience of black people into an art both limpid and programmatic ... The 'I' of the poem is not that of 'a' Negro but 'the' Negro, suggesting the whole of the people and their history. Most of the consonants – d's, n's, l's, s's – are soft, and of the vowels, long o's reoccur, contributing by sound the effect of an ancient voice. The tone of the repeated declarative sentences is muted, lulling. Every element of the poem combines to suggest that when the Negro speaks of rivers it is with the accumulated wisdom of a sage. The function of a sage is to impart the sometimes secret but long accumulated history of a people to its younger members so that they might make the lessons of the past active in the future.

(Adrian Oktenburg)

Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes (1901–1967) was an American poet, novelist, playwright, and social activist. Originally from Joplin, Missouri, Hughes spent most of his life in New York City, where he was a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance and was a pioneer of jazz poetry, a sort of subgenre which aimed to imitate the rhythms and sounds of jazz music. Some of Hughes's most well-known poems include 'Harlem (A Dream Deferred)', 'Let America Be America Again', 'Mother to Son' and 'The Weary Blues'.



A similar, perhaps less well-known, movement to the Harlem Renaissance was the Native American Renaissance of the late 1960s. The roots of the movement could be traced to the publication of N Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1968. Following its publication, there was a significant increase in publication of literature by Native American writers. The term itself has generated some controversy, with some critics objecting to it on the grounds that use of the term 'renaissance' undermines Native American writers of previous eras. Indeed, we considered the work of Zitkala-Ša in Chapter 1.1. Nonetheless, prominent writers within this resurgence include Leslie Marmon Silko, James Welch, Joy Harjo, Simon J Ortiz, Louise Erdrich and Paula Gunn Allen. The writing which emerged from this period drew heavily from the shared myths and stories of Native American culture:

[The] first generation of novels which have become the classics of the American Indian Literary Renaissance ... generally present a bleak picture of life in Indian Country. Although the authors treat their subjects with humor and compassion, and the reader gets a full sense of the characters' essential humanity, for the most part the protagonists are poor, shiftless, heavy-drinking drifters who are usually out of work and often in jail ...

(*'Writers of the Native American Renaissance'*)

ACTIVITY 2

Insights into Native American culture

Read the following extract from Joy Harjo's memoir *Crazy Brave* and consider the question that follows.

My mother's singing attracted me to her road in this world. It is her song that lit my attention as I listened in the ancestor realm. Secret longing rose up in her heart as she sang along with the radio. The music threading the atmosphere in what was known as Tulsa, Oklahoma, or T-Town, in 1951 was songs for falling in love, songs
5 for falling out of love, songs to endure the purgatory of longing, or improvisational swing jazz, country, or songs just for the sake of kicking it.

Tulsa was a Creek Indian town established on the Arkansas River, after my father's people were forcibly removed from their homes in the South in the mid-1800s. When they arrived in these new lands, they brought sacred fire. They brought what
10 they could carry. Some African people came with them as family members, others as slaves. Other African people arrived independently, established their own towns. European and American settlers soon took over the lands that were established for settlement of eastern tribes in what became known as Indian Territory. The Christian god gave them authority. Yet everyone wanted the same thing: land, peace,
15 a place to make home, cook, fall in love, make children and music.

Every soul has a distinct song. Even the place called Tulsa has a song that rises up from the Arkansas River around sundown ...

... Because music is a language that lives in the spiritual realms, we can hear it, we can notate it and create it, but we cannot hold it in our hands. Music can help raise a
20 people up or call them to gather for war ...

(Joy Harjo 18–20)

What role does music play in shaping the narrator's (Joy's) identity? How does music form part of her cultural identity? You can compare your answers to the notes on page 423.

Joy Harjo

Born in 1951, Joy Harjo is one of the leading contemporary voices in Native American literature. Harjo is a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma and has worked as a poet, musician, visual artist and dancer. Among her many accolades, Harjo received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas in 1995. In 2009, she served as a founding member of the Board of Directors for the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation.



CONCEPT CONNECTION

IDENTITY

Writers with strong ties to a particular literary movement, like Hughes and Harjo, serve as representatives of a larger community. Not only do their works reflect their individual identities, but also a collective identity; they serve as public voices for individuals who have been marginalized or silenced.

Beliefs and values

Other important aspects of culture are the beliefs and values that define it. In order to understand – and, indeed, to identify – these aspects at work in literature, we must understand the differences between each of these concepts. A belief is largely personal; a belief is an assumption or generalization that arises from a learned experience. A value is shared by a larger group of people and arises from shared human experience; values are not context-dependent like beliefs are. Beliefs and values shape our attitudes and lead to our resulting behaviours. Behaviours are governed by established codes of right and wrong, which can be written or unwritten rules, laws, customs or traditions.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold by Gabriel García Márquez is a good example of a work which reflects distinct cultural values. García Márquez never explicitly tells readers where the events of the novel take place, but it is implied that the setting is on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. The culture depicted in the novella is patriarchal; the concept of machismo (excessive masculine pride or aggression) defines, perhaps stereotypically in our contemporary context, the Latin American male society within the work.

In the novel, individual beliefs and shared cultural values both play a part in determining the characters' actions. The characters Pedro and Pablo Vicario kill Santiago Nasar in an act of revenge; Nasar's alleged crime was to take their sister's virginity. In the Vicario brothers' eyes (and those of wider society), their act is entirely justified because Nasar violated their family's sense of honour. As the story continues to unfold, there are suggestions that the Vicario brothers acted not as a consequence of their personal beliefs but of entrenched social codes. The fact that they told their plans to 'more than a dozen people' (Marquez 58) who could possibly have stopped them from committing the murder, compounded with the fact that Pedro Vicario 'considered his duty fulfilled when the mayor disarmed them' (Marquez 61), implies that they were only acting according to custom.

Gabriel García Márquez

Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014) was one of the most celebrated Spanish-language authors of the twentieth century, receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982. Prior to his literary career, García Márquez worked as a journalist; this experience is reflected in the narrative style of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. García Márquez is best known for popularizing the style of magical realism. Notable works include the novels *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Love in the Time of Cholera* and the short stories 'The Very Old Man With Enormous Wings' and 'The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World'. Many of his works are set in a fictionalized version of his native Aracataca, Colombia.



Similar to *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, honour is a value which is central to the culture depicted in Ismail Kadare's novel *Broken April*. The novel takes place on Albania's high plateau and follows the story of Gjorg, a twenty-six-year-old man who is forced to commit a murder under the laws of the Kanun (a set of traditional Albanian laws centred around four main pillars: honour, hospitality, right conduct and kin loyalty). In avenging his brother's death, Gjorg's own fate is sealed, for the laws of the Kanun dictate that he is to be killed by a member of the opposing family. Throughout the novel, we gain a great deal of insight into the the blood feuds that dominate the region, a custom which continues in the present day. A 2011 article in *The Guardian* (UK) explores the impact of this 'eye for an eye' law on the younger generation of Albanians who are trapped in a cycle of vengeance – you can read it via the QR code on the right.



ACTIVITY 3

Broken April by Ismail Kadare

Read the following extract from *Broken April* and consider the questions that follow, then compare your responses to the notes on page 423.

The funeral took place the next day around noon. The professional mourners came from afar, clawing their faces and tearing their hair according to custom. The old churchyard was filled with the black tunics of the men who had come to the burial. After the ceremony, the funeral cortege returned to the Kryeqyqes' house. Gjorg, too, walked in the procession. At first he had refused to take part in the ceremony, but at last he had given in to his father's urging. He had said, 'You must go to the burial. You must also go to the funeral dinner to honor the man's soul.'

5 'But I am the Gjaks*,' Gjorg had protested. 'I'm the one who killed him. Why must I go?'

10 'For that very reason you must go,' his father declared. 'If there is anyone who cannot be excused from the burial and the funeral dinner today, it's you.'

'But why?' Gjorg had asked one last time. 'Why must I go?' But his father glared at him and Gjorg said no more.

15 Now he walked among the mourners, pale, with unsteady steps, feeling people's glances glide by him and turn aside at once, losing themselves in the banks of mist. Most of them were relatives of the dead man. Perhaps for the hundredth time he groaned inwardly: Why must I be here?

20 Their eyes showed no hatred. They were cold as the March day, as he himself had been cold, without hatred, yesterday evening as he lay in wait for his quarry. Now the newly dug grave, the crosses of stone and wood – most of them askew – and the plaintive sound of the tolling bell, all these struck home. The faces of the mourners, with the hideous scratches left by their fingernails (God, he thought, how did they get their nails to grow so long in twenty-four hours?), their hair torn out savagely and their eyes swollen, the muffled footsteps all around him, all these trappings of death – it was he who had brought them about. And as if that were not enough, he was forced to walk in that solemn cortege, slowly, in mourning, just like them.

(Ismail Kadare 14–15)

* From the Albanian *gjak* (blood), killer, but with no pejorative connotation, since the Gjaks is fulfilling his duty under the provisions of the Kanun.

- 1 What cultural values are implicit here? Does the character Gjorg seem to share these values? What evidence do you have of Gjorg's personal beliefs?
- 2 What customs are illustrated in this extract? How do these customs reflect cultural values?

TOK Links: Considering different world views

To what extent is it necessary to share a writer's outlook to be able to understand his or her work? Do we need to be able to view a work of literature through the writer's **perspective** to fully appreciate it? For example, does Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* have less of an effect on a modern audience simply because readers may not share the same cultural values of the Igbo people?

Ismail Kadare

Ismail Kadare is an Albanian writer of **fiction**, poetry, essays and plays. He won the Man Booker International Prize in its inaugural year (2005). Like Márquez, Kadare was also a journalist before embarking on a literary career. Many of Kadare's works grapple with issues such as Albanian history, politics, folklore, blood-feud tradition and ethnicity. Kadare, alternately supportive and critical of his country's communist government, defected to France in 1990 to avoid imprisonment (Prifti).

Social organizations

Every culture is made up of social organizations, from smaller family units to larger groups made up of people who share the same levels of wealth, education, religion, place of origin, common language, or other criteria.

Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* depicts a day in the life of a young 'sweeper' of India's lower caste. The caste system is a complex social paradigm which has existed in different forms throughout Indian history; in the simplest of terms, one's position within the caste system is determined by birth. Bakha, as a cleaner of toilets, is considered 'untouchable' by members of the upper castes. In the following extract, we can see the impact of these societal structures on Bakha. The third-person **point of view** is an interesting choice; we do not view the incident described here directly through Bakha's eyes, which distances us from his experience. Writing in the preface to the novel, EM Forster noted:

No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles. And no Untouchable could have written the book, because he would have been in indignation and self-pity. Mr Anand stands in the ideal position.

(in *Anand* vi–vii)

Bakha was profoundly moved. He was affected by the rhythm of the song. His blood had coursed along the balanced melodic line to the final note of strength with such sheer vigour that his hands joined unconsciously, and his head hung in the worship of the unknown god.

5 But a cry disturbed him: 'Polluted, polluted, polluted'. A shout rang through the air. He was completely unnerved. His eyes were covered with darkness. He couldn't see anything. His tongue and throat were parched. He wanted to utter a cry, a cry of fear, but his voice failed him. He opened his mouth wide to speak. It was no use. Beads of sweat covered his forehead. He tried to raise himself from the awkward attitude of prostration, but his limbs had no strength left in them. For a second he was as if dead.

10 Then as suddenly as he had been overpowered he asserted himself. He lifted his head and looked round. The scales fell from his eyes. He could see the little man with a drooping mustache whom he knew to be a priest of the temple, racing up the courtyard, trembling, stumbling, tottering, falling, with his arms lifted in the air, and in his mouth the hushed cry, 'polluted, polluted, polluted'.

15 'I have been seen, undone,' the sentence quickly flashed across Bahka's mind. But he espied the figure of a woman behind the shouting priest. He stood amazed, though still afraid, still feeling that he was doomed. He was unaware, however, of the form the doom would take.

But he soon knew. A thumping crowd of worshippers rushed out of the temple, and stood arrayed as in the grand finale of an opera show. The lanky little priest stood with upraised hands, a few steps below him. His sister, Sohini (for that was the woman he had seen behind the priest), lingered modestly in the courtyard.

- 20 'Polluted, polluted, polluted!' shouted the Brahmin below. The crowd above him took the cue and shouted after him, waving their hands, some in fear, others in anger, but all in a terrible orgy of excitement. One of the crowd struck out an individual note.

'Get off the steps, you scavenger! Off with you! You have defiled our whole service! You have defiled our temple! Now we will have to pay for the purificatory ceremony! Get down, get away, you dog!'

(Mulk Raj Anand 60–61)

A 2018 article in *The Independent* (UK), which you can read via the QR code, illustrates how cultural and societal perceptions have changed since the novel's setting. The Hindu priest in the article displays a very different set of beliefs and values than the priest in the previous extract; the 'untouchable' is literally carried into the temple, unlike Bahka, who is seen as a contaminant simply because of his position within society.



Mulk Raj Anand

Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004) was one of the leading voices in Anglo-Indian literature of the twentieth century. As a student in London in the 1920s, Anand established friendships with prominent writers of the Bloomsbury Group (for example, Virginia Woolf and EM Forster). Many of Anand's works, including his first novel *Untouchable* (1935), raise awareness of social injustices. Anand was the recipient of many awards for his contributions to literature and society; in 1953, he was awarded the International Peace Prize, and in 1968 he received the Padma Bhushan, the third-highest civilian honour in India.

Gender roles

Finally, we can look to literature to gain an insight into gender roles. The term 'gender roles' is quite a broad category. A standard dictionary definition of 'gender roles' is 'the role or behaviour learned by a person as appropriate to their gender, determined by the prevailing cultural norms.' Gender roles can be influenced by factors such as religion, marriage or family customs or structures, education or career, power structures, and sexuality.

Woman at Point Zero by Nawal El Saadawi is a novel that challenges conventional perceptions of women. On the night before she is to be executed for murder, the protagonist Firdaus tells her story to a psychiatrist. Firdaus's life is full of abuse at the hands of men: her father, her uncle, her husband, and the men who use her services as a prostitute. El Saadawi presents Firdaus's story through the psychiatrist's frame story; structurally, Firdaus doesn't even have her own voice from which to directly share her story with the audience. Inspired by El Saadawi's own experiences as a psychiatrist in Cairo in the 1970s, *Woman at Point Zero* explores universal issues such as survival in the face of desperation and despair.

In the following extract, early in the novel, we can see how women are defined by traditional gender roles. Firdaus is considered a burden to her aunt and uncle. Higher education is out of the question because it will grant Firdaus equal status to men, at least in this context, and this is unacceptable to her uncle. The only practical option is for Firdaus to marry: in marriage, Firdaus's

potential husband will provide financially for her; in turn, it will be her duty to obey him, serve him and provide companionship. Firdaus's emotional or intellectual needs are not a consideration here, only her physical needs.

'So what can we do with her then?'

'We can be rid of her by sending her to the university. There she can live in the quarters allocated to the girl students.'

5 'To the university? To a place where she will be sitting side by side with men? A respected Sheikh and man of religion like myself sending his niece off to mix in the company of men?! Besides, where will the money come from for her lodging, and books, and clothes? You know how high the cost of living is these days. Prices seem to have gone mad, and yet the salary of us government officials only rises by a few millimes.'

'Your holiness, I have a wonderful idea.'

'What is it?'

10 'My uncle, Sheikh Mahmoud, is a virtuous man. He has a big pension and no children, and he's been on his own since his wife died last year. If he marries Firdaus she will have a good life with him, and he can find in her an obedient wife, who will serve him and relieve his loneliness ...'

(Nawal El Saadawi 47–48)

ACTIVITY 4

Gender stereotypes in *Woman at Point Zero*

Read the following extract from later in the novel. What assumptions are made about Firdaus and about women in general? You can compare your answers to the notes on page 424.

'I can't believe that someone like you can kill.'

'Why not?'

'Because you are too gentle.'

'And who said that to kill does not require a gentleness?'

5 He looked into my eyes again, laughed, and said, 'I cannot believe that you are capable of killing anything, even a mosquito.'

'I might not kill a mosquito, but I can kill man.'

He stared at me once more, but this time only very quickly, then said, 'I do not believe it.'

10 'How can I convince you that what I say is true?'

[...]

He said to the police, 'Don't let her go. She's a criminal, a killer.'

And they asked me, 'Is what he says true?'

'I am a killer, but I've committed no crime. Like you, I kill only criminals.'

15 'But he is a prince, and a hero. He's not a criminal.'

'For me the feats of kings and princes are no more than crimes, for I do not see things the way you do.'

'You are a criminal,' they said, 'and your mother is a criminal.'

20 'My mother was not a criminal. No woman can be a criminal. To be a criminal one must be a man.'

(Nawal El Saadawi 135–6)

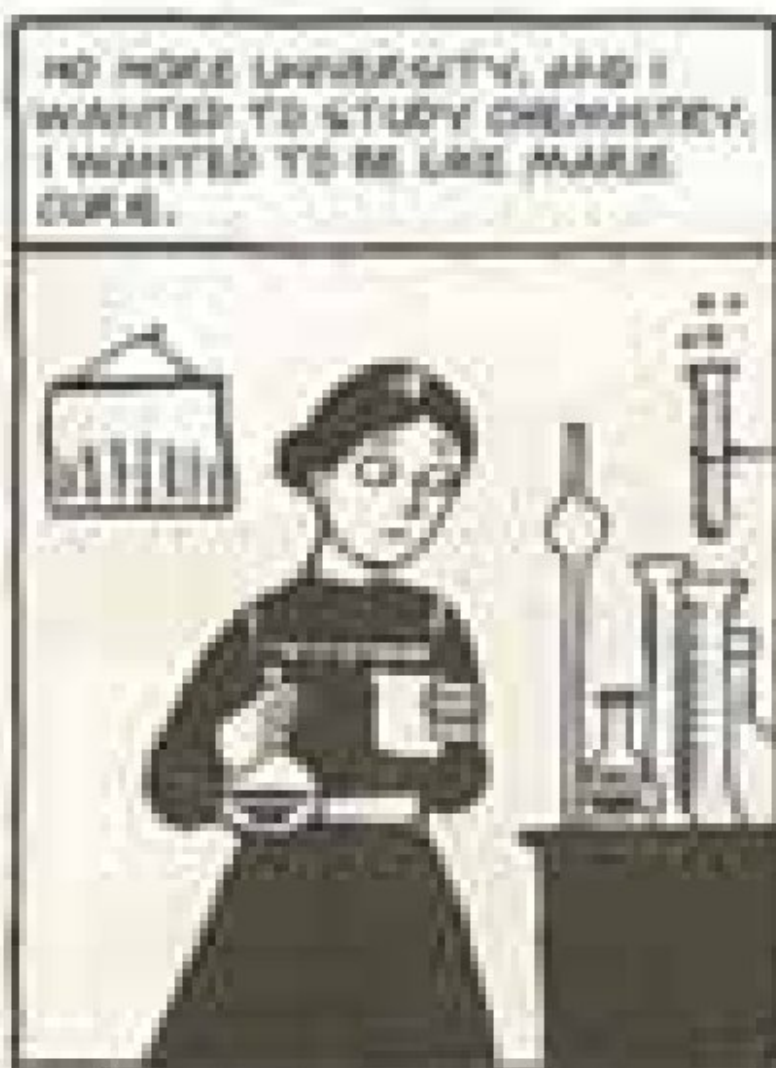
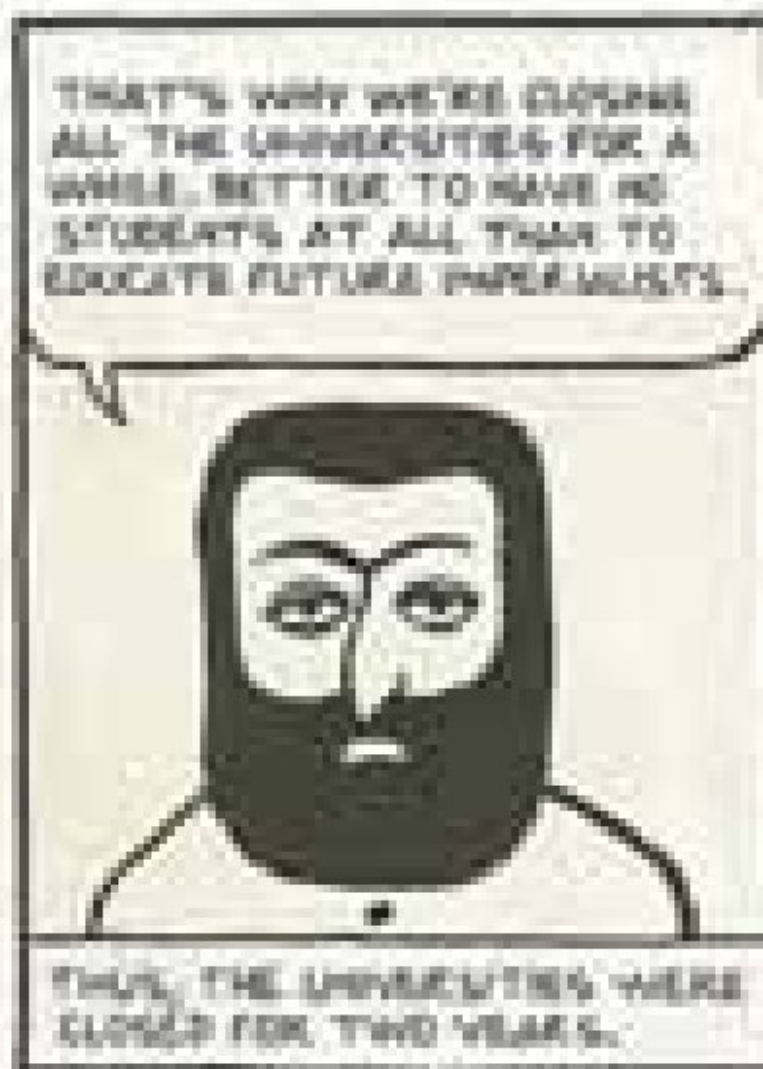
Nawal El Saadawi

Nawal El Saadawi is an Egyptian physician, psychiatrist, author and feminist. She is an outspoken advocate for women's rights and has been condemned by religious and political authorities for her views. She was imprisoned for two months in 1981 and, as recently as 2008, has battled accusations of apostasy (an act of refusing to continue to follow, obey or recognize a religious faith) and heresy. In 1982, El Saadawi founded the Arab Women's Solidarity Association. Much of her work focuses on men's use of religion as a means of oppressing women (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica).



Another work that reflects how cultural perceptions of gender roles impact an individual's **identity** is Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis*. *Persepolis* is a **bildungsroman** based on Satrapi's childhood and adolescence growing up within the context of the Iranian Revolution; it is actually more of a graphic memoir than a novel. The protagonist Marji enjoys a more privileged position within Iranian society, unlike Firdaus from *Woman at Point Zero*, who is a victim of her circumstances and constrained by her position within Egyptian society. Marji's progressive parents, both of whom are well-educated members of the middle class, are supportive of her dreams and aspirations. They arrange for her to flee to Vienna during the revolution in the hopes that she will be able to achieve her potential outside the strict confines of Iranian society.

In the following page from *Persepolis*, we can see how Marji's and her parents' values clash with those of the government. The dominant panel at the top of the page illustrates Marji's comfortable living standards; the use of space (the one panel extending across the top of the page, equal to the width of the three panels below) emphasizes their class privilege. In the next series of images, we gain insight into the government's values. They would prefer no education rather than an education which, in their views, promotes freedom of thought; the Shah, pictured in the middle panel (the singular image of his face in close-up emphasizing his authority) exaggerates his case that education leads to imperialism. Marji and her parents react dramatically to the announcement that universities will be closed. Marji's mother responds equally dramatically by suggesting that this 'backwards' thinking will lead to a literal step backwards (trading a car for a camel). In the last three panels, we see the individual impact of the government's changes on Marji. The images emphasize her mood and state of mind through the use of **emanata**, while the language in the **captions** and speech bubbles employs hyperbole. To the young Marji, she sees two possibilities for her future, each at extreme ends of the spectrum: become an intellectual pioneer like Marie Curie or end up married with ten children.



■ *Persepolis*, p.73, by Marjane Satrapi

ACTIVITY 5

Cultural values in *Persepolis*

Examine the following page from *Persepolis*. This page is located in the same chapter ('The Trip') as the example shown on page 218. Consider how Satrapi uses humour and exaggeration to represent cultural values and gender roles, then compare your answers to the notes on page 424.



■ *Persepolis*, p.75, by Marjane Satrapi

Marjane Satrapi

Born in 1969, Marjane Satrapi is an Iranian-French graphic novelist, cartoonist, illustrator, film director and children's book author. She is best known for her graphic memoir *Persepolis*, which was adapted into an animated film in 2007. Satrapi wrote and directed the film version in collaboration with French cartoon artist and filmmaker Vincent Paronnaud. Since her childhood in Tehran, Satrapi has spent much of her life in Austria and France.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: BELIEFS, VALUES AND EDUCATION

In both *Woman at Point Zero* and *Persepolis*, we are exposed to cultures that value males' education over females'. Both characters, Firdaus and Marji, must actively fight against entrenched stereotypes and expectations. In some cultures, marriage is still seen as the ultimate goal for young women, and quality education is either discouraged or out of reach (financially or geographically) for many of these women. The clash between cultural beliefs and values and the right to an education is a global issue, which is related to the field of inquiry of beliefs, values and education. There are many charitable organizations that aim to provide education and support for young women in developing countries, if you are interested in reading more on this global issue.

CAS Links: Booker Prize 'shadowing group'

The Booker Prize for Fiction is an annual prize given to the best English-language novel published in the United Kingdom. Past winners have included JM Coetzee of South Africa, Keri Hulme of New Zealand, Aravind Adiga of India, and Marlon James of Jamaica. Each year, a longlist and a shortlist of authors is created in the lead-up to the prize-giving ceremony in London. The winner is announced with much fanfare in October. The Man Booker International Prize was established in 2005 to reward any living author, of any nationality, whose work is available in English. The works that are included on both the long and shortlists all offer insights into different cultures. An exciting CAS initiative could be to organize a Booker Prize 'shadowing group'. Members of the group could each read one of the shortlisted works and make a 'pitch' for it to win the coveted prize. On prize night, you could watch the ceremony together and see if your chosen book has won.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have explored a variety of works that have provided us with an insight into distinct cultures. As readers, we are often approaching a work from a different time or place than that of the writer, and inevitably we will project our own cultural beliefs and values onto the reading experience. Throughout your study of literature, you may come across works that challenge your own sense of morality. For example, perhaps the honour killing described in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* or the blood feuds at the heart of *Broken April* may strike you as barbaric acts, different to your cultural values and beliefs. When we consider the insights that literature offers us into another culture, it is important to question and challenge, but we must be careful not to stereotype or generalize. Understanding these cultural values can help us to understand and appreciate the works better.

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2.4

How does the meaning and impact of a literary text change over time?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To understand how meaning of texts are products of context
- ▶ To investigate the impact of literature on an individual and a community
- ▶ To analyse the relationship of a literary text with changing context(s)
- ▶ To understand the way subversive works of literature affect the reader
- ▶ To investigate the way a text can be used for different purposes through time
- ▶ To understand the causes behind changes in a work's interpretation and impact
- ▶ To demonstrate the way adaptations can change the impact of literature over time

Introduction

In the first section of this book, you learned about different methods of analysis to help you interpret the meaning of a literary text through the **immanent** approach. You looked at meaning in terms of text types and genre, literary stylistic devices and other methods of using language to create meaning. Here, we understand how meaning, or multiple meanings, of texts are products of context as well. Since context changes, so too can the meaning of a text. In this chapter, we look specifically through a chronological lens to understand the way both the meaning and impact of works are changed by historical events, attitudes and innovations.

Meaning and impact of a literary text

In 1941, during the Second World War, researcher and teacher Grace Sherrer discussed the role of literature in a changing world:

The first fact to be noted in regard to literature in a changing world is, I believe, that literature itself is changing. It is true the form of the literature of the past cannot change. The form remains forever a pattern of words conceived and executed by the mind of the author. But the fixed pattern is interpreted in new ways by successive generations of readers.

(Grace Sherrer 634)

Readers during (and after) the Second World War, for example, are changed forever by their knowledge of the persecutions of the holocaust. As an example, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* uses a Jewish moneylender as the antagonist, so the conflicts between Jewish and Christian characters will now be read with new poignancy. The first half of the twentieth century also had many changes for women in European and American society, partially as a result of both world wars. Therefore, any text on this subject from before the century, such as Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, might now be read differently in analysis of marriage rites, clothing, family dynamics or education.

Great literature means different things to different people at different moments in history. Although it may reflect a particular culture or make use of a particular political situation, for example, literature can also change as a reflection of the times, giving us new ideas through new interpretations. This section on **time and space** helps you to consider all these factors, but this chapter's purpose is in looking at changes through time.

In order to allow for this unfixed meaning and impact, we must go back to Roland Barthes' 'Death of the Author', which teaches us that a work's meaning may be independent of the author's identity and intentions. This does not mean the author actually has to be dead. It just means that we are free to interpret and reinterpret his or her works based on changes in ourselves and the entire world. Barthes writes:

We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.

(Roland Barthes 146)

If, alternatively, we suppose the author has the answer with their intended meaning, we cannot have a change in meaning over time. If the author is 'God', we are slaves to their specific vision and purpose.

Some contemporary authors explicitly play by this model with their readers. Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami, for example, often discusses the lack of intentionality in his work: 'the reader and [I] have a secret meeting place underground, a secret place in the subconscious' where meaning is created together (Burkeman). Murakami remarks in the same interview that people loved his literature during the crumbling of the Berlin Wall: 'people in confusion like my books'. Murakami never talks about the Berlin Wall in his novels, but those close to the event found his more universal ideas useful at that time. You have probably already read literature that helps you to understand something about yourself or your community; likely, the author did not have you in mind when she or he wrote the text.



■ The films *Othello* (1995) and *O* (2001)

Renditions that are true to the time period can still tell us something about today. In **adaptations** like *O*, the filmmaker tells us in what way he sees the original text as relevant. We will look more at adaptation later in this chapter.

Let us consider a quick example in Shakespeare's *Othello*. For a modern overview of the story, you can watch a review available via the QR code on the right. This play's take on race relations, friendship and marriage has universal meaning that transcends time, but it may also have more specific meanings to people at different moments in history. The antagonist, Iago, lies and manipulates General Othello after being overlooked for a promotion. Othello, the 'Moor of Venice', is led to believe his wife has been unfaithful. Overcome with jealousy, he murders her and commits suicide. Additionally, Othello's skin colour – a person from North Africa in the setting of Venice and Cyprus – is a target of Iago and other characters.



The following universal themes can be identified in the play:

- Be honest and treat each other kindly.
- Revenge and/or jealousy can consume a person and make him/her act irrationally.
- Women (or those who lack power) are at the mercy of powerful men.
- Power should have nothing to do with skin colour.
- Racial prejudice is used unjustly to manipulate and gain power.

These ideas have always been at the heart of the play, but let us consider the way our understanding of them might change over time. Without detailed analysis right here, you might consider how our main areas of consideration – historical events, attitudes and innovation – change the way we understand the original drama, first performed in 1604. Attitudes about race and gender have changed over time, of course, and we will investigate this idea further in this chapter. For now, consider two modern time periods and how they might change the play: the 1960s harbouring the American Civil Rights Movement and several countries' fights for women's rights, and the 2010s harbouring the #blacklivesmatters and #metoo movements.

Our reading or viewing of the original play might change during these time periods and their related **historical events**. In the 1960s, people spoke out against racial and gender injustices. Even if an audience member in the Globe theatre in 1604 *should* understand these prejudices in the play as wrong, they might focus more on the murder and lies as being morally wrong. In the present day, however, we might focus more on bigotry, due to the way **attitudes** about race and gender have changed since 1604. A modern viewer would more clearly see a different array of moral wrongs. In the 2010s, the topical movements are more specific about unwarranted police violence against black people and sexual misconduct against women. They are enhanced through **innovation** on social media. As hashtags, these movements travel the globe more freely and can encourage us to review previous experiences in a new light with a fresh **perspective**.

Many Shakespeare plays have been adapted into new stories or simply adapted by their setting. The film production *O* puts *Othello* in an early-twenty-first-century New York high school campus. The 2001 film tells us that gender and race prejudices are still around in the twenty-first century and that revenge and jealousy can be just as dangerous in a high school as in the military. If you were viewing this film as a teenager, you might then see more relevance in Shakespeare's original after watching it. (You can view the film's trailer by following the QR code provided.)



● EE Links: Researching a text's impact

Aspects such as **critical theory**, **allegory**, and **adaptation** can help us read a text in relation to time: the contemporaneous time of its writing, the period in which the text takes place or refers to, and the time of the reader. Some researchers further look at the changing reception and impact of a text through history. This might be a method you would consider for your extended essay, or one that you would consider after secondary school as a researcher of literature. We will consider these aspects of time throughout the chapter.

■ A multiplicity of meanings

It may at first feel overwhelming to think about literature's meaning as unfixed. But perhaps we can make this a powerful idea instead.

Critical theory is a method of looking at literature through a particular lens. As we consider different lenses, we can also track changes in attitudes over time, or understand progressive ideas that an author engages in. We will look at critical theory – in particular, feminist, Marxist and post-colonial criticism – in this short section but for a more expansive and in-depth explanation



of literary critical theory visit the Owl Purdue page via the QR code on the right. One example is the use of the **feminist lens**. The lens allows us to consider changing attitudes about gender and about women's role in society. For example, when we read Jane Austen's novels, such as *Sense and Sensibility*, rather than focus on the subtle humour of family dynamics or the satisfaction of a love story, we can use the **feminist lens** to understand the female characters' abilities and limitations in the eighteenth century, as well as Austen's influence as a published female author in England at that time. We might consider how the stories would change due to changes in women's rights or cultural practices in England. In a different investigation of *Othello*, we would focus on the injustices and lack of power the female characters face, to tell us more about society at that time and about human relationships in general.

The **Marxist lens** is another useful tool. Marxist critical theorists do not necessarily believe in communism, but look at literature through a narrative of power, money and class. However, some texts that look explicitly at communist societies can be understood through this lens, allowing us to understand more about humanity rather than the specific historical situation. As we read the text with this focus, we can develop the idea of how time has changed attitudes about what government structures are judged as 'acceptable', as well as how people fight oppression.

The Land of Green Plums (1994) is one of Romanian-born German writer Herta Müller's most famous works. Written from the perspective of a young female German minority in Romania, the novel investigates the terror under the regime through four youths who eventually emigrate to Germany. In the following excerpt from the start of this narrative, let us consider the way this novel, written five years after the change in government, tells us of a certain time period and also creates a more timeless narrative about humanity and society.

When we don't speak, said Edgar, we become unbearable, and when we do, we make fools of ourselves. We had been sitting and staring at the pictures on the floor for too long. My legs had fallen asleep from sitting.

The words in our mouths do as much damage as our feet on the grass. But so do our silences.

5 Edgar was silent.

To this day, I can't really picture a grave. Only a belt, a window, a nut, and a rope. To me, each death is like a sack.

Anyone who hears that, said Edgar, is bound to think you've lost your mind.

10 And then, I have the feeling that whenever someone dies he leaves behind a sack of words. And barbers, and nail-clippers – I always think of them, too, since the dead no longer need them. And they don't ever lose buttons either.

Maybe they sensed the dictator was a mistake in a different way than we did, said Edgar.

They had proof enough, because even we considered ourselves a mistake. Because in this country, we had to walk, eat, sleep, and love in fear, until it was once again time for the barber and the nail-clippers.

15 Anyone who makes graveyards just because he walks, eats, sleeps, and loves, said Edgar, is a bigger mistake than we are. A mistake of the first order. A master mistake.

The grass stands tall inside our heads. When we speak it gets mowed. Even when we don't. And then the second, and the third growth springs up at will. And even so: We are the lucky ones.

(Herta Müller 1–2)

A Marxist reading: Money, power and class

We may use a Marxist reading of a work to help us understand society of the time and attitudes of individuals in relation to governments and class hierarchies. This opening to Müller's novel shows us the pervading fear in Romanian society under the communist ruler Nicolae Ceausescu, who is referred to as a 'dictator'. The fear keeps the characters from speaking out, demonstrating an invisible power. Notice the theme of violence and the subtext about language and speech. Although the language may be easy for you to understand, Müller uses a lot of figurative language, such as **metaphors** and imagery. In interpreting some of this language use we can begin to see the themes of the novel emerge. Violence in death: 'a belt, a window, a nut, and a rope', suggesting suicide, keeps power over the people as well. Because the narrator feels like they are all 'mistakes', she demonstrates their lack of power or class. Even the language of their thoughts, the 'grass [that] stands tall inside our heads', is 'mowed' whether they speak or not. Müller is not yet using specific details about Romanian society at the time, but she later makes the setting clearer, demonstrating the way money or assets were unjustly taken from people, people's ideas were suppressed and minorities were persecuted. In a Marxist reading, we consider these elements in relation to historical power struggles, now viewed at the level of individual citizens. These stories are sometimes left unspoken, or lack detail, as we instead focus on what happened to those in power or larger groups of oppressed people.

Herta Müller

Herta Müller is a Romanian-born German writer of mixed genre, born in 1953. Born during the communist era in Romania, she worked first as a translator before being dismissed for her lack of co-operation with the government's secret police. Her family were targeted as German minorities in the country, including the confiscation of her grandfather's farmland and the deportation of her mother to a labour camp for several years. Müller often writes of the violence and oppression under this regime but in the realm of everyday life. The Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Müller in 2009 'who, with the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose, depicts the landscape of the dispossessed' ('The Nobel Prize in Literature 2009: Herta Müller').



Reading her novel in 1994, at the time of publication, one would have a raw understanding of the history, a chapter only recently closed. We can still use Marxist theory today to understand her work. A 'dictator' then and now has extremely negative connotations, even though its origin in the Roman Empire was the title given to a temporary magistrate. However, views of communism in general have changed. Polls of citizens of former communist nations in Europe have revealed that there is a significant gap in attitude between those of adult age before the fall of communism in 1989 and those who were children. The younger generations approve much more of a multi-party system in these countries ('The Post-Communist Generation in the Former Eastern Bloc'). Since they would have been too young to read Müller's novel when it first came out, the attitude now may be more in line with the rebellious narrator. Additionally, more people around the world have learned about what actually took place in Romania under Ceausescu or can easily research it online. Their richer understanding of the persecution and violence will change the way readers today approach the layers of meaning in the novel.

Müller opens with the idea that our voices are powerful forces against oppression that dictators want to silence, by 'mow[ing]' them down. Though we might assert our voices differently in the

twenty-first century in the face of economic hardship or authoritarian rule, we understand the concept through ongoing censorship in different places in the world. Time may allow us to apply research about the effects of communist rule on groups of people, as well as understanding the fictional narrative further through researched accounts of individuals. In the context of today, we might consider what this text means to us in understanding other communist nations, the rising gap between rich and poor in many first-world countries, or the dangers of polarized political ideologies.

A post-colonial reading

The **post-colonial lens** looks at similar elements but specifically within the context of the aftermath of colonization, which includes an added dynamic of national and race relations.

Franz Kafka

Franz Kafka (1883–1924) is another author who wrote in German but lived in Prague, which was then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Czechoslovakia, after the First World War in 1918) and is currently the capital of the Czech Republic. Kafka wrote metaphorically about his **identity** as a Jewish minority in Prague, his difficult relationship with his father and the impact of modernity on individuals. In the last chapter we read the first line of his short story ‘The Metamorphosis’, in which a travelling salesman wakes up one morning as a bug; he had become the family breadwinner and eventually caved to exhaustion. The story suggests that work and modern economic systems have ruined individuals and families.

The impact of Franz Kafka’s ‘The Metamorphosis’ through a **Marxist lens** can change as we consider the way working hours, for some, have become far greater, and the way online business has allowed people to keep working from home or while on holiday. If we take a look at another of his short stories, called ‘In the Penal Colony’, we can use the post-colonial lens to investigate power dynamics more specifically in that context, but also as a way to critique modern machines and attitudes about corporal punishment. The following excerpt sets the scene for a ‘condemned man’ in the unnamed penal colony to be executed. There is a lot of attention on the method of execution, the power relations between people, and the way the ‘condemned man’ doesn’t seem to care that he will be killed.

‘It’s a peculiar apparatus,’ said the Officer to the Traveller, gazing with a certain admiration at the device, with which he was, of course, thoroughly familiar. It appeared that the Traveller had responded to the invitation of the Commandant only out of politeness, when he had been asked to attend the execution of a soldier condemned for disobeying and insulting his superior. Of course, interest in the execution was not
 5 very high even in the penal colony itself. At least, here in the small, deep, sandy valley, closed in on all sides by barren slopes, apart from the Officer and the Traveller there were present only the Condemned, a vacant-looking man with a broad mouth and dilapidated hair and face, and the Soldier, who held the heavy chain to which were connected the small chains which bound the Condemned Man by his feet and wrist bones, as well as by his neck, and which were also linked to each other by connecting chains. The Condemned
 10 Man, incidentally, had an expression of such dog-like resignation that it looked as if one could set him free to roam around the slopes and would only have to whistle at the start of the execution for him to return.

(Franz Kafka 191)

CONCEPT CONNECTION

PERSPECTIVE

As you consider this passage, notice the power dynamics among the Officer, the Traveller and the Condemned. Through the concept of perspective, consider how each would view the scene of an execution differently. What creates these power structures? Are prisoners necessarily 'bad' people? Which perspective do you think Kafka wants the reader to view the scene from?

Penal colonies were historically used to separate prisoners from the ruling nation's population. However, there is the added dynamic of the natives (or the colonized) of a place being used to move prisoners. The application of a **post-colonial lens** can help us to answer the questions above.

Some of the language demonstrates the power relationship between the characters. The Traveller attends the execution 'only out of politeness', suggesting there is a formal relationship between him and the Commandant. There is danger in acting solely for the sake of 'politeness', without reason and perhaps against one's morals. The Officer works for the Commandant and represents the ruling party and 'admir[es]' the violence of the execution machine, suggesting he is at odds with other members of the colony who lack 'interest' in the execution. His title and position represent a military rule like that associated with colonies. Rather than a human **identity**, he takes on positional authority, one that Kafka causes us to question. The soldier had displayed individuality in his crime by 'disobeying and insulting his superior', and therefore represents a threat against the colonial authority and power structure. He appears apathetic to the traveller, showing 'dog-like resignation', which suggests either that he has since been brainwashed or that he had nothing to live for other than rebelling against the authority.

The post-colonial lens allows us to focus on the way these power systems worked in the colonial world. Penal colonies, which were an intrinsic part of the colonial world, are now condemned, but there are still a few that function, although somewhat differently than in the past. The origin of the characters remains an *unsaid* in Kafka's text, but one that we can speculate on due to the title and use of the post-colonial lens for general reference. The Condemned Man might be a local native, treated differently due to his skin colour or religion. The chains here may conjure up other types of servitude and slavery present under colonization. The Traveller is certainly of an ally nation or race, for the Commandant and Officer are trying to impress him.

A reader in the early-twentieth century would have seen the end of penal colonies in France and Great Britain, and therefore would also be critical of their use. However, a more contemporary reading adds to many post-colonial texts, such as those of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, which began in the 1970s. These texts and, in large part the end of colonialism just prior, have seemingly changed public attitudes. We can also isolate the use of corporal punishment. In penal colonies or more recent out-of-territory detention centers, there is a more lawless approach to punishment. History has been rewritten to demonstrate these acts as oppression rather than glorification of the colonial powers. In this way, we may more immediately identify with the Traveller, who now seems like a person going back in time. In the narrative, he eventually runs away from the situation in disgust. There is still corporal punishment in the (non-colonial) world today, in places such as China and the United States. Kafka's text might convince some readers that this form of punishment is out of date with our current moral code, while other readers could understand the text as a warning on the *methods* of execution, without condemning corporal punishment as a whole.

A twenty-first-century example

Kafka's text has a multiplicity of meaning, partly because of vague setting. Here, we will take a look at a poem by Fadwa Tuqan that likewise does not name a setting. Similarly, nothing in this poem tells us specifically when it has been written. In this sense it lacks context-sensitive features. However, the Palestinian poet spoke and wrote often of her nation's political situation. Palestine was once a colony of Great Britain, and currently has a relationship with Israel that some describe as colonial, though this is debated. If we read through a post-colonial lens, we can understand the poem as a snapshot of a persona in the midst of Palestine's political turmoil. In the following activity, you will be asked to apply some of the ideas from the post-colonial lens in relation to this chapter's question.

Fadwa Tuqan

Fadwa Tuqan (1917–2003) was a Palestinian poet who also lived in Jordan and England. She was largely home-schooled by her brother Ibrahim, who taught her how to write poetry. Perhaps it was this dearth in her education that made her more aware when she was able to take charge and gain private lessons in English, eventually leading her to political campaigns worldwide, in conjunction with writing her poetry ('Fadwa Tuqan'). After many awards, work with other activists and poets throughout her life, and the creation of a documentary film about her work, upon her death the Palestinian Authority called her 'the great poetess of Palestine, an innovative and original talent' ('Fadwa Tuqan').

ACTIVITY 1

'Enough for Me' by Fadwa Tuqan

Read the poem below and then consider the questions that follow.

Enough for Me

Enough for me to die on her earth
 be buried in her
 to melt and vanish into her soil
 then sprout forth as a flower
 5 played with by a child from my country.
 Enough for me to remain
 in my country's embrace
 to be in her close as a handful of dust
 a sprig of grass
 10 a flower.

(Fadwa Tuqan)

- 1 What is the function of time in the poem? You may want to consider the idea of mortality.
- 2 Research what was Palestine like in 2003. How might this information help you interpret the poem?
- 3 How might the poem be reinterpreted today? Can you find a specific event in the media that might change a reader's understanding of this poem?
- 4 Why do you think Tuqan does not name 'my country' in the poem?
- 5 What universal ideas about the human condition do you take from the poem?

Have a look at the suggested answers in the back of this book (page 424) once you have finished. Your ideas about universal meaning and the unnamed country should help you see how this poem could be read by future generations. The impact of the poem can change as Palestine potentially changes and we consider the poem from our own circumstantial perspectives.

■ Attitudes or excuses?

The previous two examples looked at the universality of a text without a specific named setting. Now we turn to works of literature from particular times in history; the way they are written conveys certain attitudes of the author or the work's characters that represent what some in society thought. We will consider whether or not these works might be relevant today, and if it is worth reading something that we might now consider racist, sexist or homophobic. We shall also consider whether or not books that could be interpreted in dangerous or prejudicial ways should be banned. Many books have been (and still are) banned in different places around the world. Let us take Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as an extreme example. Among other things, the book is clearly anti-Semitic. Your school library may or may not have a copy. Some say the text helps us to understand history and avoid such violence and prejudice in the future; others say the language can incite violent action on its own and that its physical existence is insulting.

Some people think all books from history should be accessible to everyone, regardless of outdated attitudes or harmful language. They argue that knowledge is power; we can learn from our mistakes; we can investigate the nature of prejudice in the language. Others say that these books can be used for evil; we should not reprint something that was used for violent purposes in the past; the language can hurt people who come across it and make them feel attacked.

An article by Noah Berlatsky called 'The "Product of Its Time" Defense: No Excuse for Sexism and Racism' examines these debates through texts like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Snow White* and Jane Austen's novels. He talks about sexism in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: 'Being attentive to Orwell's sexism is a way to be attentive to ours; it makes *Nineteen Eighty-Four* more relevant, not less' (Berlatsky). Berlatsky believes the presence of sexism in the text helps us to understand connections between 'totalitarianism and sexism', perhaps due to the elevated patriarchy. This means that the system in the book enables male dominance, which can help us understand why this is wrong. He concludes that it is 'more respectful to argue' with the texts than to bury them in the past.

The subject is similar when we talk about using particular words in a piece of fiction. We may not know immediately whether the author uses the word to mimic people of his time, or uses it blindly or maliciously, in disrespect of those harmed by the language. To investigate what you think on this matter, we will take a look at the use of the 'n-word' in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. We have already looked at this very briefly in Chapter 1.2, as well as a more in-depth look at Flannery O'Connor's 'Revelation' (page 63).

Huckleberry Finn was published after the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery, but is set 40–50 years earlier. It is written subversively, in that the child narrator is often naïve, and there are racist characters in the text. It is not immediately obvious that Jim (the escaped black slave) is arguably the wisest character in the story, and that Twain writes strongly against any kind of racism, even though he includes the 'n-word' 219 times in the text. A **subversive text** is one in which meaning can only be discovered through interpreting the layers of the text. You considered Flannery O'Connor's 'Revelation' to this effect. O'Connor had created a character whom we are supposed to dislike and even condemn, partially for her use of the 'n-word'. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the narrator (Huck) might say something about slavery, but we are not supposed to believe him and we will find a different meaning after fully understanding the novel.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

COMMUNICATION

Communication through **fiction** is often difficult to pinpoint in its nuances. With a subversive text, this is even more the case. Sometimes subversive texts are used precisely so they are not censored by government agencies who do not like their messages. They can be a way for humans to communicate ideas that are otherwise suppressed.

When authors think of communicating with their readers, they are mainly aware of their contemporaries, for it is impossible to predict the future. Sometimes a text will need footnotes in the future for readers to understand the original intention of communication. This might help one to understand the subversive text or the use of an inflammatory or derogatory word – not to excuse it but to contextualize it. Some language has changed greatly in **connotation** over time; this is why, for example, you have probably read one of Shakespeare’s plays with many ‘interpretative’ notes, even though he wrote in Modern English.

Still, it is a fact that *Huckleberry Finn* uses the ‘n-word’ over 200 times. Some think, for this reason alone, that it is too dangerous to read this work in schools. Furthermore, it is a white author using this highly hurtful and loaded language, even if it may be for effect or as a result of the time period. Many libraries or schools ban the book because of this, even recently, because it can make ‘students feel uncomfortable’ (Akkoc) – despite the assumption that it should make the reader feel uncomfortable and allow us to see why this way of thinking is wrong, according to Twain. Let us first consider a short example together, then you can go on to answer the thinking and interpretation questions that follow. In this example, Huck (the child narrator) is addressed by his father, a man who, like O’Connor’s Mrs Turpin, we can argue is meant to be disliked by the reader. ‘Pap’ is an abusive alcoholic who controls Huck by force. Here, we listen to him sounding off about the government and black people.

SENSITIVE CONTENT

Caution: this extract includes sensitive content and dehumanizing language. The author includes the word ‘nigger’ to illustrate the society he writes about. We have chosen to let the word remain as it originally appeared, so you can consider for yourself the dehumanizing power of this term and how Twain used it to describe fellow human beings. This is central to understanding the themes of identity and human behaviour at the heart of this book. Furthermore, the IB recommends that your studies in Language A: Literature should challenge you intellectually, personally and culturally, and expose you to sensitive and mature topics. We invite you to reflect critically on various perspectives offered while bearing in mind the IB’s commitment to international-mindedness and intercultural respect.

‘Oh, yes, this is a wonderful govment, wonderful. Why, looky here. There was a free nigger there from Ohio – a mulatter, most as white as a white man. He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat; and there ain’t a man in that town that’s got as fine clothes as what he had; and he had a gold watch and chain, and a silver-headed cane – the awfulest old gray-headed nabob in the State. And
5 what do you think? They said he was a p’fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything. And that ain’t the wust. They said he could vote when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? It was ‘lection day, and I was just about to go and vote

myself if I warn't too drunk to get there; but when they told me there was a State in this country where
 they'd let that nigger vote, I drawed out. I says I'll never vote agin. Them's the very words I said; they all
 10 heard me; and the country may rot for all me – I'll never vote agin as long as I live. And to see the cool
 way of that nigger – why, he wouldn't a give me the road if I hadn't shoved him out o' the way. I says to
 the people, why ain't this nigger put up at auction and sold? – that's what I want to know. And what do
 you reckon they said? Why, they said he couldn't be sold till he'd been in the State six months, and he
 hadn't been there that long yet. There, now – that's a specimen. They call that a govment that can't sell a
 15 free nigger till he's been in the State six months. Here's a govment that calls itself a govment, and lets on
 to be a govment, and thinks it is a govment, and yet's got to set stock-still for six whole months before it
 can take a hold of a prowling, thieving, infernal, white-shirted free nigger, and–'

(Mark Twain 26)

You probably notice the strange spelling and grammar in this passage. In Chapter 2.6, we will look at the way dialects can be written into dialogue for effect. For now, let us focus on Pap's attitudes about government and black people, and their connection to the time period. Twain wrote the novel in 1884, looking back on the American Civil War and the Emancipation of Slavery with the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution (1865). His contemporaries may or may not be racist, but they lived in a world where slavery had been made illegal. In that vein, the voice is harking back to a time when white privilege was backed by slave-state governments, where a highly educated black man ('p'fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything') with money ('a gold watch and chain, and a silver-headed cane') could vote. There is **irony** in the dialogue, since a clearly uneducated and poor white man complains about an educated, successful black man who is legally free. The jealousy is tangible, demonstrating how people scapegoat other people for their own conditions. Twain writes from a seemingly enlightened time but, looking back, we know that the US would still go through the Reconstruction Era and the Civil Rights Movement *and* that racism is still present today.

We know that the 'n-word' appears 219 times in the novel, but you will also see that the word is clustered at different times. Huck rarely uses the word in his own narration; it is more often in reference to what another adult calls a black person. However, if you were to run a search for the 'n-word' in an online version of the novel, you would see a cluster of highlights for example, when a racist adult is speaking. Huck helps us to understand the way a child can be influenced by the society around him, but also shows how he has the agency to reject it, eventually siding with Jim, the escaped slave, over his father and other racist white characters. Although the 'n-word' goes back to an articulation of 'black', the use of it connotes the power structures of slavery. Now a strongly taboo word, it would have been used much more often and freely at the time Twain wrote his novel, but Twain's use of the word in relation to particular 'bad' characters arguably shows that he and his contemporaries were aware this word had a loaded meaning, even then. The impact now may be more shocking, hence the ban by some schools and libraries, but the distance in time allows us to see the use of the word as subversive characterization. The author does not agree with the character, but requires that we analyse carefully enough to understand the text's position against slavery and racism.

ACTIVITY 2

Use of offensive language

Twain and others of his time sometimes used the 'n-word' to talk about black people in America. This may be because it was the word that people around them used, because they were racist themselves, or because they were trying to make a point. Some authors still use this word, especially lyricists like Kendrick Lamar. The use of the word has changed over time – we call this a **semantic change**, where the connotations of a particular word morph – and we need to understand the contemporary context in order to read the word in its original publication. However, the 'n-word' was always used in a derogatory way; but it was used more often by white people in the nineteenth century in a way that previously was socially acceptable to other white people.

Consider the following questions and either write down your responses or discuss them with a classmate. There are no notes listed in the back of the book for comparison, as responses will be personal to the reader.

- 1 Should literature that uses the 'n-word' (or other offensive, dehumanizing language that was common in the period in which it was written) be banned?
- 2 How does reading this word in Twain's novel from 1884 affect readers today? Try to consider readers other than just yourself.
- 3 Should we edit historical texts to remove or modify offensive language, or can we read them differently in the present day?
- 4 Do you think it makes a difference whether a black or a non-black author uses the 'n-word' in a text? Why? Can you think of examples?

■ Timeless texts

Some texts, like Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony', have no fixed time context while others with fixed time, like *Huckleberry Finn*, still have relevance. Both can be considered **timeless** due to their impact, although this impact may change. Sometimes we see the impact through other literary authors' eyes, in the way that they respond directly to texts of the past or **allude** to them in their own works.

Victorian English author Charles Dickens wrote about the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which Dickens weaves together characters of different classes and circumstances in London and Paris at the time. In this work, Dickens drew heavily on *The French Revolution: A History* by Thomas Carlyle. Does this mean he wrote the novel merely as a historical document? No; it gives validity to Dickens' historical references to the French Revolution, but his novel is able to more freely develop themes through individual characters. This makes the French Revolution more relevant to later generations, who understand the violence on a personal level, and allows for more universal themes such as love, betrayal and reinvention to be applied to different contexts.

A quick look at recent literature demonstrates how some authors redevelop Dickens' ideas from *A Tale of Two Cities*. His novel opens with a long sentence which most of you have probably heard (or heard it alluded to):

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

(Charles Dickens 1)

Dickens already tells us that those divides during the French Revolution, in the late-eighteenth century, were similar to those in England in 1859 when he published the book. In this long first sentence, you might also recognize or consider elements of the world in which you live today: ‘wisdom’ in scientific discoveries; ‘foolishness’ in the antics of reality television celebrities; ‘hope’ in youthful advocates against violence like Malala Yousafzai or Emma González; ‘despair’ in the continued destruction of our environment; you could make your own associations with the superlative language of ‘best’ and ‘worst’. A **paradox** is a seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true. The **paradox** of ‘best’ and ‘worst’ times can be explained through the above examples; it can also be a matter of **perspective**. Maybe, for example, if you are financially well off or live in a prosperous country with good quality of life you are experiencing the ‘best’, whereas if you are poor, living in a violent district or if you are a refugee fleeing violence and oppression, it may certainly be the ‘worst’. People felt this way during the French Revolution, during Dickens’ time and people still feel this way today. In fact, probably at any moment in history this paradox has been true – and this relatability is what can make a text timeless. Consider further, for example, the way a war is both lost and won. The Allied forces would say they ‘won’ the Second World War, while the Axis powers would say they ‘lost’ – and both would be right. You may have heard this example before from Shakespeare, who uses it at the beginning of *Macbeth*. Can you think of another example of a paradox?

Authors who allude

You have probably seen allusions to this passage, or the novel as a whole, in the media or in other novels and poetry. Two novels that were published in the UK in 2017 played with these phrases. Ali Smith’s *Autumn* begins with: ‘It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times’ (Smith 3). Set in England, some see this novel as a Brexit story that questions the way national rifts and class wars are manifested on a more personal level. In a review for *The New York Times*, Sarah Lyall tells us: ‘the nation feels as if it’s turning into a different, unfamiliar place, and an ugly rift has opened in the collective psyche’ (Lyall). Julian Barnes’ *The Noise of Time* begins: ‘All he knew was that this was the worst time’ (Barnes 7) and plays with Dickens’ opening phrases throughout the novel. His novel about Dimitri Shostakovich, a great composer under Stalin, questions the hardships of a totalitarian regime through the personal story of its subject. After reading these tales from different time periods, the impact and meaning of Dickens’ original story and opening changes: we no longer need the paradoxes and duplicity of perspective from kings and commoners alike. Instead, the impact is for those who have it worst, and there seems to be no time needed to explain the paradoxical problems. Perhaps both of these more recent novels are articulating that, at the time of their publication, the impact of Dickens’ text has changed, in that people are focused on the negative elements of society. It could be because we have more knowledge of violent and sad events or hardships, due to a more global and readily accessible media; it could be because our attitudes have changed to be more cynical during this current era. The answer will not be black and white, and other authors may disagree, but Barnes and Smith have demonstrated that the meaning of the original novel for them is in looking at the bleakness of human society. You can also look at the interplay between *A Tale of Two Cities* and these two novels through the scope of **intertextuality**, which you will investigate in the next section. However, the purpose here is to understand the way the original text changes in **impact** during the current time period.

How do literary texts change over time?

By now, we should have a good idea of some of the ways that texts can change in meaning and impact over time. Let us conclude by looking specifically at the way several texts have been used and adapted by others over the years. In this way, we can actually trace the change in impact,

rather than speculate more generally on changes in attitudes and the way that community knowledge systems alter our understandings.

■ Environmental changes

Sometimes people use classic texts to develop arguments and methods of thinking about society. These may be politicians or activists, op-ed or essay writers. Here, let us consider two literary texts from American transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau that have been used in arguments and movements by others over time: *Walden* (1854) and 'Resistance to Civil Government (On the Duty of Civil Disobedience)' (1849).

Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was part of a small group of writers in New England in the nineteenth century who started the philosophy called **transcendentalism**, which values many romantic ideals (nature, emotion, etc.) and places value on progressive human rights, especially for women and minority races in the United States. Thoreau attended Harvard University before returning to his native Concord, Massachusetts, where he was a writer, abolitionist and philosopher.

Even before all of modernity's machines and methods of communication, Thoreau found solace in escaping to a small cabin on Walden Pond for two years, two months and two days. It was somewhat a social experiment in isolating himself with nature. Read this excerpt when Thoreau reflects on nature's influence on society in *Walden*:

Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness, – to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. At the same time that

5 we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of Nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and Titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. We need to witness our own limits

10 transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander. We are cheered when we observe the vulture feeding on the carrion which disgusts and disheartens us and deriving health and strength from the repast. There was a dead horse in the hollow by the path to my house, which compelled me sometimes to go out of my way, especially in the night when the air was heavy, but the assurance it gave me of the strong appetite and inviolable health of Nature was my compensation for this. I love to

15 see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another; that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp, – tadpoles which herons gobble up, and tortoises and toads run over in the road; and that sometimes it has rained flesh and blood!

(Henry David Thoreau 251–2)

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

You might find Thoreau's *Walden* a text that resonates with you if you ever find yourself on a computer or smartphone screen for too long, or if you just crave a little time by yourself in nature. When Thoreau wrote about his time retreating from society, he could not have predicted how we would feel, as modernity brings more and more elements of technology and space away from nature to our lives. Thoreau knew nothing of computers, social media or even driving cars in 1849, yet *Walden* is still relatable today, and this is how we know that the text's impact has changed.

His memoir might also have renewed impact, as we consider protecting the environment against climate change. Thoreau writes beautifully about

nature, farming, the seasons' effect on the mind and more. Perhaps this return to nature in literature could impact readers in the twenty-first century. Other writers, like Rachel Carson (*Silent Spring*) and Annie Dillard (*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*), take even more scientific looks at the value of nature as part of a memoir and philosophical reflection. When you work with a global issue during your interactive oral, you will also have to look at work in translation. You might consider intertextual connections to the global issue of environmentalism with writers such as Chilean Gabriela Mistral or Japanese Kenji Miyazawa, relating to the field of inquiry of science, technology and the environment.

'We need the tonic of wildness'; 'We can never have enough of Nature' – Thoreau claims that all humanity needs nature to feel free. Even when nature might show us death and sadness, he loves to see it so 'rife with life'. Notice the way he capitalizes 'Nature' as if it is a deity. The Romantics also talked about replacing religion with nature. In essence, Thoreau tells us that we are creatures of nature. What we do in society and what philosophies or ideologies we prescribe to should all be grounded in nature. You might notice that you feel calmer in nature or that you notice small things, like the sound of a stream or the bark on a tree, that you would miss in a busy urban environment.

ACTIVITY 3

Check for understanding

See if you can draw an image from Thoreau's passage on page 235. What idea does it help you understand?

Thoreau's *Walden* can be applied to any time in history in this way, but it may also be a very personal interpretation based on your own experiences with nature.

A moral philosopher in many ways, Thoreau believed in humanity's connection with nature that included equality for all humans and a lack of prejudice. In other words, nature helped him to see that we are all equal parts of the human race. As a writer against slavery, like Twain, Thoreau helped to develop the Abolitionist Movement through actions of passive or non-violent resistance, including his writing and individual choices in his behaviour. You might see passive resistance today in a peaceful protest march or a refusal to buy products sold from someone seen as sexist or racist. Thoreau wrote his essay 'Resistance to Civil Government (On the Duty of Civil Disobedience)' in order to explain his decision not to pay his taxes as an act of resistance against the federal government's allowance of slavery in the Southern states.

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such
 5 command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others – as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders – serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the devil, without intending it, as God. A very few – as
 10 heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men – serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it.

(Henry David Thoreau 267–8)

What it means to be a ‘good citizen’ has certainly changed over the centuries of human civilization, and changes within different societal constructs. Here, Thoreau tells us that those acting as ‘machines’ – people who blindly do what the government tells them to do – are ‘good citizens’. But he does so ironically, suggesting that this is a less-than-human way to be. Notice the **metaphors** connecting them with ‘wood and earth and stones’, at the bottom of nature, or as ‘horses and dogs’ who follow their masters. Thoreau then talks about the leaders of the country who ‘rarely make any moral distinctions’. Perhaps they are more concerned with their own power than with helping people as a whole. Finally, ‘very few ... serve the state with their consciences also’. These people, however, he claims must ‘resist’ the state and are therefore ‘commonly treated as enemies’. He does not say resisters *are* enemies of the state, but that the perception of those afraid to lose power may consider them as such.

Thoreau’s essay has been cited to influence movements of passive resistance and civil disobedience over time, so that the term ‘civil disobedience’ is more generally applied to non-violent rebellion against governments. Mahatma Gandhi drew heavily on Thoreau’s articulated philosophy in his work in South Africa and India toward more equality for all citizens. He used different methods of non-violent resistance, and discussed Thoreau’s essay in several interviews, such as one when he said the essay ‘contained the essence of his political philosophy, not only as India’s struggle related to the British, but as to his own views of the relation of citizens to government’ (Hendrick 462). Martin Luther King Jr., a leader of the US Civil Rights Movement, said ‘[a]s a result of [Thoreau’s] writings and personal witness, we are the heirs of a legacy of creative protest’ to explain his use of non-violent resistance in changing laws and attitudes in the US against black men and women. He talked about this resistance as a moral duty:

I became convinced that non-co-operation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is co-operation with good. No other person has been more eloquent and passionate in getting this idea across than Henry David Thoreau ...

(‘Martin Luther King Jr. on War and Civil Disobedience’)

King brought Thoreau’s essay into American culture, allowing the idea of civil disobedience to take a creative shape all its own (Eschner). You can read about others influenced by Thoreau via the QR code in the margin.

Nowadays, we can talk about civil disobedience and passive resistance without quoting Thoreau’s original text. Civil disobedience could lead to violence, though Thoreau does not act in this way, while passive resistance is specifically non-violent in its work against governments. His ideas, brought forward by leaders like Gandhi and King, have become alive themselves. The original



context of taking a stand against slavery is still important when we read the original text, but the meaning will be shaped by other forms of civil disobedience we have read about in contemporary times. People now use forms of writing, marching, speeches, hunger strikes, social media campaigns, blocking roads and more as forms of non-violent resistance. You may have heard of the idea of civil disobedience more recently in connection to Occupy Wall Street or the Arab Spring rebellions.

ACTIVITY 4

Contemporary examples of civil disobedience

As an **inquiry**, read at least three articles from different sources on contemporary uses of civil disobedience. Before getting started, take a look at this article about Occupy Wall Street (via the first QR code), and this one on the Arab Spring (via the second). Then, go back to the excerpt from Thoreau on page 237 to answer the following questions. You can compare your answers to the notes on page 424.

- 1 What is the impact of the idea of a 'mass of men' that Thoreau first describes? Who are they in the context you have read about?
- 2 Has the idea that man could be a 'machine' changed over time? How might the meaning have evolved?
- 3 Do you think all the 'legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders' connected to the context you researched are bad? Why or why not? What motivates their actions?
- 4 Who are the resisters? Does the government treat them as 'enemies' or does it listen to them and try to reach an agreement?
- 5 How does your personal reading of Thoreau change after reading about a contemporary example of civil disobedience?



TOK Links: Ethical lenses

Thoreau's essay has been used in many contexts, and whether its use is for *good* depends on your perspective. When considering the impact of a text in this nature, you may want to consider the **ethical lenses** you learn in TOK, such as **consequentialism**, **utilitarianism** and **deontology**. Moral and ethical views are also linked with cultural views and changes over time. In relation to governments, for example, different forms of criminal punishment or taxation might be acceptable at different times. Law-makers might work from different ethical frameworks in order to convince the public that their decisions are correct. If we look from a moral view – what is good or bad in behaviour and practice – it might be more connected to religions and philosophies, or a general idea about moral goodness (and evil).

Parallel times

At times, objectively discussing facts and reality about a contemporary issue in order to understand moral and ethical views can be difficult, because we are too close to it. When we are in the middle of something, it is hard to judge it. An **allegory** is a parallel historical story that can help one to understand a contemporary issue, or another time in history. They often play with philosophical concepts in contexts that help us to understand historical events or our current realities.

Can you think of an allegory you have studied before? How did it help you to understand a big idea? Allegories can also be parallel **fiction** or religious stories for the same purpose. A famous example is *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, which uses a fable set on a farm complete with talking animals to retell the historical events of the Russian Revolution in 1917. In the story, the evil of the powerful dictator (a pig named Napoleon) can help us understand Russian leader Joseph Stalin with our guard down; his atrocities become clearer through the animal fable.

However, we can use allegories in the present day as well. While a reader in 1945 (when the book was first published) might focus on this intended connection (as Stalin was in power from 1943–1953), a new reader might find a different impact in looking at current contemporary one-party states. As allegories are re-read over time, we might consider how they are relevant today, or use them to understand other historical events that post-date the literary text. Orwell's fable might allow us to investigate current political power in North Korea or the elements of revolution in Egypt over the years.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: POLITICS, POWER AND JUSTICE

This field of inquiry runs through our entire chapter. The use of **ethical lenses** or changing moral attitudes can also help us to consider elements of justice, as the changing impact of a work is often linked with changes in politics. Human rights could be used as a global issue in this field of inquiry, and form an interesting perspective from which to study texts. You can make conclusions about the impact of communism on individuals in Herta Müller's novel, or the way some governments perpetuate unfair class systems in *A Tale of Two Cities*. We will now look specifically at **allegory** and consider the following questions in relation to *The Crucible*, by Arthur Miller, but you could apply them to any appropriate text. The last question, especially, can help you to form a topic for your interactive oral:

- How does allegorical significance change over time?
- What causes changes in interpretation and impact?
- What do allegories reveal as narratives of politics, power and justice?

We will consider the way *The Crucible* is an allegory whose impact changes in the twenty-first century. Written in 1953, this play by Arthur Miller tells the story of the Salem witch trials in 1692 as a way to understand the McCarthy era and the Red Scare in America during the 1950s. The town of Salem, Massachusetts, truly believed they had witches among them. In reality, the 'witches' were targeted by God-fearing people who used the accusations for personal gain – at least, this is how Miller understands the historical account. The term 'witch hunt' was originally for any search to rid a community of 'witches', but became a more general term about the persecution of people for their beliefs in the twentieth century ('A Conspectus on Witch Hunt'). As such we now use the term more freely for unwarranted and public attacks on groups of people, partly because of Miller's allegorical connection between what happened in Salem and the way anyone could be targeted as a communist during the McCarthy trials, also known as the Red Scare. Senator Joseph McCarthy actually led hearings against potential enemies of the US Government as leader of the House Un-American Activities Committee (or House Committee on Un-American Activities) at the same time as *The Crucible*'s first performance. To learn more about this era and McCarthy's eventual downfall, you might be interested in George Clooney's film *Good Night and Good Luck* (2005).

Arthur Miller

Arthur Miller (1915–2005) was once himself the target of the Red Scare 'witch hunt' against possible communists in America. He was a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright who wrote about American life and was a public figure, partly due to his marriage to Marilyn Monroe. You may have read or seen his plays: *Death of a Salesman*, *All My Sons* or *A View from the Bridge*. *The Crucible* was written in 1953 at the height of the Red Scare.



The Crucible develops a fictional account of the way fear and ‘mob mentality’ can create a false narrative of guilty members of society. Miller shows the way a group of girls, who cried out against witches for their own gain or amusement, convinces even the judges that they are telling the truth. In this passage from Miller’s play, the judge (Danforth) encourages a town member to bring forward any suspicions he has about his neighbours.

DANFORTH No, old man, you have not hurt these people if they are of good conscience. But you must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between. This is a sharp time, now, a precise time – we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world. Now, by God’s grace, the shining sun is up, and them that fear not light will surely praise it. I hope you will be one of those.

(Arthur Miller 94)

Danforth threatens a witness that he must be ‘with this court’ unless he wishes to be put on trial himself. He creates a sharp divide between good and evil, the court and those against. The court at this point stands with the girls, so anyone who questions the reality of witches in society is suddenly linked with evil and could even be hanged as a witch. With this extreme pressure, and without physical evidence for or against witchcraft, it was very difficult to form a case on the other side, even though Salem did not really have any witchcraft.

Later in the play, the protagonist will not sign his name to confess to witchcraft, even though it would save his life. He is not a witch, but by signing his name in confession, the court would let him live. The man, John Proctor, decides that his ‘name’ is more important:

PROCTOR *with a cry of his whole soul.* Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name!

DANFORTH *pointing at the confession in Proctor’s hand.* Is that document a lie? If it is a lie I will not accept it! What say you?

(Arthur Miller 143)

This passage deals especially with two themes: truth and reputation. The constant battle between truth and lies comes to a **climax** at this moment in the play, when Proctor decides that the truth and his reputation are more important than saving his life. Signing his ‘name’ as a confession of witchcraft would forever make him a sinner. It would also ‘blacken the names’ (as he says later) of the other townspeople who have sided with him. Similarly, during the McCarthy era, people were blacklisted. For example, in Hollywood, you might have trouble getting a job if you were on a list of people associated with communism or treason.

Now, through these two passages, we will answer the questions that we began with in relation to the field of inquiry of politics, power and justice.

How does allegorical significance change over time?

We talked about the ‘death of the author’, but in some cases authors comment on the way their texts change without their authority. Miller wrote ‘Why I Wrote *The Crucible*’ in *The New Yorker* just after the film version came out in 1996. However, in addition to addressing his intentions, he writes about the way the text, in 1996, or at any later time, has a different meaning for anyone. In discussing the way that fear in American society about communists and traitors inspired him to write the text, he said:

*Fear doesn't travel well; just as it can warp judgment,
its absence can diminish memory's truth ...*

(‘Why I Wrote *The Crucible*’)

Therefore, the play’s impact has changed. Even Miller, who lived through the Red Scare, cannot fully conjure its fear as he watches the film. People bring their own *current* fears to his play, and it consequently changes the meaning and impact. The ‘memory’ also fades and therefore perhaps takes emotions out of reading the text (even if one was alive during the 1950s).

Fear connected to truth and reputation might now be present in other government practices or campaigns against prejudices. In the 1980s, fear about HIV and AIDS created this mentality both against HIV patients and gay people, who were incorrectly and unjustly linked with the disease. The search for terrorists in the twenty-first century is another example of the confluence of these ideas. Although the hunt has led to the capture of many violent criminals, some innocent people have been persecuted and their reputations tarnished because of their religion, race or familial association with other extremist individuals. We can bring these ideas and experiences forward when reading or watching *The Crucible* in the present day.

What causes changes in interpretation and impact?

Soon after 9/11, some journalists began referring to the search for terrorists as a ‘witch hunt’ (see, for example, *The New York Times*’ ‘The Witch Hunt’ via the first QR code provided on the right). Although now nearly twenty years ago, we continue to use similar discourse when looking for terrorists, and others have alternatively used the phrase ‘witch hunt’ as a method of personal investigation. President Donald Trump famously declared a ‘witch hunt’ against himself during ongoing investigations (see, for example, *The Atlantic*’s “No Collusion – Rigged Witch Hunt!” Is the New “I’m Not a Crook!”” via the second QR code on the right).

The term ‘witch hunt’ has been more broadly used beyond actually hunting those who people thought were witches, beginning with Orwell’s 1938 *Homage to Catalonia* about the Spanish Civil War and the search for communists in that country (‘A Conspectus on Witch Hunt’). Miller then borrowed from Orwell but popularized the term through his allegorical play. As we see the term in published literature and media in the decades that followed, we go back to reading or viewing Miller’s play with new understanding. In the present day, the way we read news online, which spreads quickly through social media, can now more quickly spin a lie out of control, or even create a more damaging slur on somebody’s reputation. Miller’s narrative changes impact in the way it helps us to understand these other episodes that bring fear, truth and reputation together. As Miller tells us, it is likely the *current* fear that will demonstrate the way the play impacts us at that time.



ACTIVITY 5**What do allegories reveal as narratives of politics, power and justice?**

Consider the two passages from *The Crucible*, on page 240, and what you have learned about allegory to answer the following questions. Then check your answers against the notes on page 425.

- 1 In the two passages, how does Danforth attempt to hold onto his **power** in society? What does it tell us about the way leaders might keep power **unjustly**?
- 2 To what extent does Proctor regain **power** in rejecting the signing of his name to the confession?
- 3 What do the two passages teach us about the nature of courts and **justice**?

 **TOK Links: The truth in fiction**

When we hear the word 'fiction', we often think 'fake' or 'made up'. However, some authors talk about the function of truth in **fiction**. This idea brings together several narratives we have looked at so far in this chapter, since many deal with the fictionalization of history. Miller's dramatization of the witch trials takes a few facts and fills in the gaps with his own ideas about what could have caused such terrible persecution of innocent people. His fictions help us understand the violence on a personal level. Furthermore, his play deals with the theme of truth on nearly every page, from the 'truth narrative' decided by the powerful courts, to the massive tome of knowledge that one of the ministers carries around, until he decides there is room for subjectivity when people's lives are at stake.

Your TOK class will discuss at length where knowledge comes from, and you will connect it to the idea of a greater truth. At first it might seem like anything fake or fictional goes against this idea of seeking the real truth, until you listen to some other authors like Miller. Virginia Woolf tells us there is 'more truth in fiction than in fact' in 'A Room of One's Own'. Some people think that fiction gives us more agency in using tools like emotion to help us understand a complex idea. But when we consider truly **subversive texts**, with hidden or unobvious meaning, where does the truth lie? How do we gain knowledge from texts where the subtext, that needs careful interpretation, is indeed the truth that the author wants to be extracted?

Truth and knowledge may come more from an extended investigation of a fictional text. Rather than providing the answers, the fiction might provide the questions and interpretations of truths. You can use inquiry and extension reading to further shape your opinion on the knowledge you gain from subtexts. For example, to better understand race relations in America during and after the American Civil War, one would look at other texts like historical documents, such as Sojourner Truth's 'Ain't I a Woman?' speech (1851), and non-fiction accounts, such as Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, or researched articles written today that provide contemporary attitudes looking back on slavery and the American Civil War.

 **The living literary text**

Authors respond to and reuse texts, therefore changing the impact of the original in the process. We have already considered the way a work of literature is alive as it changes through time. This is why we write about literature in the present tense in analytical papers. However, some authors and other types of artists actually alter the original text in some way; this is called **adaptation**. An **adaptation** is like a new reading of a text; it makes the changing meaning and impact visible to the reader.

We will use the following questions to help guide us through this last section of the chapter:

- How do adaptations change the way we understand a text or reinterpret it?
- What global issues do adaptations seek to help us understand?
- In what ways are adaptations specific to the time periods in which they were created?

Adaptations are a fresh way of understanding literature. The creator changes the original simply by its dialogue with the new production, graphic novel, film or other type of adaptation. The language of the text might change or the adapter can change the production context of a drama. For example, Baz Luhrman's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1997 uses the original language, but changes the setting to a futuristic 'Verona beach'. (You can view the trailer via the first QR code in the margin.) The musical *West Side Story* (1957) went further in adapting all the language and characters of *Romeo and Juliet*, merely following the original narrative more loosely in a New York City urban setting. (You can view the trailer for *West Side Story* via the second QR code on the right.) Both suggest a contemporary relevance of the original text, but the former changes the way we see the original language as it is spoken by Leonardo DiCaprio on a beach in a Hawaiian shirt. To further understand this idea of adaptation, we shall first look at an example of the Greek myth of Icarus, adapted to a spoken-word poem by London-born poet Kate Tempest.



Kate Tempest

Kate Tempest (born 1985) is a writer and performer of poetry, drama, fiction and mixed-genre. She left her London secondary school at the age of 16. She has won awards for her published texts but is better known for her spoken poetry, which often speaks about difficult issues facing youth today. In 2013, she won the Ted Hughes Award for her poem *Brand New Ancients*, and she was named a Next Generation Poet by the Poetry Book Society, a once-per-decade accolade.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

TRANSFORMATION

Adaptation is a type of transformation itself and it often helps us understand the transformation of a theme. The following spoken word poem from Kate Tempest takes the Greek myth of Icarus and transforms it into something modern and performed. Often, ancient Greek myths are used implicitly or explicitly to help us understand contemporary issues, whether in narratives, news articles or poetry. The transformation of the style in which the myth is presented helps us to understand connections between style and meaning. The transformation of the ideas over time helps us understand the way humanity has (and has not) changed since the ancient Greeks.



You can learn about the Greek myth, Icarus, from the Ted-ED talk (see the first QR code in this box), while a performance of 'Icarus' by Kate Tempest is available on YouTube (via the second QR code here). Don't forget that you can also enable the closed captioning to help you understand the language.

ACTIVITY 6**The story of Icarus**

View the original story of the myth of Icarus and Kate Tempest's adapted performance poem with the QR codes in the Concept Connection box on the previous page. Tempest tells the same story from Greek mythology but speaks to a contemporary audience. Think about your own response to each version of the story of a young man who dies because he does not heed his father's advice, nor considers the possibility of his own mortality.

How do adaptations change the way we understand a text or reinterpret it?

Tempest adapts the medium of delivery, which affects the impact of the text on the reader. The story goes from written or spoken word myth (in ancient Greek and translated into multiple languages) into live performance or video of spoken-word poetry. In this way, she can directly reach people all over the world with her voice. The story becomes a visual text with Tempest's emotional response evident in the way she performs. Her live performance also makes the story seem more relevant to the viewer than a tale translated from ancient Greek and printed in an anthology or discussed in a lecture.

Tempest's use of colloquial language and slang make the story more relatable to listeners, especially a younger audience. She addresses Icarus directly with care and concern, like a friend or peer, as if to take the authority out of the poem. Icarus does not listen to his father's advice, but Tempest suggests that a friend might have the same thoughts for him and would mourn his death in the same way.

What global issues do adaptations seek to help us understand?

The poem addresses several global issues that are similar to the original, with a focus on **beliefs, values and education**. They both tell us to be careful of **hubris** and that we may need to live to learn about the world. Hubris has changed from a specific respect for Greek gods (part of the ancient Greeks' belief that the gods were more powerful and knowledgeable than mortals) to a more general idea about respecting the laws of nature and possibly of god(s), depending on your religious views. Each also tells us to heed our parents' advice, but Tempest's advice is slightly different in that it is an appeal from a peer. Parents are often worried about their children, warning them to be safe. We can become immune to those warnings if we hear them too much, but when a peer talks about mortality and safe choices, we might realize it is something important. The **adaptation** has a slightly different way of looking at education. In this way, Tempest helps us to understand something about the original text that allows us to use a different **perspective** when approaching that text.

In what ways are adaptations specific to the time periods in which they were created?

The delivery of the adaptation by a young British woman may change the meaning or impact of the myth, firstly through an altering of the gender. We might assume it was written by a male Greek writer but, considering further, the story is about advice from fathers to sons. Tempest brings the story outside of this potentially inhibiting male-only view. Her adaptation also transcends culture and time, from Greek to British, from ancient to modern. The original is now more clearly relatable to the modern reader in a different age.

Tempest must think this myth is relevant today: guidance from elders is still important; youths might still feel hubris or, at least, consider themselves to be immortal until it is too late. Freedom from parents needs to be earned, she tells us, and it is still 'cool' to listen to their advice until you

have enough freedom to be independent. Maybe she thinks people are trying to be independent too young, or she has seen too many young people die from risk-taking. Her warning brings the advice to that of an equal; therefore, it changes the impact of the original because it might more easily be heard and heeded.

Now let's look at a second adaptation, this time from short story to film. Many books are adapted in this way and you are likely familiar with several examples. You have probably had the conversation: 'Which did you like better, the movie or the book?' More than personal preference, we will look at the impact of this adaptation on readers over time.

Zhang Ailing

Zhang Ailing (1920–1995; also known as Eileen Chang or Chang Ai-Ling) was one of the most influential Chinese writers of the twentieth century. Much of her work was set between Shanghai, her home city, and Hong Kong, where she attended university during the Japanese occupation of the Second World War. Zhang wrote a variety of prose fiction and first gained fame in 1943 with her novella *The Golden Cangue* and, a year later, with bestselling short story and prose fiction collections *The Legend* and *The Gossip* ('Zhang Ailing'). Her stories take us to many tales of everyday life, often with an element of mystery, that contain subtexts about national and ideological ideas of China and Hong Kong in the 1940s, when China was a republic and Hong Kong was a colony of Great Britain. China then went through the Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong and the leadership of the republic fled to Taiwan; it is currently under communist rule, led by President Xi Jinping. Hong Kong was returned to British rule after the Second World War, and then returned to China from its colonial rulers in 1997. Many of Zhang's stories have been revived in new political climates and adapted into film or television.



Many artists, especially filmmakers, have adapted Zhang's stories, including 'Love in a Fallen City', which we will take a closer look at. As the politics of each place, Shanghai and Hong Kong, and the relationship between them changes over time, so too does the impact of her text (Louie). Her original is shaped by layers of the national and cultural identities of the two cities, and as demonstrated through the adapters' eyes.

Zhang's work is a personal reflection of the political environment and can be read with impact now, despite its time-relevant elements. Even though her works mostly take place during a particular time, their impact changes as the relationship between the places changes. Perhaps for this reason, two great Asian filmmakers decided to adapt her stories for new audiences on the big screen.

Ang Lee, the Taiwanese director also famous for adapting Yann Martell's *Life of Pi* into film, who adapted Zhang's novella *Lust, Caution* in 2007, had this to say about his adaptation:

To me, no writer has ever used the Chinese language as cruelly as Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang), and no story of hers is as beautiful or as cruel as 'Lust, Caution'. She revised the story for years and years – for decades – returning to it as a criminal might return to the scene of a crime, or as a victim might re-enact a trauma, reaching for pleasure only by varying and reimagining the pain. Making our film, we didn't really 'adapt' Zhang's work, we simply kept returning to her theatre of cruelty and love until we had enough to make a movie of it.

(in Haiyan Lee 59)

Lee made his film from a living text. He suggests that, even for the author herself, the work continued to change in meaning and impact over time. He attempted to get to the heart of her ideas in relation to humanity, rather than the political relationship between Shanghai and Hong Kong, both then (after the Second World War) and now (after the 1997 Hong Kong Handover, when British colonial rule ended and the city became a Special Administrative Region of China). He discusses in detail the uses of the Chinese language; Zhang explicitly makes use of both Mandarin (or Putonghua) and Cantonese forms of Chinese, adding to the **contextual** elements of the text.

Haiyan Lee discusses this short story as one that contains ‘ethical and political agency in the domain of the social, the everyday, and the feminine’ (Lee 642). One might ask then, as cultural practices change over time, how can we continue to extract and make meaning from the ethics and politics of the story? The answer is in the relationships of identities of people in the text, rather than the politics of the governments. In this way, **adaptation** is highly personal and the filmmaker, Lee, who is Taiwanese, might also bring his own biases to different types of Chinese identity as he allows us to view the story through his eyes.

Zhang published ‘Love in a Fallen City’ in 1943 as a student in Hong Kong, during the Second World War Japanese occupation. The story takes place between Shanghai and Hong Kong, just like her previous work, and was made into a film by Ann Hui in 1984. Hui is a Hong Kong filmmaker, born in China, who again brings us one of Zhang’s stories through her eyes and therefore changes the original.

ACTIVITY 7

‘Love in a Fallen City’ by Zhang Ailing

First watch the trailer via the QR code on the right. Then read the final passage of the original story below and consider the time’s relevance to the text.



Hong Kong’s defeat had brought Liusu victory. But in this unreasonable world, who can distinguish cause from effect? Who knows which is which? Did a great city fall so that she could be vindicated? Countless thousands of people dead, countless thousands of people suffering, after that an earth-shaking revolution ...

5 Liusu didn’t feel there was anything subtle about her place in history. She stood up, smiling, and kicked the pan of mosquito-repellent incense under the table. Those legendary beauties who felled cities and kingdoms were probably all like that. Legends exist everywhere, but they don’t necessarily have such happy endings.

10 When the *huqin** wails on a night of ten thousand lamps, the bow slide back and forth, drawing forth a tale too desolate for words – oh! why go into it?

(Zhang Ailing 167)

**Huqin*: a general name for a group of traditional string instruments.

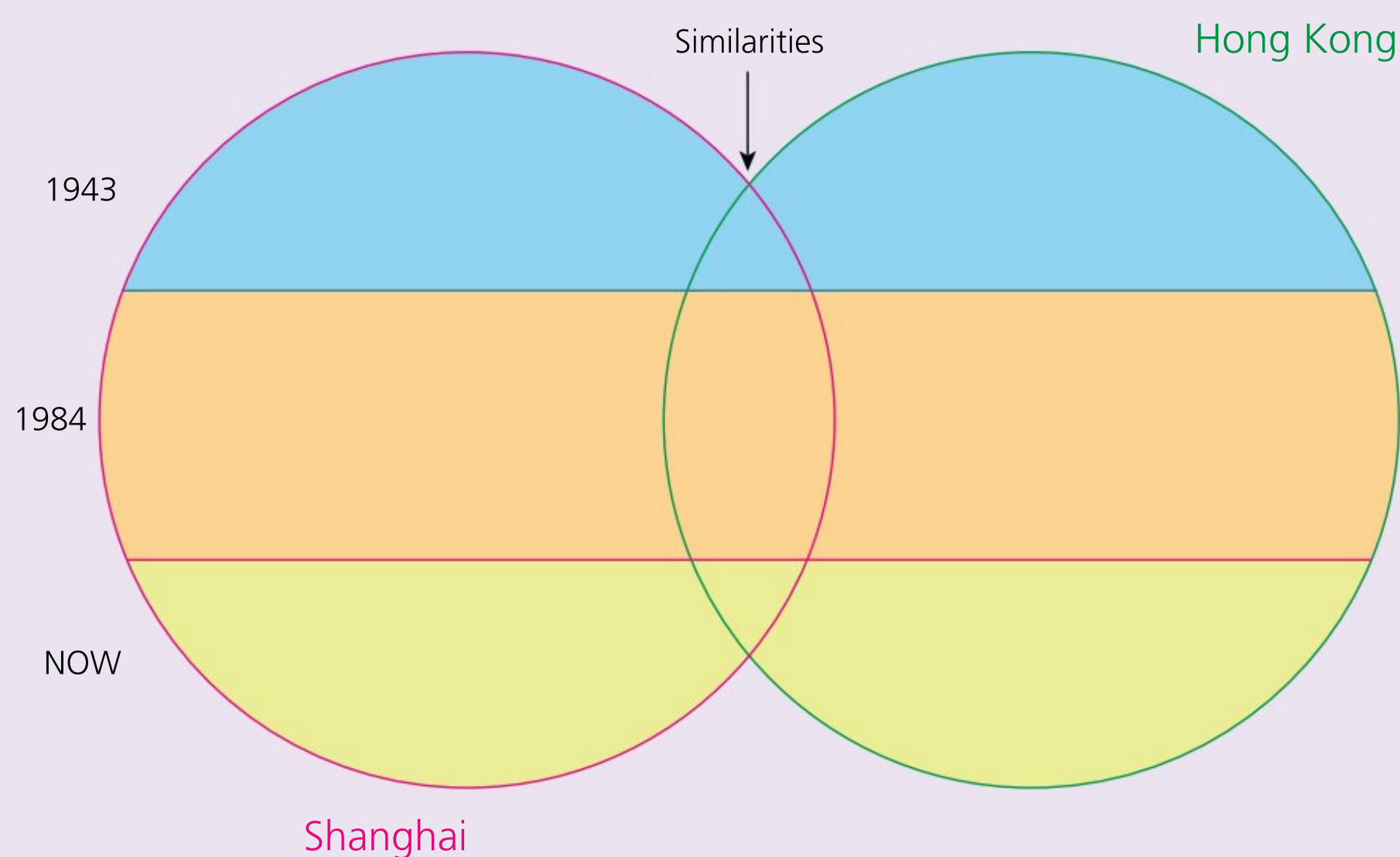
Consider the following questions and then compare the suggested answers at the end of the book (page 425) to your own.

- 1 Determine which elements are specific chronologically and which are timeless.
- 2 What is the purpose of the rhetorical questions?
- 3 How do people and events become ‘legends’?
- 4 What might the final paragraphs tell us about a contemporary issue or historical event you have read about?
- 5 How does the film trailer change your reading of the text, even if you don’t understand Chinese?

ACTIVITY 8**Considering historical context in ‘Love in a Fallen City’**

To extend on the previous activity further, conduct an inquiry into the relationship between Shanghai and Hong Kong, in 1943, 1984 and now.

- Construct a Venn diagram to show what is similar and different about the cities and identify the possible conflicts.
- Consider the matrix of the Mainland, Hong Kong, Great Britain and Japan at both of these times.
- Consider to what extent you can read this text in a post-colonial context, due to Hong Kong’s history. You might also choose to read Zhang’s ‘Love in a Fallen City’ or view Ann Hui’s film adaptation of this story.
- Consider with a classmate how the story may have changed in meaning and impact over time and what it might mean to people in Shanghai and Hong Kong today.

**ACTIVITY 9****Your own adaptation**

Select a work you are studying in your Literature course and plan an adaptation to demonstrate the relevance of the work today. You may choose to adapt to film, graphic novel or poetry (or song lyrics, if you prefer). If you choose a film, you can create a storyboard or a few pages of a screenplay to demonstrate your ideas. Similarly, a graphic novel might have just a few pages of frames. The poem could be written and, possibly, performed.

What should be similar, however, is that you make a statement of purpose. Why is the work relevant today? Beyond universal and timeless literature, what does the work have to do with a current political situation, use of technology, or particular views on groups of people or the environment? How might your adaptation change another reader’s understanding of the original?

Conclusion

Literature that lasts beyond its contemporary readers must have relevance in different contexts, whether changing politics, attitudes or use of language. We have discovered the way the original texts can change their meaning and impact in this way.

Perhaps **adaptation** is also a way of reworking a literary text into a cultural product of a particular time period. The next chapter investigates cultural production and the way that works of literature reflect, represent or form these practices.

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2.5

How do literary texts reflect, represent or form a part of cultural practices?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To recognize literature as a cultural product
- ▶ To identify reflections of and on culture (and its changes) in literature
- ▶ To understand the nature of cultural production in literature
- ▶ To investigate the relationship between culture and the literary arts
- ▶ To question the faithfulness with which authors reflect cultural practice in literature
- ▶ To demonstrate the relationship between literature and changes in cultural practice

Introduction

So far in this section, we have looked at methods of considering **contextual** and cultural factors to better understand a literary work. In this chapter, we focus on the work as a cultural product and the art of writing as a cultural practice. This chapter investigates the ways literature can reflect, represent or form a part of cultural practice in conjunction with other art forms and everyday cultural practices. Sometimes these other methods of cultural practice are likewise reflected in the literature, and at other times they run parallel as if in dialogue with it.

Breaking down the question

Before we begin, let us briefly examine the language in the guiding question: ‘How do literary texts reflect, represent or form a part of cultural practices?’ There are several parts that you may initially recognize, but the language has nuances we need to think about carefully, particularly the words ‘reflect’, ‘represent’, ‘form’ and ‘cultural practices’. Although the language should be familiar, you will want to look carefully at the **connotations** of the **diction** and the way you interpret the question – you may think that those words and phrases take on a different meaning when grouped together in a question. In Paper 2, you will be asked to answer a question related to what you have learned about big ideas, or global issues. You will then want to make your interpretation of it clear to the examiner. Similarly, TOK essay questions often sound simple until you really think about the way they are phrased and the layered meanings of the language in the questions.

To break down the terms in the question, we will consider two images. Although you are not required to analyse images in this course unless you study a graphic novel, many students find it easier to start with images because we read through images so much these days. Although the following painting and photograph come from long ago, they are famous parts of artistic movements that include literature and might be an easier starting point for considering this complex conceptual question. It is also a way to start thinking about literature as a part of the greater ‘arts’ as they are connected in your TOK course as an Area of Knowledge. After this introduction, we will focus only on literary texts that are a part of your coursework.

The first image, a fresco titled *School of Athens*, by Raphael, is shown on the next page, and the other image, a 1939 photograph entitled *New York*, by photographer Helen Levitt, can be accessed using the QR code on the right. We can ‘read’ visual arts in the same way as we read literary arts. (You will find cross-over in this area when you look at graphic novels or works that contain other visuals.)





■ *School of Athens* fresco, by Raphael

We have learned about culture already, but what is **cultural practice**? A practice is something we do with result. The result might be visible in direct human behaviour or it might result in tangible pieces of art. These can be high art (painting, sculpture, film or literature, for example) or they can be everyday practices, sometimes resulting in products (food, body language, street fashion or media texts, for example).

In *School of Athens*, which is a fresco on a wall of the Vatican's Apostolic Palace, the Italian Renaissance painter Raphael brings us back to ancient Greek and Roman times in the depiction of philosophers from that era. The sixteenth century, when Raphael was painting, may seem like a long time ago to you, but he takes us back 2 000 years earlier! However, he also includes himself in the painting (the man in the black beret) and the architecture mimics the recently completed St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. The **anachronism** will help us understand how his painting of historical figures was relevant for his contemporary Italian Renaissance culture.

Helen Levitt's *New York City* comes from a series of photographs which the American photographer took in the late 1930s and 1940s to capture New York street life, including children playing together, people peering out of windows or hanging out on door stoops, and scenes of people on metros. Photography is something that can be a 'high art' – meant for galleries and purchase – and it can also be an everyday cultural practice. This candid photograph depicts children playing around and over a doorway on the street. The columns of the doorway also mimic those of ancient times, though they would be no older than a century at most.

These pieces of art come from two distinct time periods and can help us understand the breakdown of this chapter's question when we consider the terms 'reflect', 'represent' and 'form' in reference to visual art. We shall then apply these terms more deeply to literature in the three parts of this chapter that ensue.

■ Reflecting cultural practice

When something is **reflected**, it is meant to embody something faithfully, as in a mirror image. The question is not about reflection *on* cultural practice (what the author thinks of it), but this naturally becomes part of the narrative through their inclusion of it in literature. When culture is reflected, we can try to understand our own culture, or that of others, more clearly. If we know nothing of Japanese culture, for example, we might read a work with reflections of the food and customs as well as descriptions of the local architecture and arts.

Raphael's painting reflects the cultural practices of talking, writing and thinking about philosophy from ancient Greece and Rome. We also see a reflection of the cultural practice of philosophy as being a solely male pursuit at the time. We see fashion and hairstyles of the time period, at least as imagined by Raphael. We also see the depiction of leisure time through the body language of the philosophers, who can afford to relax while thinking.

Levitt's photograph reflects exactly what she sees. As a photographer, she can edit or curate her street scenes, but she is still capturing what is actually there before her. We see children allowed free time, likely away from adults since many would see their games as rather dangerous, taking place as they do high up over the doorway and including fighting. We also see clothing and hair of the 1940s, this time *true*, though we do not know if these boys are typical without further investigation. If we were to view several photographs together, we would start to see a reflection of New York street culture in this time period, and understand more of its practices.

■ Representing cultural practice

When something is **represented**, on the other hand, it implies a certain bias. The bias may be in selecting a small part to stand for a whole, or it may be in a form of more **abstract** or metaphorical representation. What we read about might be **symbolic** and require further analysis or even inquiry to fully understand. Representation also implies an artistic rendering that could have personal meaning for the author or which could have political associations, which may again be personal or part of a group. For example, literature born of movements like **dadaism**, **transcendentalism** or **existentialism** attempt to represent the political and philosophical ideals of a group and its culture.

Raphael represents those philosophers he chooses. There are many, but they are still selected: he leaves out women; he leaves out his contemporaries. He also represents their work through his imagination of their processes; it is his own idea of the way they may have sat around or debated with peers. He also implies the importance of these people and their cultural practices in his contemporary time period, the Italian Renaissance, through superimposing them in a place that looks like the recently finished architecture at the Vatican.

Levitt similarly chooses those whom she represents on the streets. She chooses to work in poor and middle-class neighbourhoods, showing one slice of culture at that time. She also represents a narrative of street culture that shows *fun*. The boys may also be bored at times, or look hungry and dirty. She selects these types of images, perhaps to suggest that their cultural practice was to make the best of things and live in the moment. Though they are poor, they are free to play after school; they have power in the way they inhabit the streets and conquer its architecture.

■ Forming cultural practice

Form, on the other hand, is a much more active verb than 'reflect' or 'represent'. In forming cultural practice in literature, authors are responsible for at least arranging and embodying culture for us in a meaningful way, and might even become the creators and constructors of culture as it

changes. Literature is an art in itself, and therefore the very creation of any literature adds to the culture in which it is created. However, if it suggests changes or is the catalyst for new cultural practice, it is actually forming it.

Raphael forms a cultural connection between the Ancients and the Renaissance through the use of a contemporary setting for the philosophers and by placing himself in the painting. The Renaissance was largely based on a ‘rebirth’ of ideas from ancient times, but in a setting centuries later. Raphael’s selection of depicting this cultural practice can form the practices of his peers, or at least those who visited the Vatican. They might, for example, consider philosophizing about the world rather than following Vatican doctrine blindly.

As a photographer, Levitt shows us exactly what she sees. However, if we focus on just one element for a moment, she often chooses to show us black and white children playing together, or black and white people sitting next to each other on the metro. Her images predate the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Perhaps in these spaces she saw a freedom of people from different races interacting seamlessly; perhaps it is unintended. However, the result, regardless of the photographer–author’s intentions, is that it normalizes and even encourages people who look different from one another to interact and have fun with each other. Furthermore, she highlights her subjects’ poverty but also their resilience. It could change the way that others (that is, rich New Yorkers or those from other places in the country) view them and their lifestyle, and it could change the way the poor view themselves. Here, atop a door-frame containing Roman-like columns, the children have a grandness that one could imagine in a Raphael painting.

ACTIVITY 1

Conceptual orientation

Consider cultural practices in your home or host country. First, choose the culture you will focus on; you can be as specific as you like. Now try to identify the following either in written language or in visual sketches – try to think of at least three items per category:

- food or recipes of the culture
- fashion or design norms of the culture
- particular etiquette of the culture
- methods of human communication preferred by the culture
- films that represent the culture
- visual arts or architecture that represent the culture
- literary works that represents the culture.

Now create a piece of writing, in **prose** or poetic language and style, to **represent** some of the above elements of culture; you might choose to select just one category you are especially interested in. Share your work with a classmate or do a self-reflection. To what extent does your piece **reflect** culture? How could you add to your piece to **form** a new or amended cultural practice?

Reflecting cultural practice

We have all read literary works that reflect cultural practice. We might notice it more when we read about a different culture or our culture in a different time period. In these cases, the food, fashion, music, architecture and even manner of speaking with each other in the dialogue will be different from our own.

Some **non-fiction** works explicitly document cultural practice; sometimes that is even the purpose of the work. American author Ernest Hemingway writes of Spain's bull-fighting culture in *Death in the Afternoon*. He reflects and documents the cultural practice in detail in passages like this:

When the young bull charges every one notes his style; whether he charges from a distance, without pawing the ground first or without any preliminary bawling ... using the full force of his hind legs and the small of his back ...

(Ernest Hemingway 116)

At other times when Hemingway discusses the politics of bull-fighting, when some hope to see the violent practice end, he defends it – in this way, he attempts to move beyond reflecting culture into influencing it. We will look at this idea more in the last part of this chapter.

Other sports are also the cultural topic in literature. Later we will look at a poem from the 1920s at the dawn of baseball's popularity that effectively reflects baseball culture. Likewise, F Scott Fitzgerald reflects baseball as part of 1920s New York City culture in *The Great Gatsby*:

'Meyer Wolfsheim? ... He's the man who fixed the World's Series back in 1919'

(F Scott Fitzgerald 78)

Fitzgerald also uses baseball to demonstrate that gambling was a part of culture at the time. His novel is filled with references to this time period, famously known as the 'jazz age' or the 'roaring twenties', during the era of prohibition and just before America's Great Depression. However, Fitzgerald's **fiction** goes further by commenting on the problem with wealth at this time:

The culture of the wealthy Americans represented in the novel was defined mainly by consumerism and excessive material wealth ...

(Taher)

As a novel, it cannot tell us this directly; however, Fitzgerald artistically represents the time period through his narrative and reflects his opinion.

Continuing with sport, American poet Gwendolyn Brooks, the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize, reflects the youthful carpe diem – or 'seize the day' – culture of 'pool players' in 'We Real Cool'. The players have fun and stay up late, but also 'Die soon'. Brooks looks at other cultural practices in her poetry, often at cultural practices of black women in America; for example, in 'To Those of My Sisters Who Kept Their Naturals', she praises black women who do not straighten or lighten their hair like 'Marilyn Monroe'. Pointedly, she says to the women: 'You have not wanted to be white', directly connecting the practice of lightening and straightening to this idea.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

If you use poetry as the genre of study for one of your assessments, you should look at several poems in conjunction. Your class will study a set of poems from a particular poet. You could use this chapter's question as a way to investigate other poems from Brooks and what she has to say about a global issue like culture within this field of inquiry.

In an investigation of yet another sport, *Barbarian Day: A Surfing Life* by the journalist-surfer William Finnegan is part memoir and part iteration of ‘big wave’ surfing culture. He writes about many cultural practices of surfers, from the preparation of boards to methods of speaking with each other. At one point, he discusses the cultural fascination with photographs:

Nearly all surfers love shots of themselves in the act of surfing. To say that waves and the rides they provide are inherently fleeting events, and that surfers naturally therefore want mementos, doesn't begin to explain the collective passion for self-portraits.

(William Finnegan 313)

Photography might be a part of a cultural group's practice, or you can consider it as an artistic cultural practice all of its own. You have probably come across photographer characters in other fictional narratives; for example, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera, Tereza's character is a photographer who finds both personal gain in her work and a way of documenting a historical event – the Prague Spring Uprising of 1968:

Czech photographers and cameramen were acutely aware that they were the ones who could best do the thing left to do: preserve the face of violence for the distant future. Seven days in a row, Tereza roamed the streets, photographing Russian soldiers and officers in compromising situations ...

(Milan Kundera 63)

Through the practice of photography, the character witnesses and gains evidence about things the soldiers were not supposed to do, or exposes the ways they were using violence against civilians. Nowadays, many citizen journalists with smartphones already do this. Kundera also includes comments about the practice of writing in his text. All literary authors implicitly tell us about cultural writing practice, but some explicitly discuss the act of writing – we call this practice in fictional prose **metafiction**; writing about writing fiction. Kundera peppers his novel with ideas about the writing process, such as:

But isn't it true that an author can write only about himself? [...] The characters in my novels are my own unrealized possibilities ...

(Milan Kundera 215)

Hemingway also talks about the writing process in several of his works, notably in *A Moveable Feast*, a memoir that also reflects the cultural practices of cafés and food in Paris, Hemingway often comments on his writing, such as:

When I was writing, it was necessary for me to read after I had written. If you kept thinking about it, you would lose the thing that you were writing before you could go on with it the next day ...

(Ernest Hemingway 25)

He also talks about writers in Paris more generally, documenting their practices:

The Closerie des Lilas had once been a café where poets met more or less regularly and the last principal poet had been Paul Fort whom I had never read ...

(Ernest Hemingway 81)

Another author, André Aciman, who writes both fiction and non-fiction, writes about practising writing in *Alibis: Essays on Elsewhere*:

For me to write, I need to work my way back out of one home, consider another, and find the no-man's land in between ...

(André Aciman 198)

Here, the Egyptian professor and novelist, who now calls New York his home, discusses his movement and travel around the world in relation to his writing, which he says emerges in between these places. In this way, travel is another cultural practice of the writer.

The examples from Kundera and Aciman are those of authors reflecting the cultural practice of writing in their works. Later, when we look at forming cultural practice, we will consider the way authors create the practice of writing a particular type of style as the development of an **artistic movement**.

Literary works are made up of cultural ingredients; later, we see how literature can become a recipe for forming cultural practice. Works of literature often contain reflections of cultural practices more subtly. Jennifer Egan, another Pulitzer-Prize-winning author, peppers the pages of her novel, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, with music allusions that make the work come alive as a reflection of punk, rave and indie cultures (Powers). (You can find a playlist of the songs she alludes to via the QR code in the margin.)



In dramatic texts, we might be able to see cultural practices we identify with on stage as a seamless part of a narrative – one that might appear as a backdrop until we consider its symbolic qualities through the dialogue in the text. Using props and set design can help to make us identify directly with the cultural practice we see; for example, in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the motif of the poker game runs through the text, with a key scene where we actually witness this cultural act. First, Williams gives stage directions for 'The Poker Night' that include:

The poker players – Stanley, Steve, Mitch and Pablo – wear colored shirts, solid blues, a purple, a red-and-white check, a light green, and they are men at the peak of their physical manhood, as coarse and direct and powerful as the primary colors. There are vivid slices of watermelon on the table, whiskey bottles and glasses. [...] For a moment, there is absorbed silence as a hand is dealt.

(Tennessee Williams 45)

The game is directly linked with masculinity here, a primal desire of some kind reflected in the 'primary colors'. The scene includes snacks and 'whiskey' that one might expect to go with the culture of playing this game in New Orleans in the 1940s.

Any game is a form of cultural practice that can be reflected in literature to help us understand the community, and possibly to extend the game to represent an idea symbolically. Later, Stanley's sister-in-law, Blanche, uses the symbol of the poker game to comment on Stanley's low-class character, in her **perspective**. She makes him out to be an animal because of this cultural practice, even though it might be seen as a simple pastime:

'His poker night! – you call it – this party of apes! Somebody growls – some creature snatches at something – the fight is on! God! Maybe we are a long way from being made in God's image, but Stella – my sister – there has been some progress since then! Such things as art – as poetry and music – such kinds of new light have come into the world since then!'

(Tennessee Williams 83)

■ Culture of everyday life

Music and food belong to a category of culture described as ‘everyday life’, which just means the cultural practices we see all around us, as opposed to high art, like sculpture, classical music or literature. These types of cultural practice are peppered through any piece of literature you read, but might be especially present in some that focus on street scenes or use food as **metaphor**, for example.

Critical theorist Michel de Certeau analyses the use of such cultural practice in literature in *The Practice of Everyday Life*; his discussions of culture might help you to contextualize some of the literature you study in your course. He tells us that people play with language and other cultural practices that they might see on television, for example, in many facets of life:

[P]edestrians, in the streets they fill with the forests of their desires and goals. In the same way the users of social codes turn them into metaphors and ellipses of their own quests. The ruling order serves as a support for innumerable productive activities, while at the same time blinding its proprietors to this creativity (like those ‘bosses’ who simply can’t see what is being created within their own enterprises). Carried to its limit, this order would be the equivalent of the rules of meter and rhyme for poets of earlier times: a body of constraints stimulating new discoveries, a set of rules with which improvisation plays.

(Michel de Certeau)

This passage tells us that de Certeau believes the public both mimic and create their own cultural practices as individuals, but that the ‘bosses’ and ruling class, or people with money, think they are constantly determining the shape of culture. In other words, ordinary people *do* cultural things all the time, even though the elite like to think they are more ‘cultured’ through expensive entertainment or fashion.

Writers of literature may not see themselves as the ruling class, particularly economically, but the work they produce does make them an authority on culture if they are accepted as high literature, or works worthy of study in your IB Literature course, for example. However, literature also always assumes a reader; these ordinary people (the readers) can then make cultural production their own. *You* can make culture your own. This idea tells us that authors often reflect culture of ‘ordinary people’ through the everyday and that the act of writing falls into the categories of representation and formation. In the next example from Virginia Woolf, we will use the lens of de Certeau’s ‘everyday life’ to understand the way Woolf empowers female writers, as we take a look at her non-fiction that depicts everyday cultural practice for the effect of her argument.

Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) was a **modernist** writer who wrote both fiction and non-fiction with progressive features, such as the use of **stream-of-consciousness**, fighting for women’s rights, and avant-garde narrative styles, such as the use of a narrator who changes gender in *Orlando*. The British Library writes: ‘Both in style and subject matter, Woolf’s work captures the fast-changing world in which she was working, from transformations in gender roles, sexuality and class to technologies such as cars, airplanes and cinema’ (‘Virginia Woolf’).

‘A Room of One’s Own’ (1929) is a long essay developed from a speech that Woolf gave to female students at the University of Cambridge. The essay posits that women need money and independent space if they are to write published literature. Although a piece of **non-fiction**,

Woolf uses a made-up setting (Oxbridge, which merges Cambridge and Oxford Universities), scenes from her imagination and discussions of fictional characters, alongside allusions to historical writers (such as Shakespeare's 'sister', an imagined voice lost due to her sex). Woolf uses several **extended metaphors** to develop the difference between women and men in that time period, often using elements of everyday life as cultural practices to develop her point. One such metaphor is an extended look at the separate meals of men and women at the university, which demonstrates the difference in the way that males and females were treated at educational institutions in the early-twentieth century. The men's luncheon is first described in great detail:

It is a curious fact that novelists have a way of making us believe that luncheon parties are invariably memorable for something very witty that was said, or for something very wise that was done. But they seldom spare a word for what was eaten. It is part of the novelist's convention not to mention soup and salmon and ducklings, as if soup and salmon and ducklings were of no importance whatsoever, as if nobody ever smoked a cigar or drank a glass of wine. Here, however, I shall take the liberty to defy that convention and to tell you that the lunch on this occasion began with soles, sunk in a deep dish, over which the college cook had spread a counterpane of the whitest cream, save that it was branded here and there with brown spots like the spots on the flanks of a doe. After that came the partridges, but if this suggests a couple of bald, brown birds on a plate you are mistaken. The partridges, many and various, came with all their retinue of sauces and salads, the sharp and the sweet, each in its order; their potatoes, thin as coins but not so hard; their sprouts, foliated as rosebuds but more succulent. And no sooner had the roast and its retinue been done with than the silent servingman, the Beadle himself perhaps in a milder manifestation, set before us, wreathed in napkins, a confection which rose all sugar from the waves. To call it pudding and so relate it to rice and tapioca would be an insult.

(Virginia Woolf 13)

The men of the university have a long history of abundance. Woolf writes about the details of the luncheon in a stray from 'novelist's convention', which would more often describe the dialogue, the 'wit' and 'wisdom'. Convention is a patriarchal construction and Woolf uses her content and style throughout the essay to rebel. She engages in non-conventional practices, such as including imaginative characters in a non-fiction essay, beginning the essay with a conjunction, and telling us she will not give us a conclusion.

Woolf describes the details of excess: the 'partridges, many and various, came with all their retinue of sauces and salads, the sharp and the sweet, each in its order' and 'a confection which rose all sugar from the waves'. She delights in these details – but the men are used to this sort of service. The male writers Woolf refers to write instead of engaging in conversation. It is 'part of the novelist's convention not to mention soup and salmon and ducklings', and instead write of 'something very witty' or 'very wise' that was said.

Both the food and conversation would be products of culture. Woolf's choice to write of the food makes her text subtly subversive. The language of her sensory detail is beautiful, showing us what an upper-class British luncheon of the time period might look and taste like. It is a reflection in that sense; however, she uses the reflection to say something about men and women, about fiction, but she merely describes – rather than altering the food into some kind

of greater **symbol** or political statement that we might see in representation. The politics is only evident in **juxtaposition** to the women's 'dinner', so that we may easily compare the difference between the two:

Here was my soup. Dinner was being served in the great dining-hall. Far from being spring it was in fact an evening in October. Everybody was assembled in the big dining-room. Dinner was ready. Here was the soup. It was a plain gravy soup. There was nothing to stir the fancy in that. One could have seen through the transparent liquid any pattern that there might have been on the plate itself. But there was
 5 no pattern. The plate was plain. Next came beef with its attendant greens and potatoes – a homely trinity, suggesting the rumps of cattle in a muddy market, and sprouts curled and yellowed at the edge, and bargaining and cheapening and women with string bags on Monday morning. There was no reason to complain of human nature's daily food, seeing that the supply was sufficient and coal-miners doubtless were sitting down to less. Prunes and custard followed. And if anyone complains that prunes, even
 10 when mitigated by custard, are an uncharitable vegetable (fruit they are not), stringy as a miser's heart and exuding a fluid such as might run in misers' veins who have denied themselves wine and warmth for eighty years and yet not given to the poor, he should reflect that there are people whose charity embraces even the prune. Biscuits and cheese came next, and here the water-jug was liberally passed round, for it is the nature of biscuits to be dry, and these were biscuits to the core. That was all. The
 15 meal was over.

(Virginia Woolf 21)

This, too, is a British meal in a university. Woolf goes on about the 'plain[ness]' of the 'gravy soup'. She also extends the description of the dried-up 'prunes' as that of the insides of a 'miser' – one who hoards one's money. The subtle **metaphor** tells us that Woolf believes money *should* be spent on food and other small pleasures rather than simply sustaining life. This idea could also be a cultural comment or critique. In any case, there was plenty of food but its quality was in stark contrast to that of the men. Similarly to the way she treated the men's luncheon, Woolf does not describe the conversation. Instead, in comparing two meals, each being a cultural product of the society in which she lives, we begin to understand the discourse she is creating about men and women in England and especially at universities. In a search for the truth, Woolf asks questions:

For that visit to Oxbridge and the luncheon and the dinner had started a swarm of questions. Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor? What effect has poverty on fiction? What conditions are necessary for the creation of works of art?

(Virginia Woolf 31)

Ultimately, she concludes that, despite this relative poverty and a lack of positional power or authority in the publishing world, it is better to be a woman who is free of convention. This way, she can be more creative and 'stray from the path' that academic men are required to follow.

● TOK Links: Art as area of knowledge

Cultural practices are areas of shared knowledge. What do the arts tell us about shared knowledge versus personal knowledge? Practices like eating certain types of food, listening to particular music or wearing certain types of clothes create their own language of symbols and **connotations** that those within the culture understand. In response to fictions, we experience personal reactions to shared cultural products; in this way, both personal and shared knowledge interact in stories that use cultural practice. For further reading, follow the QR code to an article entitled 'How the Books We Read Shape Our Lives' from the *Independent* newspaper, printed in 2016, which discusses ways in which a reader can be affected.



Many authors reflect cultural practices of food and meals in their literature. Interestingly, this is especially true of women, perhaps since food is more traditionally in the female sphere. Next, we look at a female author from Japan whose novella, *Kitchen*, reflects both Japanese food traditions and other cultural meals to help us understand a young woman's grief, joy and love in a **bildungsroman** (a story when a person grows up) narrative.

Banana Yoshimoto

Banana Yoshimoto was born in Tokyo in 1964, and adopted her fruit name at university after her love of banana flowers. She uses many elements of Japanese culture in her books. *Kitchen* focuses on food, as the title suggests, but also reflects elements of university life: transportation, nightlife and family conventions. She gives us both the norms of society and challenges to these norms, reflecting a generation who, starting in the 1980s, wanted to rebel against tradition (Larking). However, she also highlights some of the beautiful and nurturing elements of Japanese culture, some of which are clearly referenced in her use of food.

Yoshimoto's protagonist and narrator, Mikage, finds herself an orphan after her grandmother, who raised her, dies before the story begins. Mikage goes to live with her friend, Yuichi, and his transgender father. She cooks for them and uses the kitchen to heal; making it messy is cathartic for her. Eventually Mikage goes to cooking school, to learn not only Japanese cooking but also other cultural dishes. Towards the end of the story, Mikage goes to visit Yuichi, now also mourning the death of his father. They have had a falling out over some misunderstandings and questions about their feelings for each other (are they friends, adopted family, lovers?). Despite all the fancy cooking she has learned at school, she chooses to bring him the traditional Japanese fast food of *katsudon*, a fried pork cutlet over rice with egg and a few toppings. It is a very nostalgic, familiar and comforting dish for her – perhaps like fish and chips in England or hotdogs in the US. Think about what kinds of food you might bring to different people you care about – family, friends, a romantic interest, someone you are apologizing to, etc. Food can help us to connect with people, share love and literally nurture someone in need of healing.

ACTIVITY 2

Kitchen by Banana Yoshimoto

Use the three extracts on the next page to answer the questions that follow about Yoshimoto's use of *katsudon* in the **climax** of *Kitchen* and the conclusion's reflection of food culture.

In this first extract, Mikage first encounters *katsudon*:

My *katsudon* was ready. I perked up and split my chopsticks. Thinking, an army travels on its stomach, I contemplated my meal. Although it *looked* exceptionally delicious, that was nothing to the way it tasted. It was outrageously good.

‘This is incredible!’ I blurted out spontaneously to the counterman.

5 ‘I thought you’d like it’ He smiled triumphantly.

You may say it’s because I was straving, but remember, this is my profession.

This *katsudon*, encountered almost by accident, was made with unusual skill, I must say. Good quality meat, excellent broth, the eggs and onions handled

10 – it was flawless. Then I remembered having heard *Sensei* mention this place: ‘It’s a pity we won’t have time for it,’ she had said. What luck! And then I thought, ah, if only Yuichi were here. I impulsively said to the counterman, ‘Can this be made to go? Would you make me another one, please?’

(Banana Yoshimoto 92–3)

In this second short extract, Yuichi enjoys the *katsudon* that Mikage has brought to him:

Yuichi put down his chopsticks and looked straight into my eyes. ‘This is the best *katsudon* I’ve ever had in my life,’ he said. ‘It’s delicious.’

‘Yes,’ I smiled.

5 ‘Overall, I’ve been pretty cold, haven’t I? It’s just that I wanted you to see me when I’m feeling more manly, when I’m feeling strong.’

‘Will you tear a telephone book in half for me?’

‘That’s it. Or maybe pick up a car and throw it.’

(Banana Yoshimoto 101)

Finally, at the end of the novella, Mikage tells Yuichi what she has been cooking at school:

‘Did you eat a lot of good things?’

‘Yes, sashimi, prawns, wild boar. Today was French. I think I’ve gained a little weight. That reminds me, I sent a package jam-packed with *wasabi* pickle, eel pies, and tea by express mail to my apartment. You can go pick it up if you like.’

5 ‘Why didn’t you send sashimi and prawns?’

‘Because there’s no way to send them!’ I laughed.

Yuichi sounded happy. ‘Too bad – I’m picking you up at the station tomorrow, so you could have carried them with you. What time are you getting in?’

10 The room was warm, filling with steam from the boiling water. I launched into what time I’d be in and what platform I’d be on.

(Banana Yoshimoto 105)

- 1 In the first extract, compare the description of the *katsudon* to Woolf’s descriptions of the luncheon and dinner. Which is it more like? Can you connect your observation to de Certeau’s ideas about the cultural practices of ‘everyday life’?
- 2 What part of Japanese cultural practice do you think the *katsudon* reflects?
- 3 Explain the use of **hyperbole** and superlative language. You might often hear or describe food with this type of language. Why do you think that is?

- 4 How do Yuichi and Mikage make fun of being 'manly' and what does it have to do with food culture?
- 5 In the second extract, why do you think Mikage brings *katsudon* instead of something foreign that she is learning to cook?
- 6 Why does the novella end with a broader description of the food Mikage has been cooking: 'Sashimi, prawns, wild boar ... French'?
- 7 **Extension activity:** Explore Japanese food by going to a restaurant or looking for recipes online. Try eating some *katsudon* and note how you feel as you eat the traditional dish. Why do you think this dish is included as a cultural practice in Japan? What food is particularly familiar and comforting in your culture?

Once you are finished, compare your answers to the notes on page 426.

Representing cultural practice

The difference between reflecting and representing cultural practice is subtle. In fact, many texts may do both simultaneously, like the visual arts examples on page 253. Representation implies that the creative mind, or imagination, is used along with a reflection of culture. Really, any literary writing about cultural practice would have resulted from some creative agency, but some works take more liberty and filter culture in a way that is closer to representation.

As you saw in Chapter 2.1, Laura Esquivel uses **magical realism** (where realistic narrative is combined with surreal elements of dream or fantasy) in *Like Water for Chocolate* to reflect Mexican cultural food practices, but she also further represents it by her imaginative transformation of the cultural practice into something greater. The novel questions traditions and gender norms within the culture through the protagonist's eyes, who is able to fully convey her emotions as she cooks traditional Mexican food. Passages like this one link together food and emotions, sometimes with magic:

It was as if they were rejecting that stuffed pepper, which contains every imaginable flavor; sweet as candied citron, juicy as pomegranate, with the bit of pepper and the subtlety of walnuts, that marvelous chile in the walnut sauce. Within it lies the secret of love, but it will never be penetrated, and all because it wouldn't feel proper.

(Laura Esquivel 54)

Most people will recognize the 'stuffed pepper' and 'chile' from Mexican cuisine, but the connected emotions and initial 'rejection' of the meal represent the cultural practice of food in a different way.

Similarly, in the novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which we looked at earlier, Kundera's use of photography represents more about the character than just the journalistic documentation of a historical event. In the novel, Tereza photographs her husband's mistress, showing the way that photography can take on a much more intimate lens as artistic practice. Tereza hides her emotions ('her face') with the camera lens and is able to detach herself from the difficult experience to try to understand it:

The camera served Tereza as both a mechanical eye through which to observe Tomas' mistress and a veil by which to conceal her face from her ...

(Milan Kundera 62)

Hemingway's account of bull-fighting in *Death in the Afternoon* also represents the cultural practice of bull-fighting by categorizing it as a 'tragedy':

*The bullfight is not a sport in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word ...
Rather it is a tragedy ...*

(Ernest Hemingway 16)

He creates a narrative and opinion on the practice, finding violence, beauty and truth in each bull's death. In this way, his account becomes art. In fact, this idea might help you understand how texts become classified as literature, which implies an artistic interpretation of reality.

We shall now take a closer look at representation of cultural practices in literature through two novels that imagine aspects of real religious cultural practice. Each religion has a set of practices and these are reflected in the texts, but they move into more imaginative depictions as representations of culture that teach us about global issues.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

We have already looked at the idea of shared and personal knowledge in relation to culture. You can understand this idea further through the field of inquiry of culture, identity and community. Culture, as represented in literary works, allows readers from different cultures to understand individual identities and communities in the text through a cultural lens. However, sometimes a closer look at a community's articulation of that culture and an individual's interaction with it reveal even more. When we looked at the academic community in Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own', we understood the interpretation of British food practices and what it revealed about the global issue of gender at that time. As we look at religious cultural practice, different communities form different relationships with it. Take Christianity: a look at its place in the birth of America might help us understand the country's marriage traditions, while investigating its instigation in a missionary setting in Senegal could tell us something about colonial relationships between Europe and Africa.

Furthermore, we can consider individual choices to understand related themes or specific global issues. Yoshimoto's Mikage chooses to blend other cuisines with that of her own Japanese culture, showing individuality, and uses food to connect to people and to her own emotions. With religion as a global issue, one might consider why one chooses to engage in one religion or another when given the choice. Also, an individual's moral compass can be developed through religion, either in sync with it or in reaction to it.

Let's keep these ideas in mind as we investigate two novels here. They are both originally in English, so for an individual oral you would also have to use a work in translation in comparison. Some works which deal with this idea are: *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, *The Outsider* by Albert Camus and Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*. You must remember, however, that you are required to use works that you study in your course; while you have free choice among those, you do not have completely free choice to use any work you want.

First, we look at a book partly about Christian missionaries in Nigeria by Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart* helps us understand both Igbo ('Ibo' in the novel) culture and religion, and that of the colonial missionaries who arrive. Achebe is critical of each culture at times, as he both reflects cultural practice and represents fictions of individual narratives in relation to that practice, to better understand the community and individuals. (Note that we will return to this novel in Chapter 3.3 to look at it through an intertextual lens, in conjunction with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.)

Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe (1930–2013) was a poet and novelist who was born in Nigeria. *Things Fall Apart*, his first novel, was published in 1958. As well as being a writer, Achebe was also an academic. During the later years of his life, Achebe held positions as Professor of Languages and Literature in the US, latterly at Brown University. As an academic and critic, Achebe gave a famous lecture in 1975 entitled 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*' where he argued that Conrad's presentation of Africans in the novella was racist. His intertextual relationship with Conrad was problematic, and it is possible to read *Things Fall Apart*, in some part, as a post-colonial rewriting of Conrad's inescapably colonial-age story. Achebe is still widely known as one of the best African writers, and received multiple international awards for his work.



Throughout *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe gives us insight into Igbo culture and religion and, later, Christian missionary cultural practices. He describes events, such as the 'Feast of the New Yam' which gives 'thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility' (Achebe 36), shows us scenes of wrestling and drumming that demonstrate masculinity and power, and discusses a common fear of the 'Evil Forest', where they allow the missionaries to build their place of worship. He gives us details about worship that include song, a type of cultural practice:

Then the missionaries burst into song. It was one of those gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism which had the power of plucking at silent and dusty chords in the heart of an Ibo [sic] man ...

(Chinua Achebe 146)

Soon after, a young Igbo man who had witnessed violence converts due to the 'poetry of the new religion' that 'poured into his parched soul' (Achebe 147), suggesting the new religion gave the youth hope, even though he remained confused by it. This helps us to understand why individuals may turn to other religions for answers about the evils of humanity. Though we know that Christians can also be violent, it is the newness that captivates this individual. No matter what religion one believes in or is born into, humans will continue to look for answers when things go wrong in their lives; sometimes, when the answer is not clear, one may look to a new religion with hope.

Another member of the Igbo world decides to convert to Christianity of her own free will in this passage:

It was well known among the people of Mbanta that their gods and ancestors were sometimes long-suffering and would deliberately allow a man to go on defying them. But even in such cases they set their limit at seven market weeks or twenty-eight days. Beyond that limit no man was suffered to go. And so excitement mounted in the village as the seventh week approached since the impudent missionaries built
 5 their church in the Evil Forest. The villagers were so certain about the doom that awaited these men that one or two converts thought it wise to suspend their allegiance to the new faith.

At last the day came by which all the missionaries should have died. But they were still alive, building a new red-earth and thatch house for their teacher, Mr Kiaga. That week they won a handful more converts. And for the first time they had a woman. Her name was Nneka, the wife of Amadi, who was a
 10 prosperous farmer. She was very heavy with child.

Nneka had had four previous pregnancies and child-births. But each time she had borne twins, and they had been immediately thrown away. Her husband and his family were already becoming highly critical of such a woman and were not unduly perturbed when they found she had fled to join the Christians. It was a good riddance.

(Chinua Achebe 151)

Through this fictional character, Achebe imagines the personal reasons that some Nigerians may have freely chosen to convert to Christianity. His representation shows that people may adopt religious cultural practices in order to save themselves (and those they love) from kinds of persecution, or at least a lack of belonging. The religious practices of Igbo and Christians at other parts of the novel reflect cultural practice, while this imagined personal journey is an artistic representation of this practice in a historicized period. The passage also implies a sexism and even misogyny (dislike of or contempt for women) in Igbo culture – it is the ‘husband and his family’ who are ‘critical’ of Nneka because she has birthed many twins, which are labeled as cursed in their culture. She flees to the Christians who welcome her, developing the theme that humans wish to belong to a community. Achebe does not discuss other types of sexism that would no doubt be present in the culture of the missionaries at that time; this is because Nneka is also ignorant of it. Instead he imagines how people become a part of religious cultural practices.

Later, when the women who have converted try to gather water and other items for the Christian Easter celebration, they say that ‘some young [Ibo] men had chased them away from the stream with whips’ (Achebe 160). Again, this imagined scene directly demonstrates the inhibition of cultural practice. The fact that they would care enough to keep the women from getting water shows that their act of worship is a powerful marker of **identity** which threatens their own.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

REPRESENTATION

You could investigate representation, as one of the IB key concepts, through cultural practice and in different genres. It may be helpful to consider how the imagination of the author shapes the way that a subject is represented. Consider imagination as a way of knowing, as you have investigated it in your TOK class. How can authors use their imaginations to represent cultural practice and help us understand global issues?

In Achebe's novel, we better understand individual choice and agency in motivations for people to believe in different religions. With his imagination, Achebe takes us beyond a reflected reality where cultural practices clash. Some phenomena are not clearly rooted in reality, such as the function of superstition; additionally, the shaping of this moment in history through a classic **tragedy** structure, like that of Hemingway's bull-fighting account, make it art. You may have studied this tragedy structure through Greek or Shakespearean tragedies. We see the fall of a great Igbo man, Okonkwo, whose tragic flaw is his pride. (In Chapter 3.3, you will investigate Okonkwo's fall more carefully as a classic tragedy in the post-colonial context.)

As religious practices become part of different cultures, there are more ways of imagining representation – sometimes, the imagined practice is actually manifested, as in the images you can view via the QR code. The **juxtaposition** of practising yoga in the iconic, skyscraper-filled Times Square might tell us that people need elements of Buddhism in their modern lives and will choose to incorporate them; it might also suggest new attitudes about bodies in a stereotypically prudish society. Here we merely have a connection of Eastern cultural practice in a Western setting, but an imaginative **fiction** could represent this practice in a way that also considers why.

Similarly, in this next novel by Aldous Huxley, we might also understand these individual choices, but the imagined setting creates a bigger space of play for his ideas. Huxley has truly created something new from which we can still learn about themes of belonging, belief, conformity, power and the mind–body connection.



Aldous Huxley

Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) was an English writer and philosopher most famous for his novel *Brave New World*, which also has resulted in two film adaptations. Huxley experimented with both Eastern and Western philosophies. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature seven times, suggesting that his ideas and style delivered a unique view in the artistic literary world.

Island is a novel about a journalist who is shipwrecked on the island of Pala. The utopia (an imagined near-perfect society) has blended Western science and Eastern Buddhist philosophy along with its own cultural practices, like psychedelic drugs and adopted family pods. Although the community is peaceful, its two-faced leader, named Murugan Mailendra, and his sidekick, Colonel Dipa, eventually become powerful through British colonial rule, sparked by a violent invasion. Huxley uses Buddhism as the religion and philosophy that guides his imagined utopia. Part of the cultural practice includes yoga, which is associated with several religions – one of which is Buddhism.

ACTIVITY 3

Island by Aldous Huxley

You have probably encountered some form of yoga either at a gym or in a mindfulness workshop at school. If not, you might want to watch a short video of its practice, which focuses on breathing and physical movement as well as meditation, via this QR code.



True yoga practices have a mind–body connection, and Huxley draws on this part of it to represent cultural practice. He goes beyond reflecting yoga practice as a daily habit or ritual, imagining its impact in an artistic way. Huxley talks about yoga as a way of life, and the way that yoga is a part of different aspects of their lives. It helps us understand what the mind–body connection has to do with different aspects of society. Consider yoga as a cultural practice on his imagined island, and as an imagined symbol of his narrative about the marriage of Eastern philosophy and Western science.

Read the two excerpts below and then answer the following questions. The questions will help us to understand what this cultural practice teaches through representation in his novel.

‘But even the most concrete materialism,’ Vijaya qualified, ‘won’t get you very far unless you’re fully conscious of what you’re doing and experiencing. You’ve got to be completely aware of the bits of matter you’re handling, the skills you’re practicing, the people you work with.’

- 5 ‘Quite right,’ said Dr Robert. ‘I ought to have made it clear that concrete materialism* is only the raw stuff of a fully human life. It’s through awareness, complete and constant awareness, that we transform it into concrete spirituality. Be fully aware of what you’re doing, and work becomes the yoga of work, play becomes the yoga of play, everyday living becomes the yoga of everyday living.’

(Aldous Huxley 149)

*Materialism: also called physicalism, in philosophy, the view that all facts (including facts about the human mind and will and the course of human history) are causally dependent upon physical processes, or even reducible to them (Smart).

- And now it’s time for the descent, time for a second bout of the yoga of danger, time for a renewal of tension and the awareness of life in its glowing plenitude as you hang precariously on the brink of destruction. Then at the foot of the precipice you unrope, you go striding down the rocky path toward the first trees. And suddenly you’re in
- 5 the forest, and another kind of yoga is called for – the yoga of the jungle, the yoga that consists of being totally aware of life at the near-point, jungle life in all its exuberance and its rotting, crawling squalor, all its melodramatic ambivalence of orchids and centipedes, of leeches and sunbirds, of the drinkers of nectar and the drinkers of blood. Life bringing order out of chaos and ugliness, life performing its miracles of birth and
- 10 growth, but performing them, it seems, for no other purpose than to destroy itself. ‘Beauty and horror, beauty,’ he repeated, ‘and horror. And then suddenly, as you come down from one of your expeditions in the mountains, suddenly you know that there’s a reconciliation. And not merely a reconciliation. A fusion, an identity. Beauty made one with horror in the yoga of the jungle. Life reconciled with the perpetual imminence of
- 15 death in the yoga of danger. Emptiness identified with selfhood in the Sabbath yoga of the summit.’

[...]

Very quietly Dr Robert began to talk about Shiva-Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance.

- ‘Look at his image,’ he said. ‘[...] See how it breathes and pulses, how it grows out
- 20 of brightness into brightness ever more intense. Dancing through time and out of time, dancing everlastingly and in the eternal now. Dancing and dancing in all the worlds at once. Look at him.’

- Scanning those upturned faces, Will noted, now in one, now in another, the dawning illuminations of delight, recognition, understanding, the signs of
- 25 worshipping wonder that quivered on the brinks of ecstasy or terror.

(Aldous Huxley 165–6)

- 1 In the first excerpt, Huxley emphasizes the link between ‘materialism’ and yoga. After looking at the note about materialism, why do you think he says this is the base of ‘human life’, while ‘spirituality’ through yoga makes one ‘fully aware’?
- 2 How can ‘everyday living’ be ‘yoga’? Explain the way any of these types of cultural practices we have already talked about could be linked with yoga.
- 3 Now turn to the second excerpt. Yoga helps the community articulate their understanding of the **paradox** of ‘beauty and horror’ in the world. How can the ‘yoga of danger’ and ‘of the jungle’ be cultural practices? How does Huxley represent yoga in this way, as an imaginative function of the practice?

- 4 How might the use of **direct address** change the reader's perspective of the passage? Why might this style be more relevant to representing culture than reflecting it?
- 5 Will is the journalist who lands on the island. Through his perspective, how does he view the effect of Dr Robert on the islanders? (Note that Dr Robert is also a medical doctor.)
- 6 What does the 'ecstasy of terror' have to do with 'beauty and horror'? How could these paired words work to shape the islanders' cultural practice?
- 7 What could the cultural practice of yoga have to do with the islanders' acceptance of these truths? In what way does Huxley represent rather than reflect culture in this way?

When you have finished, compare your answers with the notes on page 426.

Forming cultural practice

Now as we turn to the third and final part of the question about the formation of cultural practice, we look at texts that have actually been said to change the shape of culture. Essentially, any piece of literature has the power to form cultural practices on different levels. You might read a novel or attend a play and change some of your own practices that then influence others in your community to do the same. However, we will look at works that do so on a larger and documented scale.

Think about authors who form cultural practice as influencers – you might think of Instagrammers and YouTubers who are labelled as such. An influencer is more than just someone who posts original content; people look to that person's content to shape different cultural practices. You might see this on social media as fashion or food practices, especially. Writers as influencers, or shapers, of culture can either include other cultural practices in their works, that change the practices of groups of people, or can shape styles and subjects of literature itself. We see this idea in the development of artistic movements, like **postmodernism**, for example, or more subtly in the way that any work of literature can influence writers who follow.

Although you may expect cultural practices to be shaped by **non-fiction** (often journalistic) writers, some literary **fiction** shapes these practices directly. For example, Herman Melville, famous for *Moby Dick*, included morally wrong or questionable practices that were considered acceptable on ships in many of his stories. In the novel *White-Jacket*, Melville includes a particularly visceral description of flogging, an accepted practice of whipping crew members on ships. The chapter 'A Flogging' describes this practice at length, including its impact on the other sailors:

'All hands witness punishment, ahoy!'

To the sensitive seaman that summons sounds like a doom. He knows that the same law which impels it – the same law by which the culprits of the day must suffer; that by that very law he also is liable at any time to be judged and condemned. And the inevitableness of his own presence at the scene; the strong arm that drags him in view of the scourge, and holds him there till all is over; forcing upon his loathing eye and soul the sufferings and groans of men who have familiarly consorted with him, eaten with him, battled out watches with him – men of his own type and badge – all this conveys a terrible hint of the omnipotent authority under which he lives. Indeed, to such a man the naval summons to witness punishment carries a thrill, somewhat akin to what we may impute to the quick and the dead, when they shall hear the Last Trump, that is to bid them all arise in their ranks, and behold the final penalties inflicted upon the sinners of our race.

(Herman Melville)

Melville was someone who had witnessed this practice directly as a crew member. Partially due to his fictional account, the practice changed as a product of journalistic accounts and laws that were passed in the US Navy ('Brief History of Punishment by Flogging in the US Navy'). This is an example of literature directly impacting cultural practice in ways other than the writing itself. His book helped the public understand the problem.

Ernest Hemingway's depiction of bull-fighting, on the other hand, did not change the shape of the practice, despite some public outcry against its violence. He wrote about the practice in other fictional narratives, such as the novel *The Sun Also Rises*. Here, although continuing to reflect and represent the cultural practice of bull-fighting, Hemingway also demonstrates the way he creates a new style of writing that has influenced others since. He writes concisely, giving us spare details to arrive at his version of the truth; he is not afraid of large comments without much description, such as: 'Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bull-fighters' (Hemingway 21). He demonstrates deep implications about an ideal life being one that constantly faces their own mortality through only a few words. In another description in the same novel, he writes:

In bull-fighting they speak of the terrain of the bull and the terrain of the bull-fighter. As long as a bull-fighter stays in his own terrain he is comparatively safe. Each time he enters into the terrain of the bull he is in great danger. Belmonte, in his best days, worked always in the terrain of the bull. This way he gave the sensation of coming tragedy.

(Ernest Hemingway 171)

Hemingway is not afraid to repeat words like 'terrain' and leave out adjectives and adverbs to describe his idea that links bull-fighting to 'tragedy'. The 'terrain' is simple, **abstract**; it is a metaphorical place to demonstrate ideas about safety and danger. Many scholars have commented on this concise style:

Hemingway's search for truth and accuracy of expression is reflected in his terse, economical prose style, which is widely acknowledged to be his greatest contribution to literature ...

(Ernest M. Hemingway')

We can see, then, that rather than forming cultural practice about bull-fighting, his artistic depictions of it have, in part, formed cultural writing practices.

If we think of the world as a reality created from our own perspectives, how has literature contributed to this reality? What parts of the world could take sharper shapes in your mind through literature? Consider how poetry, fiction, non-fiction and drama might have different roles in answering these questions. In drama, we see a reality on stage; in poetry, we enter another's mind to understand the world in their way. Any style or genre of writing gives us a way of understanding the world. As authors contribute to the formation of writing styles and artistic movements, they reflect other elements of cultural practice in the world. For example, **Romantic** writers such as John Keats rebelled in part against the rise of industrialization with their focus on the natural world. **Postmodern** writers such as Jorge Luis Borges reflect an era after the Second World War that questions the moral compass of humanity when we can engage in so much violence.

Reciprocal relationships

We can see cultural practices at play in literary works, but it is more difficult to see it the other way around and track how literature can affect culture, as in the case of Melville's depiction of flogging. Changes may be subtle and may either impact an entire community, as shared knowledge, or an individual, as personal knowledge.

When trying to ascertain to what extent literature has a reciprocal relationship with culture, we may have a difficult time in coming to definitive answers, at least of a quantifying nature. However, we can truly see the reciprocity of cultural practices in some areas of literature. (Reciprocity means that there is a two-way relationship; in this case, that literature could influence cultural practice and vice versa.)

● EE Links: Literature that shapes the world

Research can help you investigate certain texts that are said to have influenced cultural practice over time. Follow the QR code to read this article from the BBC, which offers a good starting point: 'How stories have shaped the world'. For example, you may have read or at least heard of Homer's *The Iliad*. The article posits that this 'epic poem had repercussions far beyond the libraries and campfires of ancient Greece. It helped to shape an entire society, and its ethics' (Puchner). *The Iliad* 'would indicate ... how the community was to embody, live, and enact ...' (Puchner).



Moral **perspectives** (the way humans think about the world) have been shaped by literature over the ages. Seminal works like *The Iliad* can be traced in this way, and we often talk about the way Shakespeare has shaped the way we think about the world. *Macbeth* may teach us about the dangers of ambition; *Hamlet* has informed our understanding of the meaning of life and free will; the list goes on. Another example of an author who does this is Miguel de Cervantes, especially in *Don Quixote*, a work you have probably at least heard about, if not read. Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno considered it the 'true "Spanish Bible"' (Wood), suggesting that some literature can take the place of religious texts in forming our moral perspectives. The novel helps us to consider the importance of being 'skeptical' of dogmas, to beware 'egotism', and to question the connection between violence and chivalry (Wood).

Another good starting point is an NPR article called 'How Books Shaped The American National Identity', which you can read via the QR code provided. It is based on a researched exhibition at the US Library of Congress. In the next part of the chapter, we will further investigate William Carlos Williams, a poet named on this list (and also discussed in Section 3), but you might select any of the authors and their works to research for your extended essay. Consider to what extent the author reflects, represents and/or forms cultural practice and what the motivating and contextual factors are. You should be able to find research related to this idea on any of the texts named in these two articles.



William Carlos Williams

William Carlos Williams (1883–1963) was a Puerto Rican-American poet and doctor of paediatrics and general medicine. The son of immigrants from England and Puerto Rico, Williams was born and died in Rutherford, New Jersey. His poetry demonstrates both modernism and imagism with a strong focus on elements of everyday life, including observations from his home visits as a doctor. He published 'The Red Wheelbarrow' (perhaps his most famous poem) in 1922, the same year that TS Eliot published *The Waste Land*. Williams maintained friendships with poets like Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens; they all developed work in response to one another and Williams 'became an inspiration to the beat generation in the 1950s and 60s' ('William Carlos Williams'). As you will discover in Chapter 3.5, Williams had a deep and enduring relationship with painting as well as with poetry.



Although Williams lived a 'remarkably conventional life', unlike his expatriate and urban peers ('William Carlos Williams'), he produced work that influenced many. Williams is seen as an 'experimenter, innovator, and revolutionary figure in American poetry' ('Books That Shaped America 1900 to 1950'). The Library of Congress exhibition on *Books That Shaped America* includes Williams' volume *Spring and Now* with this comment:

Williams, his friend Ezra Pound, and other early-twentieth-century poets formed the core of what became known as the 'Imagist' movement. Their poetry focused on verbal pictures and moments of revealed truth, rather than a structure of consecutive events or thoughts and was expressed in free verse rather than rhyme. Spring and All, Williams's first book of poems in this modern style, greatly influenced poetry in the rest of the twentieth century and beyond.

The imagist movement, as it sounds, is based on imagery. Pound and Williams each wrote about its scope, style and philosophy in their own work and in publications like *Poetry* magazine, but Pound breaks it down to:

- I. Direct treatment of the 'thing', whether subjective or objective.
- II. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
- III. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.

(*Nature Poetry: From A Poet's Glossary*)

The poetry is minimalist and lyrical. It wishes to be 'musical' without the strictness of a 'metronome' – a musical device that delivers even beats to help a musician keep time. In *Spring and All*, Williams delivers **prose** in between his poems like a manifesto of ideas. He further links poetry with the imagination: 'the form of poetry is related to the movements of the imagination revealed in words – or whatever it may be' (Williams 219) and, paradoxically, reality: 'Art is the pure effect of the force upon which science depends for its reality – Poetry' (Williams 225). The idea is that imaginative art is the basis for reality, which might be the opposite of what some of his peer scientists thought. (The confluence of science and the arts here would make a good TOK investigation.) Other key areas of Williams' investigations in his prose include nature, truth, genius and form.

Williams draws from many subjects in his poetry – food, dance, farm tools, and more. Here, we look at a poem from *Spring and All* about a baseball game or, rather, the crowd at a baseball game.

In order to better understand what is going on in this poem about baseball, you could draw an image of the words. Try to determine what Williams is really focusing on through your image.

XXVI

The crowd at the ball game
is moved uniformly

by a spirit of uselessness
which delights them—

5 all the exciting detail
of the chase

and the escape, the error
the flash of genius—

10 all to no end to save beauty
the eternal—

So in detail they, the crowd,
are beautiful

for this
to be warned against

15 saluted and defied—
It is alive, venomous

it smiles grimly
its words cut—

20 The flashy female with her
mother, gets it—

The Jew gets it straight—it
is deadly, terrifying—

It is the Inquisition, the
Revolution

25 It is beauty itself
that lives

day by day in them
idly—

This is
 30 the power of their faces

It is summer, it is the solstice
 the crowd is

cheering, the crowd is laughing
 in detail

35 permanently, seriously
 without thought

(William Carlos Williams)

By beginning with naming the ‘crowd’ of people attending the game, Williams focuses on a ‘uselessness’ of the game. They sit ‘idly’ and ‘without thought’. Rather than critiquing baseball, he shows us that this moment of watching the game is leisure time where we have the ‘beauty’ of human interaction, of physical movement and of a day outside. They cheer and laugh on the ‘solstice’. The beginning of summer is a **symbol** of this carefree attitude, when children in America commonly have time off from school and many others take time off from work; the days are long and there is time to be outside with family and friends.

Williams wrote this poem as baseball was beginning to become popular. His volume of poetry was published in 1922 and Yankee Stadium (15 miles from Rutherford) was built just a year later. Williams reflects a growing cultural practice in America and represents the crowd **perspective**. The formation of cultural practice for him, with this poem and others, is in the creation of his imagist artistic movement.

There are several lines that discuss a revolutionary nature to this scene. The violence is followed with ‘It is beauty itself / that lives’ – that is, the revolution of beauty is in the way people can rebel against work and expectations. It is in the way beauty completely takes over these people’s lives at this time; it perseveres and becomes a kind of truth. The way Williams’ rhythm is musical and free, but still somewhat organized, mimics the way a free crowd sits in organized stands. The individuals have their own identities and responses to the game (and each other), but they are all a part of this scene of beauty, all a part of humanity.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

CREATIVITY

Although one might consider all art as creative, an understanding of the birth and use of artistic movements can help you structure thoughts about creativity. A movement does not function in a vacuum, but as a puzzle piece in the many types of cultural practice in the world, the everyday alongside high art. The imagist movement depicts the everyday within a form of high culture (poetry) in a way that should be accessible to all. Creativity is hard to define until you begin organizing the ways that people are creative. Think of artistic movements as responses to other movements, and responses to the cultural context from which they are formed. In this way, you might use the creative structure of other movements mentioned in this book to talk about a work of literature in your interactive oral or your essays. Some of these movements are: **romanticism, transcendentalism, existentialism**, modernism and **postmodernism**.

■ Cultural production and creation

Culture itself is created all the time; cultural practice is constantly being tweaked or reinvented by individuals and adopted by communities. Some traditions are upheld, while others are changed. Art forms are developed or responded to. Williams (and other poets) continued to develop the imagist style of poetry. With each new poem, he created a cultural product and therefore further developed and articulated this artistic movement. Perhaps in Year 10 or 11 you had a unit in English or Individuals & Societies that investigated the way traditions do or do not change. Think about a tradition in your own culture that has changed and why in order to better understand this idea. The same is true of any artistic movement, but it is also true of other kinds of cultural production that help us to define culture. Another poet, this time from the other side of the world, in Hong Kong, delivered an oeuvre that helped to define Hong Kong's elusive culture.

Yesi

Yesi (1949–2013, also known as PK Leung and Leung Ping-Kwan) was a Hong Kong poet and professor of literary, cultural and film studies. There are several versions of his name: IB lists him on the prescribed book list as Yesi, but other scholars refer to him as Leung Ping-Kwan. He uses PK Leung on his own book. The variation in names is an interesting look at the difficulty of appropriately respecting the culture of authors from countries different to our own. In his obituary, Vivienne Chow writes: 'Award-winning writer and poet Leung Ping-Kwan's dying wish was for Hong Kong literature to receive the respect it deserves. But his friends say he should also be remembered for his work focusing on the streets, food and characters of Hong Kong that are often overlooked by busy city-dwellers.' Yesi was known in Hong Kong as a man of culture, involved in many events like the international film festival and creative projects at universities. However, he was interested in more than just local culture; many of his travels and international explorations are represented in his poems, such as 'Postcards from Prague' and 'Brecht-haus, Berlin'.

The way that Yesi contributes to culture as an influencer is slightly different from Williams. According to Hong Kong cultural scholar Ackbar Abbas in *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, Yesi actually articulated and created a way of understanding local culture, including language, food, fashion, etiquette, and more through his poetry. Abbas' book talks about Hong Kong culture at the dawn of the 1997 handover from British colonial rule to a Special Administrative Region of China as an 'interesting time', filled with a chance for imagination, fear and desire to all be reflected in its changing culture (Abbas 1). He calls the culture a 'space of disappearance' reflected in the 'global city', a 'space of transit' (Abbas 4). Although some look more simply at Hong Kong culture as 'East meets West', Abbas includes other elements of internationalism, the relationship to Chinese traditions, capitalism, and more. He sees Hong Kong culture as a 'reverse hallucination' – 'not seeing what is there' (Abbas 6). In its space of many types of people, politics and art forms, the city's culture is hard to define.

However, Abbas thinks it is possible and powerful to define the city's elusive culture. He highlights Yesi (Leung Ping-Kwan) for his contributions to this articulation in the section of the book called 'Writing Hong Kong in Cantonese' (Abbas 129–140), and talks about Leung's poetry as a look at a 'society in the process of mutation' (Abbas 130). In this way, he cannot 'represent' the culture, but he can show us, in imagist style, what he notices and how an artist understands his local culture. Leung's poem 'Images of Hong Kong', available via the QR code, gives you a good overview.



ACTIVITY 4

'In Fabric Alley' by Yesi (Leung Ping-Kwan)

Here we will look at another of Leung's poems, from the same volume of poetry, about a specific place in Hong Kong called 'Fabric Alley':

In Fabric Alley

We follow fashions, deliberately, in and in,
 it seems going back and back into the past as well.
 Broad leaves, in tropical gloom suspended in vines,
 sway because a lady passes,
 5 from another pattern in fact,
 nothing special. On bodies
 floating past one sees petals. One turns on points
 of desire into the designs of the carnivores.
 How endless and many are the disguises
 10 concealed by revealing. The usual Chinese pagoda
 is folded in fragments, and I've no means to tailor for you
 garments of worlds to come.

A lady up ahead

is touching the fabrics, shopping for comfort, for something
 15 more natural, for a look in which to be seen, something she needs.
 She can't make them be more than separate pieces.
 her eye is kaleidoscope, too, pattering away
 at the edges everytime she moves her head even a little,
 until the scene has her outside herself utterly, in a maze
 20 of fabrics, trapped in the gaze of others;
 in a jacket criss-cross weaved, in an outer wrap,
 or cloak of denial, it is herself she is obsessed with,
 in a jungle of too many possibilities. A body wants change
 but hardly knows what it needs to want.

We pass on

25 in this alley famous for fabric stalls,
 half in deliberate play, half in unfinished feelings,
 We touch easily the thin, translucent silk,
 the cotton that drags its touch in the fingers, the coarse
 30 wool that alters a growing body, the provocations
 in the toes of shoes, the seductions in collars.
 All these stock images, the layers
 of colours superimposed to make old patterns,
 their many lyrics gone sour, also their erotic suggestions:
 35 can we really see ourselves remade in any of these?
 Yet these are all we see in front of us.
 How to go about tailoring something new,
 to make it so it wears the body well?

(Leung Ping-Kwan)

Let us use some comments from Abbas to help us interpret the poem in its relation to the formation of culture. Attempt the questions below and then check your answers against the notes on page 427.

- 1 Yesi begins the poem with: 'We follow fashions.' Here, he talks about actual fabrics and patterns that people wear.

How can 'fashions' also be more universal in relation to cultural practices, in terms of more general changes in trend?

- 2 In the second stanza, Yesi talks about a woman looking for fabric. Her 'kaleidoscop[ic]' eye finds her in a 'maze / of fabrics, trapped in the gaze of others'.

A kaleidoscope is a lens with mirrors that creates new patterns of images and breaks down the original image. How might these lines help us to understand what Yesi tells us of Hong Kong culture?

- 3 Abbas makes this comment about the last lines: '[Yesi] is alluding to the way in which a whole political system has bequeathed to us the socio-economic fabric of our lives. It is not a question of throwing away the fabric that has so much of our lives interwoven in it, but of asking, "How to go about tailoring something new, / to make it so it wears the body well?"' (Abbas 136).

How might the Hong Kong 'political system' and 'socio-economic[s]' create an understanding of Hong Kong culture? You may have to do some research in order to answer this question.

- 4 Abbas also tells us the poem is about both everyday people on the streets and the changing political rule. He says the tailor does not understand that the 'break in sartorial tradition' shows that the same ruling 'colonial body ... now wears a new style of clothes' (Abbas 136).

Where in the poem do you see evidence of a break in old and new? What does it tell us about the changing culture?

CAS Links: Student creative writing club

Culture exists within your school as well. In a similar way as Abbas writes about Hong Kong culture, your school culture may be one of many types that is brought together to create something new. Why not write your school culture through a literary magazine or writing club? As a CAS activity or project, you can continue to develop your school's culture in this way. You probably have people from different nationalities and religions, people who play different sports, speak different languages; the list goes on. But something makes your school culture unique as well. How do these cultures mix to create something new? You could also look at local culture, wherever your school is located; the group could take excursions to museums or important sites together. As you write, develop ideas about cultural practice that you notice and, together, redefine and form your school's culture from within.

Conclusion

We have looked at the way literature can reflect, represent and form cultural practice. Sometimes a text does one of these things while other times it may even do all three. Writing literature is a cultural practice in itself. The ambiguity of the chapter question suggests that we might look at literature first in this way – as the reflection, representation or formation of artistic style – then it suggests we may look at other types of culture present within literature. Much of what you read about culture may require further research for you to fully understand.

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2.6

How does language represent social distinctions and identities?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To examine the relationship between language and identity in literature
- ▶ To investigate the relationship between written style and identity
- ▶ To investigate the connotations of diction
- ▶ To determine why authors use language other than their own to represent identities
- ▶ To investigate the political choices of language use in literary texts
- ▶ To discover the way multiple languages authenticate identities within a text

Introduction

You probably cannot remember a time when you could not use language. Perhaps your language use has evolved as a result of who you are or who you want to be; it may be a product of your family, your environment and your choice to present a certain **identity**. You may have also noticed the way that people you know and authors you read use language in different ways. Part of authorial language is an effect of the writer's own identity; but part of it may be in the way the author uses language to portray different types of people.

Across the globe, we use different world languages. Even within English there are different forms and dialects in use, as well as an array of choice for which words we use for different situations. Can some people actually sound more 'posh' or rich than others? Can you determine a person's origin by the language they use? How do people use language to speak about different identities? How do you assert your own identity through language? These questions are central to an understanding of this chapter's focus.

Language and identity

CONCEPT CONNECTION

IDENTITY

Identity is, of course, about who an individual is. Its roots go back to oneness, which we might think of as the whole self, but also sameness (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). In this way, we can match types of identities to understand commonalities that tell us more about humanity. You might think about the way your identity can be aligned to a cultural identity, gender identity, sexual identity, racial identity, class identity and more. If you think about the breakdown of identity into subcategories, it will be easier to understand the way we can see these identities in language.

Social distinction, on the other hand, is the way individuals interpret the value systems of society (based on the identities listed in the previous paragraph) and 'how such classification schemes ... contribute to broader systems of social inequality' (Rivera 1315). In other words, it allows us to see the way the kaleidoscope of identities is also sorted into hierarchies by society. Ideally, we would not have power relationships between identities, but we see this all the time. As we first consider language and identity, you might already consider the way these identities are hierarchized by society, or at least in some societies, or by some communities and individuals.

Identity and diction

Words are connected to identities. You can make a **lexicon**, or list of words, related to an **identity** of a character when you start to write a piece of **fiction**, or when you write an article or essay. You could start with images of the subject and consider the related language that would describe it if you viewed it from the **perspective** of the culture in which you are writing. When you see an image of a football (or soccer) field, for example, you might think of words related to football, or you might consider the lexicon associated with leisure time or national identity (if there is a national football team). Think of the keywords that you associate with any particular identity – if you read an article about football, you might come across words like ‘offside’, ‘referee’, ‘relegation’ or some other **jargon**. (You will find a list of these, as an example, in the article via the QR code provided.) Being a football player or fan is a type of identity. You would not expect to see the same language when reading about a different topic such as politics, though the terms could be used metaphorically, especially if political debates become nasty or someone scores an ‘own goal’.



You would expect to see language like this in texts about football or soccer. For example, the **non-fiction** account of a football team’s narrative is captured by journalist Joe McGinniss in *The Miracle of Castel di Sangro: A Tale of Passion and Folly in the Heart of Italy*. In the following quote, the football-related language is in bold:

*When the **squad** took the **field**, I was pleased to see that Cristiano had been added to the **midfield**, but less so that Jaconi had opted for a **4-5-1 formation**, with Galli as the lone **attacker**. To me, this seemed tantamount to announcing over the **public address system** that his highest **hope** was for a **0-0 draw**.*

(Joe McGinniss)

The words in bold you might see in a playbook for football. One exception is the word ‘hope’, but anyone who knows a football fan will understand why this word is an essential term to represent their identity. If you aren’t a football fan, you could try to make a lexicon of words associated with a sport you enjoy watching or playing.

In a similar way, you could have a set of language connected to a gay identity. Homosexual individuals can identify with many different cultures and assume all different manifestations of their own cultures in dress, hobbies, speech and more, but a specifically a gay identity might include language like *rainbow* or *pride*. Of course not everyone who is homosexual will have this identity. (You can find more ideas for gender-driven lexicon via the QR code on the right.) Authors might perpetuate stereotypes about what it means to be gay, or they might open us up to different definitions while using language to help readers understand. Let us look at the way author Alex Sanchez writes about gay identity in his novel *The God Box*, where he also questions the nature of accepted masculinity in society. In this quote, one of the teen boys who identifies as gay talks about the way people can be confused about their own sexuality, due to what society tells us gay people should be like. The narrator goes on to use more emotive language that he says connects himself more to a gay identity.



‘...my closest friends have always been girls... You could talk to them about emotional and spiritual stuff... I had guy friends too, but they tended to be more guarded about venturing into discussions much beyond sports, cars, games, or sex.’

(Alex Sanchez 3)

The novel questions the origins of homophobia (or the fear of homosexuality) – ‘What’s unnatural is homophobia. Homo sapiens is the only species in all of nature that responds with hate to homosexuality’ (Sanchez 65) – but it also does this by helping us understand that

homophobia is connected to what people accept as masculine and feminine. Gender is a very different part of our identity from our sexual orientation, though we sometimes talk about the spectra of each in connection.

■ Gendered language

We often begin to think of identity in relation to gender. After all, this is frequently the first thing people ask when a baby is born: ‘Is it a boy or a girl?’ But in asking this question, we are really talking about the baby’s sex. Gender, on the other hand, is a societal construct and an **identity**, rather than a physical manifestation. We know now, of course, that there is gender fluidity in our contemporary society; in some places and communities this fluidity is accepted, while in others it is still challenged as a threat to convention and ways of organizing society. You might investigate such identities in literary works like *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides, whose hermaphrodite protagonist has many internal conflicts about gender, or *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf, whose protagonist transforms gender as s/he time travels through history.

Here, we will focus more on conventional perceived differences between masculine and feminine language, with a focus on contemporary authors fighting age-old stereotypes. We will look at some brief examples in literature of stereotypical masculine and feminine characters, then look at two contemporary authors who question those fixed gender roles in song lyrics and poetry.

First, let us briefly consider stereotypes of masculinity. You will see many examples of men as strong, emotionless creatures who control their families and are not afraid to use violence when necessary. We can consider a couple of examples from works of literature we looked at in Chapter 2.5. In Hemingway’s tale of bull-fighting, *Death in the Afternoon*, a definition of masculinity is enhanced by the comparison to the bull-fighter (the matador):

The truly great killer is not the man who is simply brave enough to go in straight on the bull from a short distance and get the sword in somehow high between the shoulders, but is a man who is able to go in from a short distance, slowly, starting with the left foot and being so skillful in the management of his left hand that as he goes in, left shoulder forward, he makes the bull lower his head and then keeps it down
5 as he goes over the horn, pushes in the sword and, as it is in, goes out along the bull’s flank. The great killer must be able to do this with security and style ...

(Ernest Hemingway 246–7)

Hemingway equates bravery with the way the matadors kill their bulls, a dangerous occupation that demonstrates a skill with violent weapons is viewed to be truly masculine. These men in his works of literature about bull-fighting are revered because of their lack of fear or any other emotion in the ring, their skilled violent nature, their fame and their sexual appeal. You might think of constructs of masculinity in modern gangs, or boxers, as sharing a similar definition.

We can see another example of a violent, emotionless, preferred masculinity in another culture in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (which we also looked at in the previous chapter). The main character, Okonkwo, demonstrates his power through his ability to kill even his own son when the law of the land deems it is necessary; in other words he would rather kill his own son than face the shame of perceived weakness by others. Okonkwo continuously shows dominance over others who are weaker than himself, including his many wives, until he eventually commits suicide at the end of the novel.

However, some writers will use stereotypes in **fiction**, as shown in the Sanchez extract on page 281 or the Hemingway extract on page 282, even when the characters being portrayed are not sexist or violent men (or women). We know these stereotypes are often not true; writers might use a stereotype to create a certain type of character, or work against it to show the more complex individuality of another. It is not only a problem for female stereotypes; it is unfair for all men to be labelled with this kind of identity being asserted through violent and misogynistic language.

SENSITIVE CONTENT

Caution: the music videos and lyrics recommended via the QR codes include sensitive content and expletives.

We have chosen to provide links that allow you to view the words as they originally appear, so you can consider for yourself the effects of how these words are used. This is central to understanding the themes of identity and human behaviour at the heart of this book. Furthermore, the IB recommends that your studies in Language A: Literature should challenge you intellectually, personally and culturally, and expose you to sensitive and mature topics. We invite you to reflect critically on the various perspectives offered while bearing in mind the IB's commitment to international-mindedness and intercultural respect.

In 'How Hip-Hop is Confronting Toxic Masculinity', Ioan Marc Jones discusses how contemporary hip-hop artists show the way men can be vulnerable (you can read the full article via the QR code). It highlights the related lyrics from 'Paranoia' by Chance the Rapper to show that being afraid is natural and honest. If men are told they must deny this part of themselves, they have a lot to risk. Kendrick Lamar (whose work we discussed earlier in Chapter 1.4) arguably redefines masculinity by demonstrating an anti-narrative of its stereotype. In the article, Jones discusses Lamar's offer to the public discourse at length, which can help us to contextualize many of the lyrics Lamar gives us (especially those in his album *To Pimp a Butterfly*).

Just as you study poetry, you might study Lamar's song lyrics as a set in your literature course, or your class might study a group of lyrics together that can help you to better understand global issues. If you choose to analyse Lamar's lyrics to make a conceptual point, such as one relating to masculinity, you will have to use several songs to make your point. Here, we will focus in particular on one song but make reference to a few others that you could investigate further.

Watch the video for 'i' from the album *To Pimp a Butterfly* via the QR code on the right. Notice the **tone** of the language, reflected in the music Lamar has composed and on his face in the video.

In the song 'i', Lamar gives us a portrayal of a man unafraid of showing a soft side that is brave; he reveals his emotional vulnerability, rather than a tough front of machismo like that of the bull-fighters from Hemingway's novel. Vulnerability is when people do not put up a front but instead allow themselves to show their weaknesses. Lamar speaks of mental health and even suicidal thoughts in other songs on the album, including 'u' as mentioned in the Jones article we have linked to via the first QR code. However, this particular song gives him a joyful, optimistic voice, and the title 'i' also shows that individual vulnerability can be embraced. We are all 'i' – individuals just trying to survive and be happy.

As a successful rap artist, Lamar's vulnerability can inspire his listeners to be masculine in his way, or at least allow people like him to exist peacefully in co-existence. In this song, after a description of perceived violence all over the streets, he talks of 'dreams' of 'peace' defying 'the beast' and that, no matter what happens, 'I still smile'; this is repeated several times in the song, showing an antidote to masculine toughness. The smile is also clear in the video; it demonstrates a man unafraid to show joy. He also repeats the word 'peace' several times, showing us that peace



is most important. Again, this is a reinvented form of masculine power and new language in the ‘masculine lexicon’.

He plays with the notion of police and ‘fashion police’, not really against the police, but against the discourse of violence on the streets versus the violence of the police. He ‘shoots’ the idea of this continuing violence. ‘Fashion’ is also becoming much more connected to men’s worlds, where it used to mainly be a part of a feminine **identity**; this is especially true of millennials in the US (Li).

The strongest assertion of a new masculinity by Lamar is the way he repeats the chorus; he tells us that self-love is about defining himself. It is about showing other people who he is as a strong and emotional man; they are not mutually exclusive. He repeats ‘I love myself’ throughout the chorus as a healthy way to view the self, something that could have been seen as weak or twee in the past. Even more explicitly, Lamar tells us that, rather than showing off ‘scars’ from his acts of violent ‘toughness’, his ‘scars’ are the emotional kind – and he lets *them* show. He lets people hear his emotions in his lyrics and is unashamed. His music becomes cathartic for the listener and perhaps himself.

Your class might study this album as a whole or pick songs from different albums for comparison. If your class does the former, you can go back to the contrast in ‘u’ that Jones brings up to understand the full range of mental illness and vulnerability that Lamar allows us to see in this album. Another song, ‘All the Stars’, which Lamar created for the film *Black Panther* in 2018 uses similar language. (You can listen to the song via the QR code here.) He raps again about ‘love’ and ‘dreams’ while questioning people who act ‘entitled’ or too tough to live their lives freely. Lamar once more shows he is not afraid to show emotion, crying and praying ‘for no reason’, thankful for life itself. He shows that he values all kinds of emotions; they are what make life worth living. His challenge to masculinity within a genre once associated with men bragging about violence, crime and power over women is especially poignant. His success shows that people are ready for this change.



When we look at femininity, we can likewise consider the authors who challenge stereotypical notions of what it means to be a woman. Another work mentioned in the previous chapter can demonstrate the stereotypes these authors are fighting against. We have briefly looked at *The Great Gatsby*, by F Scott Fitzgerald, several times throughout this coursebook. Although Fitzgerald gives us a female character who is a sporting champion, and references advances for women in Jordan Baker, the main female character, Daisy, is stereotypically emotional, weak and materialistic. For example, in a scene during which her former lover shows off for her his many shirts, she cannot handle her emotions: ‘Suddenly with a strained sound Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily’ (Fitzgerald 98). Daisy even understands she is somehow lesser when her best hope for her daughter is to be a ‘fool’: ‘I hope she’ll be a fool – that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool’ (Fitzgerald 21). The quote tells us that women who allow themselves to be controlled have an easier life. Daisy even ‘wept’ when she was told her baby was a girl, knowing that the child would have a fate similar to her own. As we saw in Chapter 1.2, we have to remember that authors do not necessarily expect us to approve of all the characters, and that including a stereotypical character like Daisy Buchanan does not mean that Fitzgerald is necessarily sexist or biased. He may include her in order to make the reader question this reality, but the language linked with Daisy helps us to understand this traditional gender identity.

Next, we turn to Scottish poet Carol Ann Duffy, whose work you also examined in the first section. Duffy often challenges gender norms for both men and women in different ways. Her ‘Standing Female Nude’ is ‘an interior **monologue** comprising a female model’s response to the male artist who is painting her image in a cubist style’ (‘Carol Ann Duffy’).

ACTIVITY 1

Language and gender identity

Consider Duffy's poem below and answer the questions that follow, then compare your responses with the notes on page 427.



■ *Le Grand Nu* (literally 'large nude') by Georges Braques (1908)

Standing Female Nude

Six hours like this for a few francs.

Belly nipple arse in the window light,
he drains the colour from me. Further to the right,
Madame. And do try to be still.

5 I shall be represented analytically and hung
in great museums. The bourgeoisie will coo
at such an image of a river-whore. They call it Art.

Maybe. He is concerned with volume, space.

I with the next meal. You're getting thin,

10 Madame, this is not good. My breasts hang
slightly low, the studio is cold. In the tea-leaves
I can see the Queen of England gazing
on my shape. Magnificent, she murmurs,
moving on. It makes me laugh. His name

15 is Georges. They tell me he's a genius.
There are times he does not concentrate
and stiffens for my warmth.

He possesses me on canvas as he dips the brush
repeatedly into the paint. Little man,
20 you've not the money for the arts I sell.
Both poor, we make our living how we can.
I ask him Why do you do this? Because
I have to. There's no choice. Don't talk.
My smile confuses him. These artists
25 take themselves too seriously. At night I fill myself
with wine and dance around the bars. When it's finished
he shows me proudly, lights a cigarette. I say
Twelve francs and get my shawl. It does not look like me.

(Carol Ann Duffy)

- 1 Describe the cubist female nude in the painting by Georges Braques. Do you think the image of femininity is empowering or limiting?
- 2 'Georges' is also mentioned as the painter in the poem. He gazes on the model. Why does he say he paints the model? Who will look at her image?
- 3 Why does the model pose for 'Georges'? What does the model think about the reasons the painter works?
- 4 How does the model take power over the male painter (who is also the one with the money)?
- 5 In what way does specific language demonstrate the power of the woman throughout the poem?

■ Dialects and cultural identity

Other types of language can help us interpret characters and their cultural identity in a text. Dialects, whether formally named subsets of language or more nuanced categorizations of language used by a group, help us to understand character identity. It is not necessarily the language of the author when we read distinctive language used in this way.

In Chapter 2.4, we looked at Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (pages 231–2). In the following preface to the novel, Twain tells us exactly what he is doing with his characters:

Explanatory

In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri Negro dialect*; the extremest from the backwoods Southern dialect; the ordinary 'Pike County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.

- 5 I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.

(Mark Twain Preface)

*Twain's use of the phrase 'negro dialect' had no negative connotation at the time. Not until the 1960s Civil Rights leaders in the US spoke about ceasing the use of this word, for its connection to atrocities and prejudices of the past, did it have this connotation. In 2016, former President Barack Obama signed a bill to make it illegal to use 'negro' in any US Federal Laws (Owen).

Twain's explicit discussion of language use makes a link between identity and language. He shows us the way an author creates dialogue of many different kinds of language use. Here, he references different 'dialect[s]' and even 'modified varieties' of them. Any language has variety in this way, whether named dialects or not. In the US, there are many types of spoken English, sometimes with a mix from a home language and sometimes as a result of different cultures. In the next example, we will first look more carefully at an author who shows us how English and a home language can come together and demonstrate ideas to the reader, and then at a character who makes use of cultural dialect.

Chang-rae Lee

Chang-rae Lee (born 1965) is a Korean–American author and a professor at Stanford University. Lee was born in South Korea but immigrated to the US when he was only three years old. He often depicts Korean–American characters in his books as well as related 'themes of immigration, identity, alienation, and the intricacies of the Asian–American experience' ('On Writing and Identity: an interview with Author and Professor Chang-rae Lee'). In an interview for Stanford, Lee describes the way his experience as an immigrant has shaped his writing:



I've always been compelled by the notions of context and individuality. This interest has been expressed in different ways across my books, but I think I've been consistently fascinated by the question of persons who find themselves in a context that either fits too well or doesn't fit at all, by persons who feel they exist simultaneously inside and outside of a cultural or political space. It's no surprise that as an immigrant I've always been extra conscious of this interplay.

('On Writing and Identity: An Interview with Professor Chang-rae Lee')

In *Native Speaker*, Chang-rae Lee uses the language of a Korean–American to tell some of the story of Henry Park, a spy who is attempting to find information about a New York politician. The fact that Park's ex-wife has a job as a speech therapist adds another layer to the theme of affected language in the text. Novels like this show both struggle and power in having a second home language. Some of you might have this experience, or might even have several home languages; this type of experience comes with both challenges and benefits. Although it is difficult to persevere in a language that is not their own, by writing narratives that include this language, authors reclaim their authority and their cultural identities become something that is layered into a reflection in language.

In the following passage, the narrator (Henry Park), recalls the way his father would speak in either English or Korean at different times for effect – this change between languages is called **code-switching**. Additionally, Lee writes in the **accents** of characters without command of 'proper' English, to help us understand the way these characters would sound and the way they might be misunderstood by others. Consider the way you use different language, even particular words, with different people. What is a word you might use with friends but not your teachers or parents? Why is that the case? Considering how you use code-switching might help you to understand the following passage.

We pick up the narrative after Park's father has just used a string of nonsensical offensive expletives to berate his wife:

I broke into their argument and started yelling at him, making sure I was speaking in complete sentences about his cowardice and unfairness, shooting back at him his own medicine, until he slammed both palms on the table and demanded, 'You shut up! You shut up!'

I kept at him anyway, using the biggest words I knew, whether they made sense or not, school words like
 5 'socioeconomic' and 'intangible', anything I could lift from my dizzy burning thoughts and hurl against him, until my mother, who'd been perfectly quiet the whole time, whacked me hard across the back of the head and shouted in Korean, *Who do you think you are!*

Fair fight or not, she wasn't going to let me dress down my father, not with language, not with anything.

'Hen-ry,' he now said, accenting as always the second syllable, 'you know, it's difficult now. Your mommy
 10 dead and nobody at home. You too young for that. This nice lady, she come for you. Take care home, food. Nice dinner. Clean house. Better that way.'

I didn't answer him.

'I better tell you before, I know, but I know you don't like. So what I do? I go to store in morning and come home late, nine o'clock, ten. No good, no good. Nice lady, she fix that. And soon we move to nice
 15 neighborhood, over near Fern Pond, big house and yard. Very nice place.'

'Fern Pond? I don't want to move! And I don't want to move there, all the rich kids live there.'

'Ha!' he laughed. 'You rich kid now, your daddy rich rich man. Big house, big tree, now even we got
 house lady. Nice big yard for you. I pay all cash.'

'What? You bought a house already?'

20 'Price very low for big house. Fix-her-upper. You thank me someday ...'

'I won't. I won't move. No way.'

Byong-ho, he said firmly. His voice was already changing. He was shifting into Korean, getting his throat ready. Then he spoke as he rose to leave. *Let's not hear one more thing about it. The woman will come with us to the new house and take care of you. This is what I have decided. Our talk is past usefulness.*

25 *There will be no other way.*

(Chang-rae Lee 63-4)

In the passage above, Lee immediately demonstrates the power of moving between languages. The narrator's father uses English like a weapon: he is partly using it to access a different **identity**, one he equates with his life in the US as an immigrant on the streets of New York, no doubt tougher by the experience, and he is partly using it as a way to either connect with English speakers in his shop or to isolate his wife in the home, who speaks very little English. Just prior to the extract above, when he was emotionally upset, Park's father uses harsh swear-words to berate his wife. Perhaps the language sounds less harsh to his ears in a second language, but his son (who has more command over the language) stands up to his father. This demonstrates the way the next generation of immigrants, who have more control over the local language, can have power over their parents. The narrator uses 'the biggest words I knew, whether they made sense or not' against his father to demonstrate his linguistic superiority. When his mother gets angry and yells at him in Korean, it shows even more clearly how she is belittled by her lack of knowledge of the English language. She does not understand the situation fully.

What is not immediately clear (out of context) is that the argument was a flashback to an earlier time. The father (in the present time) is then trying to connect with his son after the mother has died to convince him that a relationship with another woman who will be his step-mother will be for the best. In the sentence beginning ‘Hen-ry’, Lee clarifies the strong Korean **accent** and poor English grammar to show the father’s vulnerability. Though he tries to relate to his son in this way, in the language his son comfortably uses with his friends and at school, he still fails to sound correct and therefore loses power in the conversation. When he is unable to convince his son that the move is for the best, he switches to Korean. In Korean, he speaks more directly and chastises his son for complaining.

Lee uses English translation in italics for the Korean parts of his narrative, perhaps to demonstrate the fluidity of the narrator’s world that moves between these two languages. A non-Korean speaker would have to look at footnotes in a cumbersome way that would disrupt the flow of the text. Notice that in the first part of the passage, the father uses English to berate the mother, while in the second part he uses Korean to berate his son. In each case, he uses the language that the other member of the **conflict** is less capable of speaking. In this way, he asserts his power through language.

The novel as a whole documents many encounters with language through the eyes of the narrator. Language is often connected with race and location. As immigrants, the narrator’s family is both new in New York and of a minor race; therefore, their accents and poor knowledge of English mark them as different and, sadly, to some, inferior. However, parts of the novel show us that there is also power in holding on to your identity through language. By preserving parts of our roots and culture in this way, we can better understand where we come from or, by learning a new language or dialect, we can better understand a group of people who speak and publish writing in it.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

Sometimes just by putting language in print, we give it power – if it is published, it is ‘real’. We know that there are many types of English around the world: in 46 countries, more than half of the inhabitants speak English (Smith, O), suggesting that there must be many dialects, accents and slang words around the world. We even name some types of English: in Singapore, we have Singlish; in parts of China or Hong Kong, Chinglish; sometimes we also reference American English or British English, especially when talking about the spelling and grammar rules we might use. You can even set your computer spell-check that way. Depending on your country of birth or from whom you have learned English, you might have a hard time understanding Australian slang words or an Irish accent, even if the speaker has English as their mother tongue. These ‘Englishes’ are products of place, other mother-tongue languages and the creativity of groups of people.

For this reason, we can look at cultural identity through the lens of different communities that use language together in a particular way, and your investigation of the global issue of language could focus on a specific group’s language use. We have had several examples of Black English in this book. We will take a short look at an essay from James Baldwin before we consider dialogue in a fictional narrative that plays with this language and identity. To investigate the global issue of political language further, you can consider Black English in a text alongside a work in translation that uses another type of language identifier, such as that of gender or class. You might determine to what extent the texts are stereotypical, subversive or empowering. This relates aptly to the field of inquiry of culture, identity and community.

In 'If Black English isn't a Language, Then Tell me, What is?' Baldwin uses perfect standard academic American English to talk about Black English, sometimes also called African–American Vernacular English or Ebonics. By naming it as a language rather than a set of errors of English, he gives power to people who speak it. In that regard, Twain does the same thing by portraying different dialects in his novel. We will look at part of Baldwin's essay here, but you can read it in full via the QR code in the margin.



James Baldwin

James Baldwin (1924–1987) was a writer of many genres and styles. Born in Harlem, New York, Baldwin emigrated to Paris at the age of 24 to escape a fated identity as a gay black man in America (Pierpont). He wanted to embrace both of these identities but in his own way; 'he never ceased to reflect on his experience as a black man in white America' ('James Baldwin'). Baldwin wrote about race, class, gender and sexual identity at length both in his essays and fictional narratives.

His 1979 essay, printed in *The New York Times*, gives a clear distinction of what this language is and why it should be named and used. Writing from France, Baldwin uses examples from the French language to articulate how he feels about all dialects:

People evolve a language in order to describe and thus control their circumstances, or in order not to be submerged by a reality that they cannot articulate. (And, if they cannot articulate it, they *are* submerged.) A Frenchman living in Paris speaks a subtly and crucially different language from that of the man living in Marseilles; neither sounds very much like a man living in Quebec; and they would all have great difficulty
 5 in apprehending what the man from Guadeloupe, or Martinique, is saying, to say nothing of the man from Senegal – although the 'common' language of all these areas is French. But each has paid, and is paying, a different price for this 'common' language, in which, as it turns out, they are not saying, and cannot be saying, the same things: They each have very different realities to articulate, or control.

What joins all languages, and all men, is the necessity to confront life, in order, not inconceivably, to outwit
 10 death: The price for this is the acceptance, and achievement, of one's temporal identity. So that, for example, though it is not taught in the schools (and this has the potential of becoming a political issue) the south of France still clings to its ancient and musical Provençal, which resists being described as a 'dialect'. And much of the tension in the Basque countries, and in Wales, is due to the Basque and Welsh determination not to allow their languages to be destroyed. This determination also feeds the flames in Ireland for many
 15 indignities the Irish have been forced to undergo at English hands is the English contempt for their language.

(James Baldwin)

Baldwin connects language directly to 'identity' and the way 'acceptance', 'achievement' (line 10) and 'the necessity to confront life' (line 9) all make up this identity through the language we articulate in. He argues that we hold on to forms of language in order to preserve cultural identity and history of groups of people. Language is like a **perspective** of the world; he discusses French speakers from different nations (France, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Senegal) and the way they have 'different realities to articulate' (line 8).

Ultimately, Baldwin tells us that ‘language is also a political instrument, means, and proof of power. It is the most vivid and crucial key to identify: It reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity’ (Baldwin). He talks about the creation of the ‘black diaspora’ (or cultural group) in America through the use of Black English. If we think back to Lee’s novel *Native Speaker*, consider that there is also, for example, a Korean diaspora throughout the world who continue their cultural practices through different types of traditions, and perhaps especially through the continued use of the Korean language (or dialects of it).

However, in the same way that Lee speaks fluent American English, Baldwin, a black American, writes this essay in ‘proper’, ‘standard’ American English, the spelling and grammar of the newspaper for which it is printed. He and other black American authors, like Toni Morrison, whom he quotes in the essay, show this dexterity by using narration and dialogue both in this standard English and Black English. The use of different Englishes shows different identities and perhaps multiple parts of the author’s self – for we are all made up of several parts or communities. Baldwin also speaks French; perhaps this demonstrates another part of himself. His essay is ultimately more than a defender of dialects; it is the argument that a monolingual society negates our identities.

It is also important to consider that the dialect or **accent** written into a character’s dialogue may show a conscious decision by the character to portray a certain **identity**. In other words, they may be playing with their identity or covering up some aspect of their roots. We will now look at another author’s effective use of this language play.

Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty*, which you will also revisit in Chapter 3.3, is a novel about a mixed-race family living outside of Boston. With an African-American mother named Kiki and a white-English academic father named Howard, a confluence of language associated with different races and classes emerges on Smith’s pages.

Zadie Smith

Zadie Smith, who was born in 1975, is a British novelist, essayist and short-story writer. Her first novel *White Teeth* (2000), which she wrote while studying English Literature at Cambridge University and which tells the stories of multicultural Londoners, was an immediate success. A television adaptation of the novel appeared in 2002. *On Beauty*, her third novel, was published in 2005. In 2010 she was appointed professor in the Creative Writing faculty of New York University.



In the following passages, Smith includes language of the street, academia and poetry. Beyond these passages, there are further contrasts between British and American English as well as different local dialects of American English (Florida, Massachusetts). Before you read, note that:

- Zora and Levi are sister and brother, the children of Kiki and Howard (and are therefore of mixed race)
- Levi is still in high school
- Zora attends a fictional university (Wellington) where her father works, and she takes a poetry class with (white) professor Claire
- Carl is a young black poet ‘from the streets’ who has been working with Zora’s poetry class at Wellington.

ACTIVITY 2

Extended-response questions

Answer the questions in relation to each of the passages. These are long-answer, thinking questions that you might respond to in your learning portfolios or in oral discussion. Either way, try to form a **thesis statement** in response. Remember that thesis statements should be argumentative, clear and concise. Your response should be purposeful beyond the text and you should be articulating a global issue. To take it a step further, identify and analyse specific quotes to support your statement. When you have finished, turn to page 428 and compare your answers to those suggested at the back of the book.

‘This old lady on Redwood – I was minding my business – and she’s looking at me, all the way down the street, like everybody in this town – she stops me, speaking to me – she looked like she was trying to work out if I was gonna kill her.’

This of course was not true. But Levi had a point to make, and he would have to
5 bend the truth to make it.

‘And then she started talking about my mom this, my mom that. Black lady.’

Howard made a noise of objection, but was overruled.

‘No, no, but that don’t make no difference. Any black lady who be white enough to live on Redwood thinks’ *zackly* the same way as any old white lady.’

10 ‘Who is white enough,’ corrected Zora. ‘It’s the worst kind of pretension, you know, to fake the way you speak – to steal somebody else’s grammar. People less fortunate than you. It’s grotesque.’

(Zadie Smith 85)

- 1 In the first excerpt, Levi demonstrates that he speaks differently from the rest of the academic family. What does his **appropriation** of Black English demonstrate about language and identity?

‘Yes ... Now, Zora, you know there are people in the college who don’t approve of our class – I mean they don’t approve of people like Chantelle ... people like *Carl*, being a part of our community here at Wellington. It’s going to be on the agenda at that meeting. There’s a general conservative trend sweeping this university
5 right now, and it really *frightens* me. And they don’t want to hear from *me*. They’ve already decided I’m the communist looney-tune anti-war poetess or whatever they think I am. I think we need a strong advocate for this class from other side. So we’re not just arguing the same stupid dialect over and over. And I think a student would be much more appropriate – to make the case. Somebody who has
10 benefited from the experience of learning alongside these people. Someone who could ... well, attend in my place. Make a barnstorming speech. About something they believed in.’

Zora’s all-time academic fantasy was to address the faculty members of Wellington College with a barnstorming speech.

15 ‘You want *me* to go?’

‘Only *only*, if you felt comfortable doing that!’

‘Wait – a speech I’d devised and written?’

‘Well, I didn’t mean an actual *speech* speech – but I guess as long as you knew what you want to–’

20 ‘I mean, what are we *doing*,’ asked Zora loudly, ‘if we can’t extend the *enormous* resources of this institution to people who need it? It’s so *disgusting*.’

Claire smiled. 'You're perfect already.'

'Just me. You wouldn't be there?'

'I think it would be much more powerful if it was you speaking your own mind.'

- 25 I mean, what I'd *really* like to do is sent Carl himself, but you know ...' said Claire, sighing. 'Depressing as it is, the truth is these people won't respond to an appeal to their consciences in any language other than Wellington language, Zora. You of all people. And I don't meant to get overly dramatic here, but when I think of Carl, I'm thinking of someone who doesn't have a voice and who
- 30 needs someone like you, who has a very powerful voice, to speak for him. I actually think it's that important. I also think it's a beautiful thing to do for a dispossessed person in this climate. Don't you feel that?'

(Zadie Smith 262–3)

- 2 In the second excerpt, the professor, Claire, values a student voice, but suggests the other academics will only respond to 'Wellington language'. Carl is the student they are advocating for and he has proven at a poetry slam that his work in language is artistically superior to other students like Zora. What does Smith tell us about the nature of academic language here?

SENSITIVE CONTENT

Caution: the following extract includes mild expletives.

We have chosen to allow you to view the words of this extract as they originally appear, so you can consider for yourself the effects of how these words are used. This is central to understanding the themes of identity and human behaviour at the heart of this book. Furthermore, the IB recommends that your studies in Language A: Literature should challenge you intellectually, personally and culturally, and expose you to sensitive and mature topics. We invite you to reflect critically on the various perspectives offered while bearing in mind the IB's commitment to international-mindedness and intercultural respect.

'Minimum wage getting shit on everybody all the time – a lot of stuff, I guess.'

Zora closed the window and sat down. She leaned into Carl's body to look at his computer. He covered the screen with his hands.

'Aw, man – don't be doing that – I ain't even spellchecked it, man.'

- 5 Zora peeled his fingers from the monitor. 'Crossroads ... The Tracy Chapman album, no?'

'No,' said Carl, 'the motif.'

'Oh I see,' said Zora in a teasing voice. 'Pardon me. The *motif*.'

- 'You think I can't know a word 'cos you know it, is that it?' demanded Carl, and immediately regretted it. You couldn't get angry with middle-class people like that – they got upset too quickly.
- 10

'No – I – I mean, no, Carl, I didn't mean it like that.'

- 'Oh man ... I know you didn't. Calm down, there.' He patted her hand softly. He couldn't know about the electric whoosh that went through her body when he did that. Now she looked at him funny.
- 15

'Why are you looking at me weird like that?'

'No, I was just ... I'm so *proud* of you.'

Carl laughed.

- 'Seriously. You're an amazing person. Look at what you've achieved, what you're achieving every day. That's so my whole point. You *deserve* to be at this university. You're about fifteen times as brilliant and hard-working as most of these over-privileged assholes.'
- 20

‘Man, shut up.’

‘Well, it’s true.’

25 ‘What’s *true* is that I wouldn’t be doing none of this is I hadn’t met you. So there you go, if you’re gonna start getting all Oprah about the situation.’

‘Now, *you* shut up,’ said Zora, beaming.

‘Let’s *both* shut the hell up,’ suggested Carl, and touched his keyboard. His screen, which had gone to sleep in the last few seconds, came back to life. He tried to
30 retrace the thread of his last half-written sentence.

(Zadie Smith 376–7)

3 In the third passage, what does the discussion about language between Zora and Carl reveal about the connection between language and power?

4 Extension activity: Academic English is often considered the highest **register** of the language. This creates a hierarchy of language, very likely with ‘street language’ at the bottom.

What do you think of this power structure? Can you imagine when ‘street language’ might indeed be more powerful?

Language and social distinctions

On Beauty starts to look at language in connection not only to reflections of identity, but also the tensions and power struggles in society derived from using different types of language. We make choices with language all the time for different reasons. Instead of our own identities, we may appeal to certain types of people by using this language. You would probably use a ‘high’ level of standard English for a job interview or when you write an essay for your teacher – and you would probably be more likely to get the job or a better grade for doing so.

However, when you speak with your friends, you might use different types of slang or swear-words, for example, to connect about different topics in a more authentic way. You might also use language that either adults or other communities do not understand in order to form your own community culture. The social distinction comes in when people decide that this other language represents a different class or different **perspective** on the world. To some extent, this is always true, but we have to be careful in that it does not mean one type of language is *better* than another; it just has different reasons or spaces for its articulation.

Sometimes people who speak multiple languages use one or the other for effect – the protagonist’s father in Lee’s *Native Speaker* chooses to use English with his wife:

Sometimes, when he wanted to hide or not outright lie, he chose to speak in English. He used to break into it when he argued with my mother, and it drove her crazy when he did and she would just plead, ‘No, no!’ as though he had suddenly introduced a switchblade into a clean fistfight.

(Chang-rae Lee 58)

People use language choice for power in personal relationships in the same way that it is powerful for large groups or even nations. The language that authors choose to write in can also be politically motivated. This is not only true about dialect: for example, Dai Sijie writes in French about the Chinese Cultural Revolution, even though his mother tongue is Chinese. In the novel *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, the emigrant who now lives in France

describes a fictionalized historical account for an outside audience. Dai Sijie, who is also a filmmaker, told *The New York Times* that he wrote in French because he had several failed attempts at films in Chinese; although French was his second language, he was ‘chasing an audience’ in his adopted homeland (Riding). Furthermore, Dai’s novel is banned in China because of his use of Western literature:

‘It wasn’t that I touched the Cultural Revolution,’ Mr Dai said [...] ‘They did not accept that Western literature could change a Chinese girl. I explained [to Chinese authorities] that classical literature is a universal heritage, but to no avail ...’

(Riding)

Ironically, the book is about ‘a stash of forbidden books’ (Dai 45), those of Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens and more, and they make the narrator ‘feel as if [his] pale hands were in touch with human lives’ (Dai 93). Dai peppers his **fiction** with points about Mao and Chinese history that a foreign reader might not know. He also engages in a minor subtext about the ‘dominant’ Chinese language. Here, the narrator speaks to an old man in the re-education village during the Cultural Revolution:

I greeted him, not in Szechuan dialect of our province, but in Mandarin, as if I were an actor in a film.

‘What language is he speaking?’ the old man asked Luo, puzzled.

‘The official language,’ replied Luo. ‘The language of Beijing. Don’t you speak Mandarin?’

(Dai Sijie 63)

The inclusion of this minor discussion about dialect and the ‘official language’ of Beijing (Mandarin or Putonghua) demonstrates an added awareness of Dai’s language choice for the text as a whole. There are ongoing conflicts about Mandarin’s use as the language of official business and education in some places. Similarly, Parisian French once became this type of official language of France:

‘... in 1539, King François I signed into law an edict, the Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts, which made Francien, the northern French dialect of Paris and the Île-de-France, the entire county’s official language ...’

(Bahrami)

Dialects of French are still spoken some 500 years later. French readers of Dai’s work would be aware of this parallel and may find purpose in understanding their own language through conflicts in another.

● TOK Links: Language choices – knowledge and power

Being able to choose the language we use gives us **agency** in what we want to say. We must understand that the language we use will be judged by others and can even be political. Furthermore, based on our language choices, some and not others will be able to fully understand what it is we want to say, because knowledge is conveyed through language.

Some authors also use multilingualism for effect, and include words or phrases from other languages in an English text. This use of language can make a text more authentic or more specific; for example, in *War and Peace*, Tolstoy uses French dialogue as the upper class in Russia often spoke in this language. Even in translation from Russian to English, the text keeps the French dialogue intact with added footnotes for those who need it. This gives authenticity to the text and tells us something about the relationship between language and class. In other examples, single words from another language are included: Chinua Achebe uses some Igbo language in *Things Fall Apart* (discussed in the previous chapter). This inclusion of local Nigerian language and glossary in an English text again gives authenticity but also shows us that some words are untranslatable.

■ Class and language

Shakespeare's dialogues may sound like academic language to you because the language his characters use is old and they are often highly educated aristocrats. Keep in mind that his language is still considered Modern English, but the words are used less often nowadays, or are used in different ways. However, even Shakespeare uses street talk for certain characters, including vulgar slang and breaks from his poetic use of **iambic pentameter**, which we learned about in Chapter 1.4.

One example of such a character is the porter, or gatekeeper, in *Macbeth*. First performed in 1606, this play tells the story of Macbeth's rise to power in Scotland. After an initial taste of power, he gets overly ambitious and begins sneakily and violently taking over the kingdom, killing the former king as well as his best friend. Much of the play is about this idea of climbing the hierarchy, and makes us question for what purpose and at what cost people do so.

Most of the speaking characters in *Macbeth* are of a noble class. However, one character of low class with extended dialogue is the porter of Macbeth's castle. Below is his **soliloquy**, just before Macduff enters and it turns into a dialogue.

Knocking within. Enter a Porter.

PORTER Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key. (*Knock.*) Knock, knock! Who's there, i' the name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer, that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty: come in time; have napkins enow about you; here you'll sweat for't. (*Knock.*) Knock, knock! Who's there, in the other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven: O, come in, equivocator. (*Knock.*) Knock, knock! Who's there? Faith, here's an English tailor come hither, for stealing out of a French hose: come in, tailor; here you may roast your goose. (*Knock.*) Knock, knock! Never at quiet. – What are you? – But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire.

Anon, anon!

[The Porter opens the door to] Macduff and Lennox.

I pray you, remember the porter.

(*Macbeth Act 2 Scene 3 Lines 1–20*)

The porter likens himself to the gatekeeper of hell ('hell-gate'): more than determining his own character, this **metaphor** tells us he is judging the people inside the castle. Before other nobles understand that Macbeth is evil and stop worshipping him, the porter condemns him for his actions and his character. He also suggests that whoever is at the gate might be seeking entry into hell. The imagined 'farmer', 'tailor' and 'equivocator' seek this entry: the farmer and tailor trick their customers into earning more money; the equivocator tries to play God, but of course God knows he is evil. In other words, the porter knows you cannot hide from your moral decisions – they will come back to haunt you.

The porter, then, uses clever plays of language but in a **low register** and speaks the truth through this **vernacular**. By the end of his imaginative speech, he has already had enough of hell's 'bonfire' and the people who might enter into it. He is not interested in engaging with these types

of people; however, the continued knocking in stage directions and in his own speech register a kind of doom they will all face.

The porter concludes by saying: 'I pray you, remember the porter'. This might mean simply to leave him a tip, to allow him a meagre wage for his work, and perhaps for his wit, but it also tells the audience that what he is saying might be important. Rather than just a strange character on the stage, he is like truth chiming in on a diseased group of people. As the gatekeeper, he sees much of the evil ways of the nobles. The low register of his language might address the audience directly without any distracting poetic style.

The porter's colloquial language includes sexual **connotation** ('stealing out of French hose' may be an obscene reference to a prostitute; 'goose' is also another word for prostitute) and is emphasized even more by his lack of **iambic pentameter**. But Shakespeare does not value this type of register less: by giving us a sharp window of truth through the porter's streetwise tongue, he shows us the value of different Englishes.

Pygmalion (1912), written by Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, explores English dialect as connected to class. In it linguist Professor Higgins is initially challenged by his friend, Colonel Pickering, to change the street-talking Eliza Doolittle into a 'refined' woman, based on her language skills. She speaks in cockney dialect (a dialect very specifically from East London) and their aim is to get her speaking 'proper' standard British English. Higgins trains Eliza in speech over some months and goes through several trials of passing for upper class with her changed speech. Consider conversations you may have had in English class about using the 'correct grammar' in your essays. Is it only to achieve a higher mark or are there other reasons to use 'proper' English? Also consider if you have ever felt belittled by someone using language you didn't fully understand. Although Higgins believes he controls her throughout the play, Eliza eventually runs away and threatens to get help with her speech elsewhere, and possibly go off with a young man. Her dramatically changed language skills show she is in control of her choices by the end of the play. *Pygmalion* was adapted into the film *My Fair Lady* in 1964, which you might be familiar with.

George Bernard Shaw

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) was an Irish playwright who immigrated to London early in his career. Coming from a low-income family in Dublin, Shaw struggled through his first years in London, but eventually wrote over sixty plays and earned the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1925. 'Shaw's radical rationalism, his utter disregard of conventions, his keen dialectic interest and verbal wit often turn the stage into a forum of ideas' ('The Nobel Prize in Literature 1925').



ACTIVITY 3

Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw

Read the passage on the following page and answer the following questions, then compare your answers to the notes on page 429. As you read, consider the difference in language used between Liza and Higgins.

- HIGGINS Listen, Eliza. I think you said you came in a taxi.
- LIZA Well, what if I did? I've as good a right to take a taxi as anyone else.
- HIGGINS You have, Eliza; and in future you shall have as many taxis as you want. You shall go up and down and round the town in a taxi every day. Think of that, Eliza.
- 5 MRS PEARCE Mr Higgins: you're tempting the girl. It's not right. She should think of the future.
- HIGGINS At her age! Nonsense! Time enough to think of the future when you haven't any future to think of. No, Eliza: do as this lady does: think of other people's futures; but never think of your own. Think of chocolates, and taxis, and gold, and diamonds.
- 10 LIZA No: I don't want no gold and no diamonds. I'm a good girl, I am. [She sits down again, with an attempt at dignity.]
- HIGGINS You shall remain so, Eliza, under the care of Mrs Pearce. And you shall marry an officer in the Guards, with a beautiful moustache: the son of a marquis, who will disinherit him for marrying you, but will relent when he sees your beauty and goodness—
- 15 PICKERING Excuse me, Higgins; but I really must interfere. Mrs Pearce is quite right. If this girl is to put herself in your hands for six months for an experiment in teaching, she must understand thoroughly what she's doing.
- 20 HIGGINS How can she? She's incapable of understanding anything. Besides, do any of us understand what we are doing? If we did, would we ever do it?
- 25 PICKERING Very clever, Higgins; but not sound sense. [To Eliza] Miss Doolittle—
- LIZA [overwhelmed] Ah—ah—ow—oo!
- HIGGINS There! That's all you get out of Eliza. Ah—ah—ow—oo! No use explaining. As a military man you ought to know that. Give her her orders: that's what she wants. Eliza: you are to live here for the next six months, learning how to speak beautifully, like a lady in a florist's shop. If you're good and do whatever you're told, you shall sleep in a proper bedroom, and have lots to eat, and money to buy chocolates and take rides in taxis. If you're naughty and idle you will sleep in the back kitchen among the black beetles, and be walloped by Mrs Pearce with a broomstick. At the end of six months you shall go to Buckingham Palace in a carriage, beautifully dressed. If the King finds out you're not a lady, you will be taken by the police to the Tower of London, where your head will be cut off as a warning to other presumptuous flower girls.
- 30 40 If you are not found out, you shall have a present of seven-and-sixpence to start life with as a lady in a shop. If you refuse this offer you will be a most ungrateful and wicked girl; and the angels will weep for you. [To Pickering] Now are you satisfied, Pickering? [To Mrs Pearce] Can I put it more plainly and fairly, Mrs Pearce?
- 45 MRS PEARCE [patiently] I think you'd better let me speak to the girl properly in private. I don't know that I can take charge of her or consent to the arrangement at all. Of course I know you don't mean her any harm; but when you get what you call interested in people's accents, you never think or care what may happen to them or you. Come with me, Eliza.
- 50

HIGGINS	That's all right. Thank you, Mrs Pearce. Bundle her off to the bath-room.
LIZA	[rising reluctantly and suspiciously] You're a great bully, you are. I won't stay here if I don't like. I won't let nobody wallop me. I never asked to go to Bucknam Palace, I didn't. I was never in trouble with the police, not me. I'm a good girl—
55	
MRS PEARCE	Don't answer back, girl. You don't understand the gentleman. Come with me. [She leads the way to the door, and holds it open for Eliza.]
	<i>(George Bernard Shaw, Act II)</i>

- 1 What differences are there in the style of speech between Liza and the other characters? Cite examples.
- 2 What does Liza's style of language use tell you about her identity?
- 3 What connections do you see between money and language in the passage?
- 4 Why does Mrs Pearce ask to 'speak to the girl properly in private'? What does she mean by speaking 'properly', in contrast to the way Higgins thinks of speaking properly?
- 5 How might a full change in Liza's language limit her in the future? Note these quotes from different parts of the play:
 - a Act I: THE FLOWER GIRL. Good enough for ye—oo. Now you know, don't you? I'm come to have lessons, I am. And to pay for em too: make no mistake.
 - b Act IV: LIZA. I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me.
- 6 At the end of the play, Liza takes matters into her own hands. In what ways could knowledge of both standard and cockney English help her in her journey to independence?

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at the way language helps us understand **identity** and social distinction. **Diction** might include **jargon** or slang and other keywords that relate directly to an identity. Diction also creates a particular **register** of the language, but this is additionally influenced by style. The way words are put together can be analysed in many ways; you learned how to accomplish this skill in the first section of this book, and can apply it to your understanding of the way language reflects different identities. Furthermore, you can consider the way authors speak multiple languages, dialects or registers themselves and use these distinctions in their texts to create identity and define social differences.

As we move to the last section of this book, on **intertextuality**, consider the way we have already begun to compare and contrast many works of literature in this book. In the chapters that follow, you will learn more formally how to find meaning and purpose by looking at two or more works in this way. You will also begin to make your own conceptual discoveries about global issues through the dialogue of literature.

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Intertextuality: connecting texts

3.1

How do conventions and systems of reference evolve over time?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To explore and deepen your understanding of some of the evolving traditions and conventions of poetry, drama and prose
- ▶ To explore the ways in which works in all literary forms make use of systems of reference
- ▶ To explore how those systems of reference evolve over time

Introduction

■ What does 'intertextuality' mean?

No text exists in a vacuum. All novels, plays and poems are connected to other texts; they relate to – they talk to, are in conversations with, if you like – other texts. When we use the word *intertextuality*, therefore, we are talking about the connections between ('inter') different works of literature ('texts').

In his 1973 book, *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom argues that the history of poetry is 'indistinguishable from poetic influence' (Bloom). In his mind all literature is influenced by other literature. People who write books are almost always keen readers. What they write, therefore, is shaped and influenced by what they read; they are continuing a conversation with books that have come before and creating a pathway for books that will be written in the future.

When we read a text, how we read it is shaped and conditioned by what we have read previously. We naturally notice connections, we spot when things are similar and different, and we make judgments about why we like some texts more than others. In other words, we bring our own experiences to our reading and our responses and interpretations are shaped by those experiences. In fact, when we read a text, what we are actually doing is interweaving our ideas and previous experiences with the text in front of us. Those previous experiences are works that we have read before: other novels, plays, poems, and works of non-fiction. The word *intertextuality* actually comes from a Latin word meaning to 'interweave'. Therefore, an intertextual approach to literature is constantly making connections and exploring the dialogue that takes place between texts across space and time.

This section will explore this approach in detail, looking at relationships between literary texts and exploring themes, forms, generic conventions and literary traditions. It will encourage you to develop a personal, critical response to reading literature which appreciates and values the network of relationships that exists between different texts. It will support you in asking key critical questions about works of literature and the nature of their interrelations with other works.

As you have discovered in Sections 1 and 2 of this book, your study of literature in the IB Diploma is focused on four key literary forms: poetry, drama, prose fiction, and prose non-fiction. You have already read about some of the conventions of these different forms and learned how writers use various forms and structures to help shape their work. This chapter will examine how some of those conventions have evolved over time: how some traditions have remained remarkably consistent, and how some have changed in many and diverse ways. We will look at some of the precursors to modern English literature and we will examine how systems of reference for literature have also shifted and evolved over time in order to deepen our understanding of how texts work intertextually.

Traditions and conventions

Ian McEwan's 1997 novel *Enduring Love* opens with the deceptively simple sentence: 'The beginning is simple to mark' (McEwan 1). His text, like so many works of literature, is being ironic: the manner in which the narrative plays out over the next few pages suggests to the reader how difficult it really is to pinpoint exactly when any experience begins. It is the same for English Literature: there is no simple beginning.

There are, however, several traditions that we will examine briefly in order to develop a better understanding of the contexts for some of the **conventions** and systems of reference that have developed and evolved over time. Many of these continue to influence the literature we read today. The first is the influence of the classical tradition. Greek and Roman literary works have, throughout the history of English literature, been consistently important influences. For many writers and readers, the seminal, most important, work is Homer's *The Iliad*. This ancient Greek poem about the siege of Troy during the Trojan wars is attributed to an 'author' called 'Homer'. We don't really know who Homer was; he may well have been an individual, or a group of writers, or the narrative may simply be part of the 'oral tradition' (stories passed down by word of mouth over time). Nevertheless, *The Iliad*, and its 'sequel', *Odyssey*, have been hugely influential. One small example of the ways in which subsequent poets have continued to imitate some of its classical forms is in the opening poetic invocation where, conventionally, a poem calls on a muse to 'sing' the poem. Martin Hammond's 1987 translation of *The Iliad*, for instance, begins: '**Sing**, goddess, of the anger of Achilleus, son of Peleus' (Hammond 51). This motif of invoking song is picked up and consciously repeated by many subsequent writers including John Milton in 1667 with *Paradise Lost*, which begins: 'Of Mans First Disobedience ... **Sing** Heav'nly Muse', and then by Alexander Pope in 1717 with 'The Rape of the Lock', which starts: 'What dire Offence from am'rous Causes springs, / What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things, / **I sing**' (Pope, Alexander and Butt 218–19). This is just one, very small, example of how writers continue to evoke traditions over time. Writers in later centuries often use exactly the same conventions because they share a similar system of reference: in this example, that of Greek Epic poetry. Their gesture of reference is an explicit intertextual nod to the convention in which they're working.

EE Links: Modern retellings

The influence of works from the ancient classical traditions (*The Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are perhaps the most obvious examples) continue to fascinate writers even today. Over the last few centuries poets – such as Alexander Pope, Matthew Arnold, and Robert Graves, among many others – have undertaken 'translations' or retellings of these classical works. You might be interested in looking at these as subject matter for a possible extended essay, or perhaps you might write about even more contemporary versions. Two exciting recent 'translations' are Simon Armitage's *Homer's Odyssey*, which reworks the text as a series of compelling dramatic dialogues, and Christopher Logue's *War Music*. Logue's retelling of *The Iliad* is sparkingly contemporary, employing scenes that are almost cinematic and using brashly up-to-date language.

Other classical conventions that have evolved into English literature include the dramatic concepts of **tragedy** and comedy, which derive, in large part, from Roman theatre and playwrights such as Seneca and Euripides, Plautus and Terence. In addition, Aristotle's *Poetics*, written in about 335 BC, was an early work of literary criticism that has been highly influential in introducing a series of conventions for drama, which many later writers have tried to imitate. It is claimed that from this source, for instance, the idea of 'classical unities' developed. The classical unities are concerned with action, place and time.

The ‘rules’ of these conventions are:

- **Unity of action:** there should be only one main plot; all events in the play must contribute to that plot. Nothing extraneous is allowed.
- **Unity of place:** there should be only one place in which the action occurs. The stage was not expected to become different places one after the other.
- **Unity of time:** the action of the play should take no more than one 24-hour day. Extreme adherents suggested that in fact the action should take no longer than the play took to perform.

As we will see, however, these systems of reference have not always been that influential. Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, for instance, is one of only one or two of his works that might be considered to comply with the three unities. This was a convention that clearly wasn’t important to him, even if it was to other writers. In fact, in *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare’s lack of interest in the dramatic ‘unity’ of time manifests itself in the playful levity in which he foregrounds the preposterousness of time passing between Acts 3 and 4: a figure comes onto the stage as ‘Time’, brandishes an hourglass and lets everyone know that 16 years have just magically passed in the blink of an eye.

ACTIVITY 1

Literary conventions

This chapter introduces you to the idea of conventions in literature. In order to understand what is meant by conventions, try to think of a non-literary example of something that has a set of conventions. For example, you may have seen a trailer for a film recently. What are their conventions? How long are they? How do they start? How do they finish? What other conventions do they adhere to? Or perhaps you could think about the conventions of a particular type of film: a romantic comedy or an action movie, perhaps. You could even consider the conventions of a piece of pop music. Once you’ve decided on a general example, write a list of all the conventions you can think of which are associated with this form. Then find a specific example of the form and think about where it adheres to the conventions and where it breaks them. When you have finished, compare your answers to the notes on page 429.

One further reason, however, why the classical influence over literature in English is so pervasive is because of the period between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century in Europe, which we now often refer to as the Renaissance. Coming from the French word meaning ‘rebirth’, the Renaissance was a period of time when writers, artists and thinkers gave ‘birth’ again to Roman and Greek traditions, celebrated and tried to replicate the artistic achievements of the classical period. The study of the classics was very popular at that time and exerted a huge influence as a system of reference for subsequent literature in English.

The classical influence was, and remains, extraordinarily powerful; however, there are competing traditions and conventions that have also played important roles in the growth and evolution of English literature. One interesting alternative tradition is that of alliterative verse. As this chapter will go on to explore, rhythm and rhyme have often been the defining characteristics of English poetry and much drama. However, a divergent convention is that of using **alliteration** – the repetition of the same letter at the start of two or more words in the same line – as an organizing system for poetry.

The famous poem *Beowulf* was written in about 1 000 AD. Although it is written in Old English, this is a language which is very different from Modern English and inaccessible for many of today’s readers, certainly without a lot of preparation. Can you, for instance, recognize any of the words in the first two lines of this more than 3 000-line poem, as they are reproduced below?

*Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon*

We might not understand the language, but we can see the repetitions of the alliterative ‘g’ and ‘b’ in these lines. You will also notice the way in which the lines are separated by a **caesura** – a gap in the middle of a line – which is another marker of this convention of poetry. Frances B. Grummere is one translator of *Beowulf* and, so that you can see what the words mean, she has rendered these lines as: ‘Lo, praise of the prowess of people-kings / of spear-armed Danes, in days long sped’ (Grummere). We find the alliterative tradition being used in many Old and Middle English texts, most famously, perhaps, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a long, late-fourteenth-century poem about the court of King Arthur. Its first line is reproduced below for comparison:

Sipen þe sege and þe assaur watz sesed at Troye

(Gordon 1)

Did you notice that, like *Beowulf*, it uses a letter thorn (þ) which is no longer part of Modern English? This letter was used in both Old English and some dialects of Middle English, such as that used for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This is a very different tradition of English poetry and, again, it is not immediately obvious to a modern reader what all the words mean; however, you will notice that the line above does contain a reference to the ‘sege’ (the siege) of ‘Troye’ (Troy). So, even this fourteenth-century Middle-English poem, whose conventions are mostly the chivalric tropes of Arthurian legend, contains references to the classical tradition (you will remember that *The Iliad* tells the story of the siege of Troy).

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight has been frequently translated into more modern versions of English. One relatively recent translation, or retelling, is that by Simon Armitage. Like the original poet, Armitage uses alliterative verse. This extract is from the first ‘Fitt’, or section. Read it carefully and then consider the commentary that follows; important observations have been emboldened.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Now, on the subject of supper I’ll say no more
 as it’s obvious to everyone that no one went without.
 Because another sound, a new sound, suddenly drew near,
 which might signal the king to sample his supper,
 5 for barely had the horns finished blowing their breath
 and with starters just spooned to the seated guests,
 a fearful form appeared, framed in the door:
 a mountain of a man, immeasurably high,
 a hulk of a human from head to hips,
 10 so long and thick in his loins and his limbs
 I should genuinely judge him to be a half-giant,
 or a most massive man, the mightiest of mortals.
 But handsome too, like any horseman worth his horse,
 for despite the bulk and brawn of his body
 15 his stomach and waist were slender and sleek.
 In fact in all features he was finely formed
 it seemed.
 Amazement seized their minds,
 no soul had ever seen
 20 a knight of such a kind –
 entirely emerald green.

(Simon Armitage 11)

King Arthur and his court have been celebrating Christmas when suddenly their supper is interrupted by the arrival of a strange, astonishing and uninvited guest: a knight who is completely green from head to foot. This passage describes his entry into the court, his appearance, and the way in which he disturbs the festivities.

Armitage presents the manner in which the guests are surprised and startled using **alliterative verse** and **repetition** when he describes how, ‘another sound, a new sound, suddenly drew near’. The repeated ‘sound’ is like a double-take, as if the revellers can’t quite believe what they are hearing the first time. And the alliterative ‘s’s create a sense of the knight sweeping – swooshing even – into earshot and into their party. **Alliteration** can, like rhyme, often have the effect of linking words. In line 6, for instance, the three alliterative terms (‘**s**tarters’, ‘**s**pooned’ and ‘**s**eated’) all have a domestic quality and they combine to describe a community which is contentedly ready to start a long meal, being waited upon, and comfortably ensconced.

This sense of security is in powerful **contrast** to the next line, where the introduction of the knight is described using the **alliterative** ‘f’s: ‘a **f**earful **f**orm appeared, **f**ramed in the door’ (line 7). We might hear the anxiety in the quavering ‘fearful form’ and this is then underlined with the image of him ‘framed’, as if he is already mythologized. The physical appearance of the knight is captured also with the alliteration of the harshly consonantal ‘**h**ulk of a **h**uman from **h**ead to **h**ips’, where the four ‘h’s seem to convey his enormity. This is further underscored with the expansive ‘l’ alliteration: ‘so **l**ong and thick in his **l**oins and his **l**imbs’, where ‘loins’ added to ‘limbs’ (they’re almost synonymous) seems to extend the knight’s legs and arms to a terrifying degree. The poem also uses a powerful **contrast** between two alliterative couplings to convey the knight’s combination of massive strength (‘bulk and brawn’) and controlled skill (‘slender and sleek’).

Just like the original poem, Armitage’s translation bridges the alliterative and rhyming conventions. As we have seen, the main body of the section uses alliteration. However, the final four short lines employ an ABAB rhyme scheme. In fact, the most striking thing about the knight is his colour (he is entirely green) and we find this out only in the last word, perhaps anticipated by the expected rhyme with ‘seen’.

Simon Armitage

Simon Armitage is a British poet and academic who was born in West Yorkshire, England, in 1963. He has written many volumes of poetry, plays and translations, including *Homer’s Odyssey*, *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* and *Pearl*, another poem originally written in Middle English dialect. In 2015 he was elected to the position of Oxford Professor of Poetry, a post which has been held in the past by, among others, WH Auden, Robert Graves and Seamus Heaney.



The Gawain-poet (the term we conventionally use for the anonymous writer of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) was writing at about the same time as another huge figure in the evolution of English Literature: Geoffrey Chaucer. Although they were virtual contemporaries, Chaucer, unlike the Gawain-poet, is writing in a Middle English which is much closer to the English we use today. Chaucer doesn’t write in the alliterative tradition; in contrast, he uses rhythms and rhymes (especially in the opening extract we will look at) which are very close to the **iambic pentameter** and the rhyming couplets which we will look at next. This extract is from the very start of *The*

Canterbury Tales, a collection of tales, or stories, told by different pilgrims who were on a religious journey to the holy city of Canterbury, in the UK. When you read this introductory section, try to read it out loud to give yourself the best chance of understanding it.

Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
 The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,
 And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
 Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
 5 Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
 The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
 Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
 And smale fowles maken melodye,
 10 That slepen al the night with open yë,
 (So priketh hem nature in hir corages):
 Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
 (And palmers for to seken straunge strondes)
 To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry londes;
 15 And specially, from every shires ende
 Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
 The holy blisful martir for to seke,
 That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seke.

(Geoffrey Chaucer)

ACTIVITY 2

Translating *The Canterbury Tales*

Once you've read this famous opening, have a go at putting the passage into Modern English. How many of the meanings of each of the words can you work out? The first two lines, for instance, might be rendered literally: *When April's sweet showers [of rain] have pierced the drought of March to the root.* And putting it into your 'own words' might give you something like: *When the desperately needed rains come in April they make sure that the dry spell of March is completely ended and even the plants' roots get the water they need.*

As you work on your translation, see whether you, too, can use **alliteration** in your version. You can compare your translation to the one in the notes on page 429.

How does something become conventional?

Conventions are ways of doing things which have evolved over time. In order for something to become conventional, it needs to have been repeated, time and again. Repetition creates convention, as writers respond to systems of reference and replicate forms and structures that writers before them have used. This process has taken place in each of the major genres of literature that we have been looking at, and this chapter will consider what has become conventional for each of those genres, and how.

Poetic literary conventions

Firstly, we will look at poetry. We will also consider dramatic verse because many traditional plays are written in what is, in effect, also poetry. As we began to see in Chapter 1.4 of the **readers, writers and texts** section, poetry is conventionally highly organized. Poets structure their poems incredibly intricately, building beautiful patterns and constructing perfectly formed works of art. Indeed, poetry might well be seen, in a line usually attributed to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as ‘the best words in their best order’ (‘Samuel Taylor Coleridge’). For poets, form is very important. When poets write a sonnet, a ballad, a **sestina** or a limerick, they are writing in a pre-existing form and conforming to its patterns and expectations. In contrast, when poets don’t use a specific form, or don’t follow any conventions around rhythm and rhyme, then we call this **free verse**. Some poets, such as Robert Frost, are sceptical about free verse; he is reported as saying he’d ‘just as soon play tennis with the net down’ than write a free-verse poem. He thought that structure and form were vital for successful poetry. However, many other poets and readers don’t agree and free verse is itself often very carefully crafted and highly structured.

TOK Links: Can we think without language?

Even when a poem is written in free verse and doesn’t follow a particular form, it is still highly organized and carefully structured. Indeed, without structures, it is difficult to organize our thoughts. Language itself is a way of organizing our thoughts. Do you think that, without language, it would be possible to impose any order on our thoughts? Do we need linguistic structures in order to allow us to think? Do you think it would be possible to think without language?

When we start to think about form in poetry, it can be helpful to start with the rhythms of the language that we are using. When we read out loud, we give each word a particular weight, and when we give different weight or emphasis to different words, or parts of those words, we start to introduce rhythm into our language.

Poetry is organized into rhythmical units and the structure of those rhythms starts with the metrical **foot**. This is the pulse or the heartbeat of a poem around which its rhythms are constructed. The most common metrical foot in poetry in English is the **iamb**: it is a rising unit of rhythm which has the form ‘ti-tum’, and is made up of two syllables where the first is unstressed and the second is stressed. Poems which use this rhythm are referred to as ‘iambic’ because they use the ‘ti-tum’ rhythm of the iamb. Say ‘ti-tum’ to yourself, putting the stress on the second syllable. Can you hear this rhythm in your head?

We know that a pentagon has five sides and that the stem ‘penta’, therefore, refers to the number five. Therefore, a line that has five iambs is called an **iambic pentameter**. The line might have a Greek name, but it is a firm convention of literature in English as it has evolved over time.

As we have seen, the unstressed-stressed, ‘ti-tum’ **foot** is an iamb, but there are other metrical **feet** as well. For example, stressed-unstressed, or ‘tum-ti’ is a **trochee**, and stressed-unstressed-unstressed, or ‘tum-ti-ti’ is a **dactyl**.

The **iambic pentameter**, though, is the rhythm and the heartbeat of much conventional poetry in English. Its pulse is five regular iambs: ‘ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum’. This is the rhythm of the lines of most of Shakespeare’s plays, and it is also the rhythm of one of the most famous of all poetic forms: the sonnet. Sonnets are traditionally 14 lines of iambic pentameter and if we look at the first two lines of one of Shakespeare’s most famous sonnets, Sonnet 18, we can hear the persistent, regular rhythm of the iambic pentameter.

You can see that the text below has been marked up using the convention you learned about in Chapter 1.4 for indicating stressed and unstressed syllables. The metrical foot being used here is the iamb.

U / U / U / U / U /
 Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 U / U / U / U / U /
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate

(William Shakespeare)

Can you hear the rhythm: 'ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum'? It is a line which is used repeatedly in literature in English. If you've studied a Shakespeare play, for example, you'll have heard that rhythm. In Act 2 Scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, when Romeo sees a light as he is looking up towards Juliet's balcony, he famously says: 'But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun'. If you say the lines out loud, you can definitely hear that insistent iambic rhythm: 'ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum'. It is certainly the rhythm that a contemporary audience at one of Shakespeare's plays would have been expecting to hear.

The iambic pentameter has been the most common line of poetry in English since the sixteenth century, when Shakespeare was writing. So, for instance, John Milton's great religious epic *Paradise Lost*, of 1674, is written entirely in iambic pentameter. Its narrative focuses on the temptation and fall of human beings in the Christian religion, and begins with the story:

Paradise Lost

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit
 Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste
 Brought Death into the World, and all our woe

(John Milton 56)

If you read each line slowly and out loud, you will notice that it is written in iambic pentameter. Some people have argued that this line is so dominant in English poetry because it is the same length as a natural exhalation of breath. This might be true, but whether it is or not, it is hopefully a conventional form that you are beginning to recognize.

John Milton

John Milton was an English poet who was born in 1608. He wrote poetry and **prose** in English and Latin but also pamphlets (short essays, often political in nature), particularly in support of Oliver Cromwell during the English Civil War. When Charles II returned as king in 1660, Milton no longer enjoyed an outlet for his political work. By this point in his life he was also blind, but he nevertheless went on to write much of his most well-known poems after this point. His most famous work is *Paradise Lost*, a long religious narrative poem of twelve books in **iambic pentameter**, published in 1667, which tells the story of the temptation and expulsion from paradise of Adam and Eve in the Bible.

In the eighteenth century, Thomas Gray, in the poem conventionally known as ‘Gray’s Elegy’, makes reference to Milton in one of the many examples of **intertextuality** that you will find in literature, where poets and writers talk to each other across time. Indeed, the maker of the first great dictionary in English, Dr Samuel Johnson, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, thought that Gray’s poem, ‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard’, ‘abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo’ (Johnson 470). Mirrors and echoes in poetry are what we are investigating in this section as we look at intertextuality and explore conventions and systems of reference evolving over time. If we have a look at the start of Gray’s poem, for instance, we can see that it describes evening in the countryside with the agricultural workers heading home and the darkness descending:

Elegy in a Country Churchyard

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
 The lowing herd wind slowly o’er the lea,
 The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
 And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

(Thomas Gray)

As you are reading this stanza, you might find you need help with some of the vocabulary:

- A **curfew** is a bell that is sounded at evening, perhaps to mark the end of the working day.
- To **toll** is a verb which means to ring.
- A **knell** is a bell rung at a funeral.
- A **lea** is a meadow or open area of grassland where cattle might be kept.
- A **plowman** is an agricultural worker.

This is traditional English **pastoral poetry** which is poetry written about, and often in celebration of, the countryside and traditional working practices in the country. Did you notice that it is written in very clear iambic pentameter? Now let us evaluate the first stanza, which focuses on how the reader responds and why.

Adjectives and adverbs contribute to a sense of end-of-the-day exhaustion and lethargy in the stanza. When a two-syllable word is placed within the line of iambic pentameter so that it has a falling-away rhythm (stressed – unstressed; tum – ti) it creates a rhythmic mirroring of the day diminishing and darkening. We can see this in: ‘parting’; ‘slowly’; and, ‘weary’.

Onomatopoeia is used to interject a soundscape into the stanza. The cows are heard ‘lowing’ and here the sound of the word echoes the sound that cattle make. When we read the line, the rhythm also means we stress ‘low’ and pause on that onomatopoeic sound and the movement slows down, in line with the movement of the stanza as a whole. The overall **rhythm** mimics the slow footfall of the returning agricultural workers; the stressed, monosyllabic ‘plods’ sound like a heavy step which falls away with the tired, ‘weary way’.

Later on in the poem, when the narrator is looking at the graves in the churchyard, he imagines that ‘Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest’. The poem looks back to an earlier writer, whom we have just learned about, and acknowledges his influence. In doing so, Gray uses some of the same forms and conventions. Interestingly, in terms of the history of literature in English, the poem not only looks back but continues the intertextual conversation into the future as well. One of the poem’s famous lines – ‘Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife’ – was used by the nineteenth-century writer Thomas Hardy as the title for his novel *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

Thomas Gray

Thomas Gray was an English poet who lived from 1716–1771. For most of his life, Gray was an academic at Cambridge University. He published only a handful of poems during his life; however, his ‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard’ has become one of the most famous poems in English. On his death, Gray was buried in the very churchyard, in Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, that is celebrated in his poem.

This section started by discussing the ways in which poets and writers are influenced by other writers. In *Aurora Leigh*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning reflects on that influence and on the way in which she tried to imitate the poets that she most liked who had written before her. In this stanza from her epic poem, she muses on her early attempts at imitation and what, looking back, she considers to be her failures. It is interesting to observe a poet writing about her influences and consciously attempting to adhere to a form.

Aurora Leigh

And so, like most young poets, in a flush
Of individual life, I poured myself
Along the veins of others, and achieved
Mere lifeless imitations of life verse

(Elizabeth Barrett Browning 32)

Let us evaluate this short extract and consider how Barrett Browning describes her early attempts at poetry to her reader.

This extract from the poem is written in **iambic pentameter** – in fact, this long narrative poem is written entirely in unrhymed iambic pentameter; another phrase to describe this is **blank verse**. In poetry in English it is traditionally the form of the narrative epic (*Paradise Lost*, for instance, is written in blank verse).

Barrett Browning uses **metaphor** to describe the process of writing poetry and the influence of other poets when she says: ‘I poured myself / Along the veins of others’. She sees the joining of a poetic tradition as a conscious act of ‘pouring’, but the liquid she is talking about is the metaphorical, intertextual life-blood of poetic creativity which flows through ‘the veins’ of previous poets who influence her. She is describing a point in her early development as a poet, when her writing is still immature, and she uses **polyptoton** (‘lifeless’ and ‘life’ are different forms of the same word in the same line) to describe her ‘Mere lifeless imitations of life verse’, and to suggest that her writing has not yet been injected with the spark of vitality she sees in the great poets who have come before her.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was a nineteenth-century English poet. During her life she campaigned for the abolition of slavery and for child labour reforms. In 1846, having been disinherited by her father, Barrett Browning moved to Italy with her husband, the poet Robert Browning; she stayed there for the rest of her life. In 1856 she wrote a long poem in **blank verse** entitled *Aurora Leigh*.

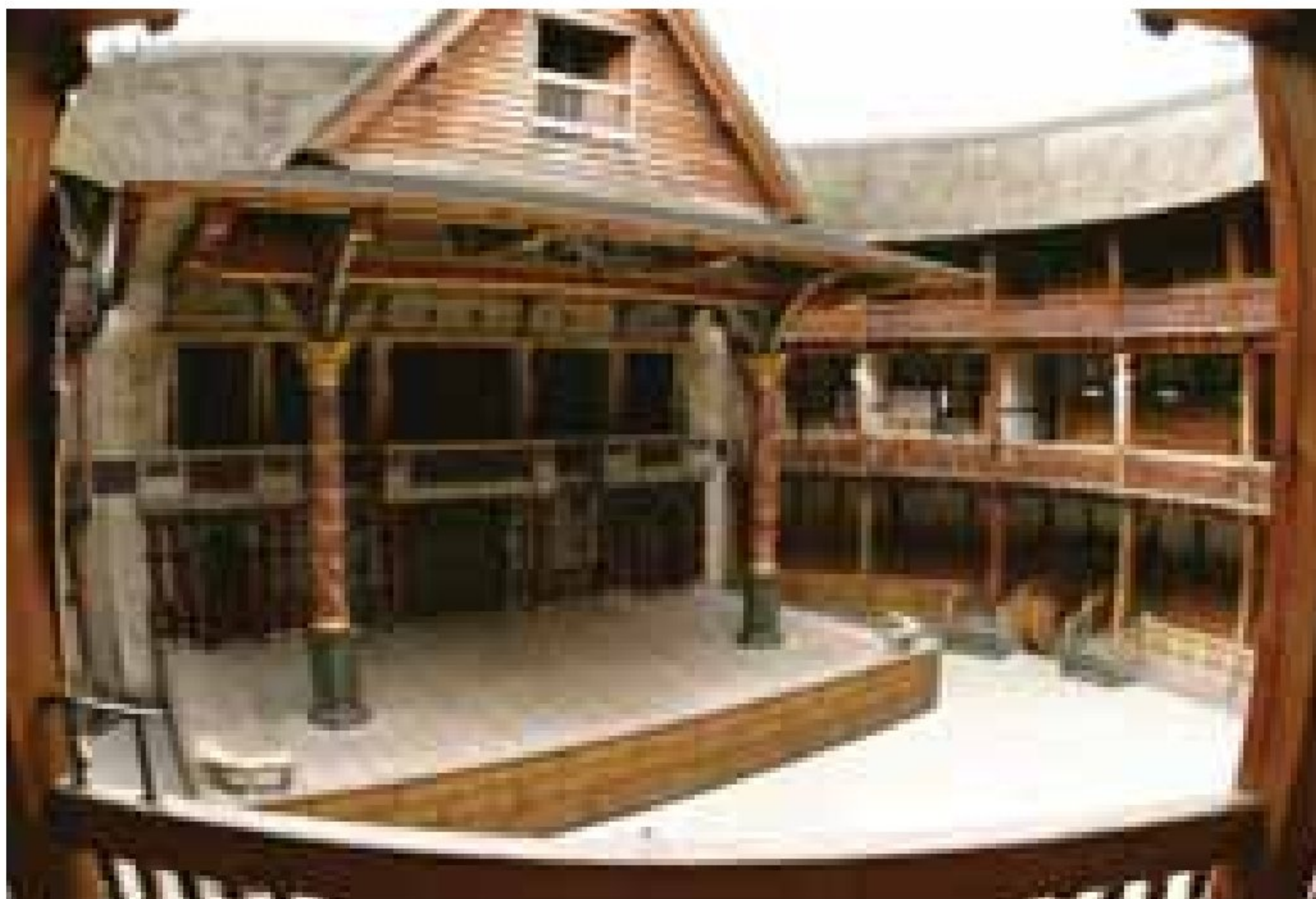
Barrett Browning is adhering to a traditional form in *Aurora Leigh*, and understanding how some of those conventions work is really important in terms of your study of literature. In the next few chapters we will see how poets deviate from those forms and conventions as well as adhere to them.

■ Drama conventions

We have already looked at some of the early conventions for drama in English: the use of the classical models of comedy and **tragedy**, and the centrality of the line of iambic pentameter to much of the drama of the Renaissance period, when many of the conventions and systems of reference for drama over the following centuries were established. We will now explore briefly some of the traditional conventions of theatre which, as we will see over the next few chapters, have exerted a powerful influence over subsequent dramatists.

The history of English theatre includes the performance of medieval morality plays, which grew out of an even earlier tradition of religious ‘mystery’ plays. These dramas featured stereotypical or allegorical characters and told religious morality tales. This theatrical experience was very different from the ‘characters’ we see revealed on stage if we go to the theatre today. One of the things that changed these conventions was the historical growth of the theatre as a public space during the early modern, or Renaissance, period. The flourishing of theatre during the English Renaissance is a very interesting phenomenon: the later Elizabethan period produced a quite extraordinary and unique explosion of theatre, in London at least. The most famous writer from that period is, of course, Shakespeare.

Although drama had developed from the medieval period, it was still governed by a set of conventions that are quite different from many experiences we might enjoy in the theatre today. For example, although there were various stage effects, many of the plays were performed outside and in natural light. It was, therefore, difficult to use lighting and special effects to create a sense of place and tension; writers had to use language to convey those things. In fact, at the beginning of *Henry V*, Shakespeare explicitly invites his audience to use their imaginations to let them believe that the stage represents the fields where the battle scenes that they are about to witness will take place. In the prologue, a ‘chorus’ (a convention from classical theatre) comes onto the stage to introduce the action.



■ Interior of the Globe theatre, London

As you read, try to imagine being a member of the audience at the Globe theatre (look carefully at the image on the previous page) and imagine how the stage might be made to seem like the ‘vasty fields of France’ in the audience’s imagination. Then let us evaluate this short extract:

Henry V

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
 The brightest heaven of invention,
 A kingdom for a stage ...
 ... can this cockpit hold
 5 The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
 Within this wooden O the very casques
 That did affright the air at Agincourt?

(William Shakespeare)

The invocation of a **muse** is a convention of classical literature, which we encountered at the start of this chapter when we looked at the conventions for starting epic poems. The ‘muse’ here will need to be the imaginations of the audience, inspired by these words and by the performance of the actors.

The prologue here explicitly references the need for **suspension of disbelief** in the theatre: the audience will have to imagine that something is in fact something else. Here that means substituting mentally a ‘kingdom for a stage’. The actor makes direct reference to the proportions and design of the theatre itself, calling the Globe theatre a ‘cockpit’ (a traditional arena where cock-fighting would take place) and a ‘wooden O’ (the Globe is round like an ‘O’ and made of wood). This feat of imagination will hopefully lead, argues the chorus, to the audience believing that they have been transported to ‘the air at Agincourt’, the location of Henry V’s famous victorious battle. Theatre, therefore, is conventionally interested in ‘transporting’ audiences to other times and spaces. Another convention of the theatre of Shakespeare’s time was, of course, that male actors played the female roles. Because women were banned from appearing on stage, audiences had to recognize a man dressed as a woman, *as a woman*, which becomes quite confusing when the male actor playing the female part has a scene where s/he has to dress up as a man as a disguise or in order to confuse the other characters in the play.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

The presentation of gender on the early modern stage is interesting and problematic. On the one hand, there is a great deal of apparent gender fluidity, and yet the structuring convention is that the female parts are played by boy actors, which is fixed rather than fluid. That said, many plays of the time also have those ‘women’ re-disguising as ‘men’, which might once again suggest a certain degree of fluidity. Nevertheless, the lack of female actors is a difficult concept to come to terms with in the contemporary world. Are men able to successfully ‘represent’, to embody, the part of women? It is an interesting debate in terms of both identity politics and current

arguments about cultural appropriation. Are people from outside of a certain ethnicity, background, class, culture, sexuality, or range of experiences, really able to represent the experiences of someone else who is from that background? Is it appropriate to use cultural symbols, practices and ideas which are not part of a particular writer’s cultural background? This idea of representation could be an interesting global issue in the culture, identity and community field of inquiry. These are difficult debates on which many people have strong, conflicting views. If you’re interested in reading more, there is a lot of material available online and in the media.

In the 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love*, directed by John Madden and written by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard (whose work we will look at in the next chapter), Gwyneth Paltrow plays a young woman who wants to act and disguises herself as a boy in order to audition to appear on stage. The film makes close use of many historical sources from Shakespeare's time. It is a fictionalized response to the conventions of the theatre of Shakespeare's time, but it only makes sense, of course, if we first understand some of those conventions.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

TRANSFORMATION

One of the ways in which literary experience has been transformed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the turning of literary narratives into film. The **lexicon** and the stylistic range of film operate in a different realm from **prose**, poetry and drama; film can transform stories and how we see them. As we will see in Chapter 3.3, films such as *Apocalypse Now* have used their intertextual interactions with works such as *Heart of Darkness* to transform a story about nineteenth-century imperialism into a powerful narrative about the Vietnam War. In Chapter 3.4, we will see how one of the consequences of a story becoming a 'classic' is that its narrative takes on a

life of its own, beyond the original page, and often finds itself in the hands of film-makers. Shakespeare's plays are often used to tell stories about the modern world and are transformed from their original contexts to illuminate others: for instance, in the 1995 film *Richard III* starring Ian McKellen, the play is transformed into a narrative about 1930s fascism. More humorous translations, as we have seen, can be found in films like *Shakespeare in Love*. Ask yourself how the experience of watching Shakespeare's plays performed is different from what his contemporaries experienced, especially since we generally see them with the female roles performed by female actors.

■ Prose conventions

Finally, we will consider briefly some of the conventions of **prose** narratives. The modern novel, an extended prose narrative, grew out of some of the earlier traditions of romances and historical works. Early proponents of the novel, as we have come to know it, are often cited as Cervantes and Daniel Defoe. However, as we will discover in the following chapters, access to publishing has skewed the history of prose narratives, in particular, to exclude many women writing at the time of these men who have historically been presented as the pioneers of the novel.

In the eighteenth century, the epistolary novel became an important convention. This is a novel which is written as a series of letters: for instance, novels like *Pamela* and *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson; Mary Shelley uses the form in her famous novel, *Frankenstein*, published in 1818. The convention is less frequently used in the modern novel; however, there are some notable exceptions, such as Lionel Shriver's 2003 work *We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Shaffer.

The novel has particularly flourished since the nineteenth century with the famous examples of writers, among many others, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Eliot. Writers of prose texts can choose to use a range of different narrators and narrative devices. The two extracts that we will look at next use one of the most conventional strategies: the third-person narrator. What both of these writers use is a narrator who tells us the story without necessarily being a character within that story, which provides the reader with a certain level of objectivity. As we will see, however, what these prose narratives are able to do is to exploit **perspective** and **point of view**, **irony**, and **free indirect discourse** to guide to their readers. These are some of the conventions of prose writing which we will explore in more detail in the following chapters, as we look at how different texts have adhered to and deviated from these novelistic methods. After you have read

the passages, the analyses that follow will show you some of the ways in which these two writers are exploiting these conventions and systems of reference.

The first extract is from a very famous nineteenth-century novel (which you also saw in the Introduction to this text), *Middlemarch*, written by a female novelist under the pen name George Eliot. The narrator is describing Mr Casaubon, an elderly clergyman who marries the novel's heroine, Dorothea Brooke. However, the marriage is not a success because – as the narrator starts to show us in this extract – Mr Casaubon is not very self-aware and is rather pedantic. Here, Eliot employs some of the conventional strategies of a novelist in presenting Mr Casaubon, who is trying, over-ambitiously and unsuccessfully, to write a book called 'the Key to all Mythologies'.

Mr Casaubon, as might be expected, spent a great deal of his time at the Grange in these weeks, and the hindrance which courtship occasioned to the progress of his great work – the Key to all Mythologies – naturally made him look forward the more eagerly to the happy termination of courtship. But he had deliberately incurred the hindrance, having made up his mind that it was now time for him to adorn his

5 life with the graces of female companionship, to irradiate the gloom which fatigue was apt to hang over the intervals of studious labor with the play of female fancy, and to secure in this, his culminating age, the solace of female tendance for his declining years. Hence he determined to abandon himself to the stream of feeling, and perhaps was surprised to find what an exceedingly shallow rill it was. As in droughty regions baptism by immersion could only be performed symbolically, Mr Casaubon found that sprinkling

10 was the utmost approach to a plunge which his stream would afford him; and he concluded that the poets had much exaggerated the force of masculine passion. Nevertheless, he observed with pleasure that Miss Brooke showed an ardent submissive affection which promised to fulfil his most agreeable previsions of marriage. It had once or twice crossed his mind that possibly there was some deficiency in Dorothea to account for the moderation of his abandonment; but he was unable to discern the

15 deficiency, or to figure to himself a woman who would have pleased him better; so that there was clearly no reason to fall back upon but the exaggerations of human tradition.

(George Eliot 60–1)

Firstly, the **parenthetical phrase** 'as might be expected' might be considered ironic: is the narrator actually suggesting that we might really expect the opposite? You will remember that **irony** is when the intended meaning is the opposite of what's actually being said. Mr Casaubon's view of female companionship seems to be being satirized, or made fun of, by the narrator. His lack of self-awareness is presented in the triplet of expressions describing his view of what a relationship with a woman might entail. The narrator's ironic voice describes the 'graces of female companionship', the 'play of female fancy' and the 'solace of female tendance' (lines 5, 6 and 7). These wordy obfuscations seem to suggest that he can't really imagine such a relationship at all.

The **ironic tone** continues with the description of Mr Casaubon 'determined to abandon himself to the stream of feeling' (lines 7–8). Being 'determined' to do something is strangely at odds with 'abandon' which seems to anticipate a rather more rigorous flow of water than a 'stream'. There is also, of course, the suggestion that in desperately wanting 'feeling', Mr Casaubon is not, in fact, actually 'feeling' very many strong emotions at all, certainly not romantic ones. The **narrative voice's ironic commentary** in line 8 that he 'perhaps was surprised to find what an exceedingly shallow rill it was' reinforces this sense. The ironic 'perhaps' and 'surprised' might be signaling that there is, in fact, actually neither any doubt nor any surprise in this discovery.

The **comic tone** of the passage continues with a moment of **free indirect discourse** where the ostensibly objective third-person narrator slips temporarily into the perspective of Mr Casaubon, who comes to the realization that ‘the poets had much exaggerated the force of masculine passion’ (lines 10–11). The narrator is able to show the reader how Mr Casaubon does not recognize the emotions that he has read about in poetry and to relate them with those that he actually feels, or doesn’t feel.

The second extract is from *Myal* by Erna Brodber, which also features a clergyman. The female narrator is describing Maydene’s thoughts about her husband, William, and his brother. As you read, think carefully about the third-person narrator’s presentation of the characters and, particularly, the point of view of Maydene.

Maydene found this Baptist parson quite a reasonable man. But a clear message came from her husband that he would prefer if she kept him at a distance. She rolled her husband’s insides around in the palms of her hands like Cook making dumplings, searching for the not-yet smooth side. ‘What is it?’ William was a very rational man, usually, and from the earliest days they had always discussed issues both of a public and private nature fully and frankly with each other but Grove Town and the Rev. Simpson were a different kettle of fish. It bothered Maydene that William’s brother was so deep-set that he feared to let it surface, and if it didn’t, how was she to help him as she ought? It bothered her that it was something very simple and that any woman born in Jamaica would have been able to fathom it, in which case, the mirror was showing a clash, not a joining of cultures and there went one mark against her marriage and a telling blow to her faith in the intrinsic beauty in the meeting of unlikes. The bother bothered her continually.

(Erna Brodber 15)

ACTIVITY 3

Myal by Erna Brodber

Using the analysis of the *Middlemarch* extract as a guide, try to answer these questions about *Myal*, thinking carefully about the role of the narrator in shaping how the reader is responding. Compare your answers to the notes on page 430.

- 1 The first two sentences of the extract present the reader with conflicting **points of view**. What do you think is the effect on the reader of the third sentence? With whom does the narrator seem to be wanting us to empathize?
- 2 The narrator describes William as ‘a very rational man’ but then qualifies that description with the adverb ‘usually’. How might this be **ironic**? What do you think the narrator is trying to convey to the reader?
- 3 In what ways do the **alliterative couplings** ‘public and private’ and ‘fully and frankly’ suggest that the nature of these conversations might have been rather superficial? Does the fact that the phrases are almost **clichés** help to create this impression in the reader’s mind?
- 4 How does the final sentence of the passage (‘The bother bothered her continually’) make you think about Maydene?
- 5 Are there any other aspects of the narrative that you think are particularly interesting and worthy of further comment?

Erna Brodber

Erna Brodber is a Jamaican poet, novelist, teacher and academic who was born in 1940. The author of five novels, *Myal* won the Caribbean and Canadian regional Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1989. One of Brodber's projects has been the collecting of oral histories from communities in rural Jamaica. Her writing is particularly interested in the power of community, and especially the role of women and diversity in the communities she represents in her novels.

Hopefully, you have started to think hard about the function of the narrative voice in **prose** works, and particularly in novels. It is an important feature and convention of these texts, to which we will return in subsequent chapters.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored and hopefully deepened our understanding of some of the evolving conventions of poetry, drama and **prose**. We have looked at some of the ways in which works in all literary forms make use of systems of reference, and we have started to examine how those systems of reference evolve over time. Over the next few chapters, we will continue our intertextual journey to look at how writers start to deviate from those conventions, how they shift over time, and how the echoes from the past can continue to be heard in the intertextual conversations that permeate so much literature.

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3.2

How do literary texts adhere to and deviate from conventions associated with literary forms?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To explore the shifting ways in which poetry adheres to and deviates from various literary conventions and forms
- ▶ To explore the shifting ways in which drama adheres to and deviates from various literary conventions and forms
- ▶ To explore the shifting ways in which prose texts adhere to and deviate from various literary conventions and forms
- ▶ To explore how literary forms have both stayed consistent and have shifted over time

Introduction

In this chapter, we will look again at some of the forms and conventions we encountered in the previous chapter and throughout the book; however, we will also look at how writers break with traditions and challenge conventions. Literature is often at its most interesting when it challenges conventions and turns them on their heads. Looking at each of the literary forms, we will explore how writers ‘write back’, confront, and sometimes even provocatively challenge traditions and conventional forms. The previous chapter looked at patterns of conventions and systems of reference; now the focus shifts to how literature deviates from those traditions and conventions rather than adhering to them. Here, when we say something ‘deviates’ from a convention, it means that it does not follow the expected form and is unusual or different.

One of the conventions we placed at the heart of the tradition of English literature was the line we called **iambic pentameter**, which we have already identified in both poems and plays. This line has been consistently adapted, challenged and played with over time.

We can find an excellent example of deviation from this convention not just within the works of Shakespeare, but within perhaps his most famous line of all. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* – which Chapter 3.4 will go on to argue is a ‘classic’ – is written largely in iambic pentameter, the conventional form of the drama of its time. However, in Act 3 Scene 1, Hamlet begins his most famous **soliloquy** with the line: ‘To be or not to be that is the question’. It starts off in iambs; ‘To be’ has the rhythm ‘ti-tum’. But, say the line out loud, and try to fit the iambic pentameter rhythm to it. It doesn’t quite work, does it? This is because, instead of the expected ten syllables, here – as you will have noted – there are, in fact, eleven.

How would you read the line if you were acting the part of Hamlet? Where would you put the stresses on the individual syllables? Here are two possible versions marked up below with different unstressed (U) and stressed (/) syllables.

U / U / U / U / U / U

To be or not to be that is the question

U / U / U / / U U / U

To be or not to be that is the question

(William Shakespeare)

The line doesn't fit. It deviates from the conventions and, as we will learn in this chapter, very often some of the most interesting things to say about texts happen at the moments where the structure breaks down, where the convention is challenged, or where fault-lines begin to appear. Perhaps, to return to *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's line is saying something very important: that Hamlet's thoughts are too big to be constrained by the normal conventions; perhaps, that the binary 'to be or not to be' fails to contain Hamlet's capacity to think, and so the convention is exploded. Whether or not you agree, it is always interesting to ask questions about the points at which texts begin to deviate from conventions, and that is what we will continue to do throughout this chapter.

Adherence and deviation in poetry

In TS Eliot's great **modernist** poem, *The Waste Land*, the second section, 'A Game of Chess', starts with a very Shakespearean-sounding line of **iambic pentameter**: 'The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne'. If you think it sounds like Shakespeare, then that's probably because it is Shakespeare. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act 2 Scene 2, Enobarbus describes Cleopatra's seat on her boat as: 'The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne'. Eliot has changed Shakespeare's original 'barge' to 'Chair' but, apart from that small shift, this is a line taken directly from *Antony and Cleopatra*. This is an extraordinary intertextual moment, akin to sampling in music, where whole lines or motifs from other works are seamlessly integrated into a new one. To extend the musical analogy, Eliot then 'riffs' on the language and musical rhythms of Shakespeare when, inserting another line taken in its entirety from a Shakespeare play (this time *The Tempest*), Eliot tells us 'Those are pearls that were his eyes' and continues:

The Waste Land

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—
It's so elegant
So intelligent

(TS Eliot 67)

We can see here that Eliot has taken a work which is seen as part of the canon, a work which presents us with literature as we expect to see it, and he updates it. When he takes the original line, it is conventionally iambic, and then when he immediately 'riffs' on the language, he breaks the convention that he just used, deliberately drawing his reader's attention to his intertextual games. He is expecting the reader to recognize the quotations and to see what he's doing with them. When you've read even more Shakespeare, perhaps you can return to Eliot to see that *The Waste Land* is actually a kind of intertextual collage made up of scraps from the history of literature and philosophy.

TS Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot was an Anglo-American poet, who lived from 1888 to 1965. He was born in St Louis, Missouri, in the US but moved to England in 1914, where he lived for the rest of his life. He is often considered a **modernist** poet, most famous for *The Waste Land* which is made up of a myriad of quotations and intertextual references. In 1943, during the Second World War, he published the deeply spiritual *Four Quartets*. Eliot was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948.

● TOK Links: When is it plagiarism?

In his book of critical writing, *The Sacred Wood*, TS Eliot makes the contentious argument that: 'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better' (Eliot 125). We all know that plagiarism is something we should avoid. Using other people's words without acknowledging the source is academic malpractice and can, in fact, be a violation of intellectual property, and therefore illegal. So when TS Eliot says 'mature poets steal', he's probably not promoting plagiarism, but do you agree that it might not be plagiarism if you use someone else's words in your writing as an intertextual **allusion** *expecting your reader to notice the source*? Is this a legitimate way to improve a work?

We can see how TS Eliot inserted whole lines from Shakespeare into *The Waste Land*. Writing many years later in the twenty-first century, Wendy Cope does exactly the same thing.

In Act 5 Scene 2 of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, just before the scene where the eponymous hero has the fight in which he dies, he says to his friend Horatio, in a very wistful, prophetic and philosophical moment: 'If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all'. He has come to terms with the inevitability of his death and says that he is now ready for it, whenever it will come.

One of the ways in which **intertextuality** works is like a metaphorical haunting: words from previous writers are forever floating in a writer's mind and they inflect and influence their own work. 'If it be' is the subjunctive mood: the mood of uncertainty or doubt, or never being quite sure. This thought, from Shakespeare, has clearly haunted Wendy Cope. Musing on Shakespeare's lines, therefore, Cope writes a meditation on them:

If It Be Now

If it be now, 'tis not to come:
Hamlet, just before the fight
That sent him to eternal night.

It's always there: a quiet drum
5 Sounding when I have a fright:
If it be now, 'tis not to come.

Choking, breathless, falling – numb
With mortal fear, I hear it right
On cue and silently recite,
10 *If it be now, 'tis not to come.*

(Wendy Cope)

Read the poem carefully to yourself two or three times over and then read the following commentary, thinking carefully about how the poem's intertextual relationship unfolds.

Three times in the poem, once in each stanza, we hear the **repeated refrain**: '*If it be now, 'tis not to come*'. It is italicized both to highlight the intertextual borrowing but also, perhaps, to signal the haunting quality of its repetition: indelibly locked into the poet's consciousness. The second

line of the poem directs the reader to its intertextuality with the **prosaically colloquial**: ‘Hamlet, just before the fight’. The everyday nature of the language here might signify the acceptance of death, expressed in the quotation in an ordinary moment of resignation before an extraordinary rite of passage. The phrase ‘eternal night’ is a powerful **metaphor** for death (a sleep which goes on forever) but, in another intertextual moment, is actually a quotation from Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. Similarly, the phrase ‘quiet drum’ might remind us of the witches chanting ‘A drum, a drum! / Macbeth doth come’ in anticipation of that tragic hero’s arrival in *Macbeth*. However, the silently inescapable throbbing is a pulsing reminder of the haunting quality of the phrase that sets the poem in motion.

The first line of the final stanza charts the movement from agitated suffering, to quiet, unfelt death: ‘Choking, breathless, falling – numb’. The **present continuous** verbs create a sense of the inescapable freefall that is the passage towards death, while the **caesura** before ‘numb’ – pausing on the dash – is one final sharp intake of breath before succumbing to the inevitable.

The poem registers its intertextual debt throughout the final stanza. When Cope writes: ‘I hear it right / On cue’ she’s using the **metaphor** of an actor’s cue (the lines immediately before they have to speak their line), in part to take the reader back to the dramatic world of *Hamlet* where the poem started and where, with the repeated line, it ends.

That Shakespearean refrain, which – as we have just seen – returns three times in the short poem, is a ‘quiet drum’ of insistence, a powerful **metaphor** for the way in which the rhythms of previous writers are always playing out in the heads of other writers as they respond to the intertextual influence of writers who have come before them.

Wendy Cope

Wendy Cope is a contemporary British poet who was born in 1945. After reading history at Oxford University, she trained as a primary school teacher and taught for many years. Much of her poetry is explicitly intertextual; one of her favourite forms is parody and she has written, for instance, a short parody of TS Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Her collection *Anecdotal Evidence* was published in 2018.



Wendy Cope’s poem is replete with intertextual references. But it is also largely adhering to conventional patterns, not least in terms of its lineation and punctuation. However, the next two poets, both writing in the twentieth century, are – in their very different ways – both deliberately deviating from traditional forms. However, the intertextual footprints of their earlier influences are still clearly visible.

We met the work of William Carlos Williams earlier, in Chapter 2.5. His poem, ‘This is Just to Say’, is immediately striking in terms of the way that it appears unconventional. It contains, including the title, only 33 words. It is unpunctuated. It is written in simple, unadorned language. On first glance it could just be a note that someone has left on the ‘icebox’ (depending where in the world you are reading this, you might call an ‘icebox’ a fridge or refrigerator), and yet it is still definitely poetic.

Read the poem carefully two or three times over and then read the commentary that follows.

This Is Just To Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

5 and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
10 they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

(William Carlos Williams)

Do you think this is more than a note that someone has left on the icebox for someone else, perhaps their partner? Could it actually be a meditation on guilt and desire and the terrible mixed feelings that result from having done something wrong, and yet nevertheless having benefited from that deceitful act? Do you think that the narrator of the poem feels sorry? Do you think that forgiveness is sincere?

The rather coy title – ‘This Is Just To Say’ – is an integral part of the poem and the slightly dismissive, defensive **adverb** ‘just’ seems to want to deflect away attention from something that, perhaps, the narrator feels guilt about. The ‘note’ then gets straight to the point in **simple and direct language** when it tells the intended recipient: ‘I have eaten / the plums’.

The second stanza, however, introduces a tone of doubt, in contrast to the directness of the first stanza. The speculative ‘you were probably / saving’ might be an evasive way of acknowledging a wrong-doing. The adverb ‘probably’ doesn’t seem very probable given that ‘saving / for breakfast’ seems so knowledgeable. That sense of guilt is manifested at the start of the final stanza with a direct apology (‘Forgive me’) which is also, therefore, probably an admission that the act was a conscious theft. However, the apology (of sorts) is left hanging and the rest of the final stanza – ‘they were delicious / so sweet / and so cold’ – is a sensual (in that it appeals to the reader’s senses) appreciation of how much the narrator enjoyed eating the plums, even if he knew he shouldn’t.

As you can see, this is a poem that, in many ways, is unconventional. The lack of punctuation, the very short lines that break sentences into many parts, and the lack of traditional patterns of **meter** and rhyme are all features which break with convention. However, there are many things about it that are also conventional, such as the compression and formality of language and the reliance on image and **metaphor** to convey complex ideas. These aspects of the poem are thrown into the spotlight by Tom Leonard, the next poet we will look at, whose intertextual take on ‘This Is Just To Say’ we will examine later on in this section.

Tom Leonard writes as he talks. His poems are written in a type of Scottish dialect, but they're also **phonetic** (they employ non-standard spelling to create the sound of an **accent** when you read them aloud). Born in Glasgow, Leonard's Glaswegian dialect and accent is not always easy to follow (especially if you're not used to it), but his poems register a powerful sense of his **identity** and the importance of the relationship between language and identity.

To get a sense of the way in which Leonard uses language, we will first look at a short extract from 'The Six O'Clock News' (from *Unrelated Incidents*). In this poem, he confronts the assumption some people might have that words would not ring true in a register of Glasgow speech, whereas they do in received pronunciation. Received pronunciation (or 'RP') is traditionally the accent of the upper classes, the elite, the kind of people who, historically at least, read the news on the television. See if you can read this extract from 'The Six O'Clock News' out loud and make sense of it.

The Six O'Clock News

this is thi
 six a clock
 news thi
 man said n
 5 thi reason
 a talk wia
 BBC accent
 iz coz yi
 widny wahnt
 10 mi ti talk
 aboot thi
 trooth wia
 voice lik
 wanna yoo
 15 scruff.

(Tom Leonard)

Tom Leonard

Tom Leonard was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1944; he died in 2018. He was a poet, a writer and a critic. Many of his poems are written in a **phonetic** Glaswegian dialect and they are particularly interested in the relationship between language, class, and identity.

This strategy becomes intertextually interesting when Leonard responds to the Williams poem that we have just read. Using the same techniques we have just seen, he recasts 'This Is Just To Say' in his Glaswegian **accent** and dialogue. His poem 'Jist ti Let Yi No' is an explicit intertextual response to 'This Is Just To Say' (notice the subtitle!). See if you can read the poem out loud and make sense of it. You may need to refer to the 'translation' that comes after the poem.

Jist ti Let Yi No

(from the American of Carlos Williams)

ahv drank
 thi speshlz
 that wurrin
 thi frij

5 n thit
 yiwurr probbli
 hodn back
 furthi pahrti

awright
 10 they wur great
 thaht stroang
 thaht cawld

(Tom Leonard)

Unless you are from Glasgow (or you're used to the accent) you'll probably need a 'translation' of this poem to help you make sense of it. It goes something like this:

*I have drunk the specials (cans of beer) that were in the fridge
 and that you were probably holding back (saving) for the
 party. Alright, they were great: that strong, that cold.*

You might also find it useful that 'special brew' (the 'speshlz') in the poem would probably be drunk by a very different group of people from those who might eat plums. Can you see how the poem is a direct reworking of Williams' original? Once you've read the poem through a couple of times more, try the activity below.

ACTIVITY 1**Textual comparison: Leonard and Williams**

Tom Leonard's rewrite of William Carlos Williams' poem takes its essential themes (of guilt, forgiveness, weighing the pleasure received against the pain caused) and 'translates' them into a different social, cultural and class context.

- 1 Make a list of all the key changes that Leonard has made in this intertextual re-placing, and make notes on how the different versions speak particularly to a specific group of people at a particular time.
- 2 Do you think that people who are not in the group that is perhaps the intended audience might feel alienated by either of the two poems' assumptions about the sorts of things people do, eat and how they live and behave? How do the poems deviate from conventions?

Once you have finished, compare your answers to the notes on page 430.

Both of these poems are clearly unconventional in different ways. They break with certain established conventions and yet, perhaps, through his intertextual reimagining, Leonard's poem shows us that Williams' poem is much more 'conventional' than we might at first have thought.

Although Williams is breaking certain conventions (such as not following one of the traditional forms and not using standard punctuation) Leonard's response shows us that, despite this, Williams is still using a formal, conventional literary **register**. Leonard breaks that convention of formality and makes his poem a mouthpiece for his class, his city, and his way of speaking.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

IDENTITY

The relationship between language and identity is endlessly interesting. You might want to consider what the language used in these poems suggests about the identity of the authors and of the **implied readers** of the poems. The language (or languages) we speak is central to our identity. Not only might it mark out where we come from and tell us something about our background, but we even think differently in different languages. Some languages have words for concepts not contained in others, have different

tenses, and provide its speakers with a way of seeing the world which is not always replicated in different languages. Equally, even within a single language, our **accent** and dialect are very important markers of our identity. Accent can be difficult to represent in literature without breaking away from the conventions of standardized spelling. Do you feel differently about Leonard's poems when you read them out loud and start to hear the sound of his accent as well as the words of his dialect?

So far in this chapter, we have looked at poems and dramatic verse to explore how, over time, writers both adhere to and deviate from various poetics. Hopefully you are now ready to apply some of that knowledge to some of the other genres that you are studying.

Adherence and deviation in drama

This chapter has so far been looking at poetry and dramatic verse. The remaining sections will look at drama and **prose** to examine the ways in which these texts are also inflected by their intertextual influences and, equally, both adhere to and deviate from conventions associated with literary forms.

We have already looked at an extract from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In that play, two of Hamlet's 'friends', Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are persuaded to return from university by Hamlet's mother and his uncle in order, basically, to spy on him. They are bit-part characters with not many lines in the play, part of the subplot rather than the main plot. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also become complicit in a plot to have Hamlet killed, but Hamlet turns the tables and manages to manufacture their deaths: he escapes and they die in place of him. The last mention of them is when an ambassador comes in to announce that 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead'.

Tom Stoppard, who we met in Chapter 3.1 as the screenwriter for *Shakespeare in Love*, took this line as the title for his 1968 play which imagines the two characters talking 'off-stage', but in the foreground, as the main action of *Hamlet* continues in the background. This is a highly inventive and original take on the idea of **intertextuality**: telling the story of characters from the subplot while the main narrative is going on in the background, reversing the textual focus.

Tom Stoppard

Sir Tom Stoppard was born in Czechoslovakia in 1937. Starting as a drama critic and journalist, he published his first play in the early 1960s and has since written more than 50 plays, radio plays, screen adaptations and television plays. He became Sir Tom Stoppard in 1997 when he was knighted for his services to literature.

This extract from Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* comes at the beginning of Act 2. Hamlet has just run circles around Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's questions, realizing almost at once that they were spying on behalf of his mother and uncle. The first few lines are Polonius and Hamlet speaking from Shakespeare's play, as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are then left alone to ponder and reflect on the scene that has just taken place. Read the extract carefully. If you can, take parts and read it out loud.

POLONIUS My Lord! I have news to tell you.
 HAMLET (Releasing ROS and mimicking) My lord, I have news to tell you ... When Roscius was an actor in Rome ...
 (ROS comes downstage to rejoin GUIL.)
 5 POLONIUS (As he follows HAMLET out) The actors are come hither my lord.
 HAMLET Buzz, buzz.
 (Exeunt HAMLET and POLONIUS.)
 (ROS and GUIL ponder. Each reluctant to speak first.)
 GUIL Hm?
 10 ROS Yes?
 GUIL What?
 ROS I thought you ...
 GUIL No.
 ROS Ah.
 15 (Pause.)
 GUIL I think we can say we made some headway.
 ROS You think so?
 GUIL I think we can say that.
 ROS I think we can say he made us look ridiculous.
 20 GUIL We played in close to the chest of course.
 ROS (Derisively) 'Question and answer. Old ways are the best ways'! He was scoring off us all down the line.
 GUIL He caught us on the wrong foot once or twice, perhaps, but I thought we gained some ground.
 25 ROS (Simply) He murdered us.
 GUIL He might have had the edge.
 ROS (Roused) Twenty-seven-three, and you think he might have had the edge?! He murdered us.
 GUIL What about our evasions?
 ROS Oh, our evasions were lovely. 'Were you sent for?' he says. 'My lord, we were sent for ...'
 30 I didn't know where to put myself.

(Tom Stoppard 40–1)

As you can see, while Guildenstern tries to be positive and look for successes, Rosencrantz is much more pragmatic and realizes that Hamlet has had the upper hand throughout and completely outwitted them. Did you notice the short exchange of lines – the **stichomythia** – which conveys the two characters' anxiousness and uncertainty? Rosencrantz's direct line 'He murdered us' is interesting dramatically because, while it is a **metaphor** for their argumentative failures, for an audience that knows *Hamlet* it is also ironic because, of course, Hamlet, does in

fact arrange for their murders (although not actually carrying them out himself). What do you make of the stage directions ('Derisively'; 'Simply'; 'Roused')? How do you think these help the director and the actors when they are preparing the play for performance?

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, therefore, we have a text which in several key ways adheres to some of the conventions of theatre we have seen over the previous chapters of this book: it features dialogue, the staging and stage directions are conventional and, intertextually, it engages very closely with a 'classic' text of the theatre, *Hamlet*. However, in some ways it also deviates from convention, in that it inverts the plot structure of *Hamlet* by elevating minor characters to the roles of major ones and vice versa.

Despite its playful approach, in many ways, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* adheres to the conventions associated with theatrical forms more than it deviates from them. An audience in the theatre will enjoy the 'two hours' traffic of our stage' that the Prologue in *Romeo and Juliet* promises. Our next text, however, hardly adheres to those conventions at all. Samuel Beckett is being much more radical and deviating significantly from the conventional forms that we might expect to experience when we go to the theatre.

You will remember the passage from *Henry V* in the previous chapter, where Shakespeare's 'chorus' uses words to encourage the audience to conjure up the fields of France in their imaginations. You will have noticed that words – obviously – are one of the playwright's key tools, along with staging, set, and the actors' physical performances. One of the main ways in which playwrights develop character is through how their characters interact with each other. Drama is conventionally all about dialogue; so, given this, what do you notice that's particularly interesting about Beckett's 'play', *Breath*, which is reproduced here in its entirety?

Breath

CURTAIN

- 1 Faint light on stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish. Hold about five seconds.
- 2 Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.
- 5 3 Expiration and slow decrease of light together reaching minimum together (light as in 1) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold about five seconds.

CURTAIN

RUBBISH

No vertical, all scatter and lying.

10 CRY

Instant of recorded vagitus. Important that two cries be identical, switching on and off strictly synchronized light and breath.

BREATH

Amplified recording.

15 MAXIMUM LIGHT

Not bright. If 0 = dark and 10 = bright, light should move from about 3 to 6 and back.

(Samuel Beckett 369)

The 'play' has no words. There are some human voices, or sounds at least, but no words. In fact, this is barely recognizable as a play at all in terms of some of the conventions we might be looking out for.

Samuel Beckett

The playwright, novelist and short-story writer Samuel Beckett was born in Ireland in 1906 and died in France in 1989. He is perhaps best known for the play *Waiting for Godot*, but was a prolific writer in both English and in French. His writing in general is **modernist** and his writing for the theatre, in particular, is sometimes considered part of the 'Theatre of the Absurd'. Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1969.



ACTIVITY 2

Breath by Samuel Beckett

Read *Breath* through to yourself two or three times. Try to imagine what a performance might look like on the stage.

- 1 What do you imagine the audience's response to the performance might be? Is it the sort of theatrical event that you would pay to go and see?
- 2 Think about how the form of the play deviates from the conventions of theatre that you have encountered throughout this book. How would you interpret this piece? What do you think Beckett, the playwright, wants the audience to think?

You can compare your responses to the notes on page 431.

As we have seen, drama comes in many different guises. Sometimes plays are very conventional; sometimes they purposely deviate from those conventions. However, even when theatrical experiences seem at their most unconventional, some of their power derives from our knowledge of conventions and, therefore, our ability to notice their purposely deviant qualities. Without an intertextual awareness of what the conventions are, the unconventional would not make sense either.

Adherence and deviation in prose

In the final section of this chapter, we will look at prose. We will examine one extract from a **modernist** novel and two short pieces of **non-fiction**, and look at the ways in which writers both adhere to and deviate from some of the conventions of writing in **prose**.

The first extract is from the first section of the novel *Ulysses* by James Joyce. At the start of this modernist 'classic', which was first published in 1922, Stephen Dedalus is a history teacher (his name, like that of the novel's, is an intertextual reference to Greek mythology and literature). In the episode before the one we are about to read, we have seen him teaching a history class; in the following passage he is visiting the headmaster, Mr Deasey, to collect his wages. The two discuss money, Englishness, and Irish history.

Read the extract carefully and then read the commentary that follows.

- A sovereign fell, bright and new, on the soft pile of the tablecloth.
- Three, Mr Deasy said, turning his little savingsbox about in his hand. These are handy things to have. See. This is for sovereigns. This is for shillings. Sixpences, halfcrowns. And here crowns. See. He shot from it two crowns and two shillings.
- 5 - Three twelve, he said. I think you'll find that's right.
- Thank you, sir, Stephen said, gathering the money together with shy haste and putting it all in a pocket of his trousers.
- No thanks at all, Mr Deasy said. You have earned it.
- Stephen's hand, free again, went back to the hollow shells. Symbols too of beauty and of power. A lump
- 10 in my pocket: symbols soiled by greed and misery.
- Don't carry it like that, Mr Deasy said. You'll pull it out somewhere and lose it. You just buy one of these machines. You'll find them very handy.
- Answer something.
- Mine would be often empty, Stephen said.
- 15 The same room and hour, the same wisdom: and I the same. Three times now. Three nooses round me here. Well? I can break them in this instant if I will.
- Because you don't save, Mr Deasy said, pointing his finger. You don't know yet what money is. Money is power. When you have lived as long as I have. I know, I know. If youth but knew. But what does Shakespeare say? Put but money in thy purse.
- 20 - Iago, Stephen murmured.
- He lifted his gaze from the idle shells to the old man's stare.
- He knew what money was, Mr Deasy said. He made money. A poet, yes, but an Englishman too. Do you know what is the pride of the English? Do you know what is the proudest word you will ever hear from an Englishman's mouth?
- 25 The seas' ruler. His seacold eyes looked on the empty bay: it seems history is to blame: on me and on my words, unhating.
- That on his empire, Stephen said, the sun never sets.
- Ba! Mr Deasy cried. That's not English. A French Celt said that. He tapped his savingsbox against his thumbnail.
- 30 - I will tell you, he said solemnly, what is his proudest boast. I paid my way.
- Good man, good man.
- I paid my way. I never borrowed a shilling in my life. Can you feel that? I owe nothing. Can you?

(James Joyce 36–7)

Let us now focus on the various ways that this extract adheres to and deviates from novelistic conventions. You might find it useful to know that 'sovereigns', 'shillings', 'sixpences', 'crowns' and 'halfcrowns' are all types of coin.

You will firstly notice that Joyce dispenses with the conventional apparatus for presenting **dialogue**. Rather than use speech marks, Joyce deviates from this convention and uses a single dash at the start of phrases of direct speech. Perhaps this is part of the novel's use of **stream of consciousness**, where experiences are presented as fluid and interconnected rather than separate and static. The novel employs a form of **free indirect discourse** to slip in and out of the third- and first-person **perspective**; however, once again, the novel is deviating from convention in

appearing to use both almost simultaneously. So, in lines 9 and 10, ‘Stephen’s hand, free again, went back to the hollow shells’ is clearly a third-person narrative but ‘A lump in my pocket’ is back in the first person. And when the text says ‘Answer something’ line 13, this is clearly Stephen speaking to himself.

The headmaster makes an explicit intertextual reference to the play *Othello* when he says: ‘But what does Shakespeare say? Put but money in thy purse.’ But the text, operating with several **levels of irony**, has Stephen murmuring ‘Iago’ in response. In silently correcting the headmaster, he’s both recognizing the source of his quotation and showing a greater understanding of it. The headmaster is quoting ‘Shakespeare’ as giving ‘advice’. Stephen is noting that the advice he is quoting is in fact delivered in the play by the character Iago, a villain, who is dispensing this ‘advice’ in order to try to trick Roderigo, to whom he’s talking at this point.

You will also have noted the way in which Joyce breaks from convention by conflating two words ‘sea’ and ‘cold’ to make a single neologistic adjective ‘seacold’ (a **neologism** is the making up of a new word).

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: BELIEFS, VALUES AND EDUCATION

Stephen Dedalus, in *Ulysses*, is a history teacher. The way in which we present our histories, as we can also see in the later extracts from Walcott and Paz, is crucial to our sense of identity. History is always written from a particular perspective. Stephen may be being slightly ironic when he tells us that ‘History ... is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake’ (Joyce 42), but our histories, and how we view history, are nevertheless central to who we are and what our beliefs and values are. Individuals, communities and educational systems

often shape the beliefs and values that are held in particular societies, and this can also be a source of tension and **conflict**. Have you ever experienced being presented with a ‘version’ of history in your education – in the widest sense – which doesn’t necessarily fit easily with your beliefs and values? Personal experiences and the construction of our own histories in relation to the beliefs and values we are presented by society every day is an interesting global issue you could explore in the beliefs, values and education field of inquiry.

James Joyce

James Joyce was an Irish writer who lived from 1882–1941. He was a poet and critic but is best known as a novelist. His most famous novel is the modernist *Ulysses* – a novel set in Dublin that uses episodes from Homer’s *Odyssey* as its structure – which was published in 1922. Joyce was born in Dublin and it is the subject of much of his writing; however, he spent most of his adult life outside of Ireland, living in Trieste, Paris and Zurich.

A couple of pages later in the novel, we find the famous line: ‘History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake’ (Joyce 42). Whether it is a nightmare, a haunting presence, or an inspiration, the historical existence of previous literary works is something that writers are constantly dealing with. As we have seen, Joyce makes intertextual references to Shakespeare’s Iago; our next text, ‘The Muse of History’ by Derek Walcott, in a similar way, refers to Caliban, a character in *The Tempest*.

In Shakespeare’s play, Prospero and his daughter Miranda have been shipwrecked on an island. Caliban, who is described as a monster, is already living on the island. Prospero controls Caliban and, in effect, makes him his slave in a such a way that many critics have read *The Tempest* as an **allegory** for colonialism.

When Miranda refers to Caliban as an ‘abhorred slave’, he retorts:

You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!

(The Tempest Act 1 Scene 2)

Having been taught English – by Miranda and Prospero – Caliban is now able to use it to ‘curse’ and abuse what he sees as his English-speaking tormentors. There is also an **irony** in the play that Caliban has many of its most poetic lines. Like many writers, Derek Walcott makes intertextual references to Caliban in order to use his situation as an **allegory** for his decision to write in the ‘language of the master’. Read the extract from ‘The Muse of History’ carefully and consider how Walcott makes use of this intertextual comparison.

New World poets who see the ‘classic style’ as stasis must see it also as historical degradation, rejecting it as the language of the master. This self-torture arises when the poet also sees history as language, when he limits his memory to the suffering of the victim. Their admirable wish to honour the degraded ancestor limits their language to phonetic pain, the groan of suffering, the curse of revenge. The tone of the past becomes an unbearable burden, for they must abuse the master or hero in his own language, and this implies self-deceit. Their view of Caliban is of the enraged pupil. They cannot separate the rage of Caliban from the beauty of his speech when the speeches of Caliban are equal in their elemental power to those of his tutor. The language of the torturer mastered by the victim. This is viewed as servitude, not as victory.

(Derek Walcott 38–9)

ACTIVITY 3

‘The Muse of History’ by Derek Walcott

Walcott here talks about ‘classic style’ (in Chapter 3.4 we will be examining the notion of a ‘classic’ and its associated problems). As you read this extract, do you think it is possible to separate ‘the rage’ of using the language of colonial oppression from its ‘beauty’? Do you agree with Walcott that ‘victory’ might, in fact, be becoming an even more powerful writer in English than those who have taught you that language? In writing in English, do you think Walcott is adhering to, or deviating from, the conventions of the history of the literature written in English?

Derek Walcott

Sir Derek Walcott was a Caribbean poet, playwright and essayist from St Lucia who lived from 1930 until 2017. One of his most famous works is *Omeros*, an epic poem which is intertextually indebted to Homer. ‘The Muse of History’ is anthologized in his 1998 collection of essays *What the Twilight Says*. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992 and in 2016 he was made Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Lucia.



TOK Links: Writing in 'your' language?

We have already explored the close link between language and identity. Derek Walcott seems to be suggesting that writers from former colonies should embrace writing in English, even though English is the language of the oppressor. Do you agree? In the next chapter, we will find Joseph Conrad and Chinua Achebe writing in English, rather than their other languages. Multilingual writers often have an interesting choice to make: to write in their mother tongue or to write in a language, like English, where they might find a much wider audience. Do you think that writing in a 'colonial' language is problematic?

Like Walcott, Octavio Paz is very interested in the links between language, **identity** and belonging. The next extract is from his essay *The Labyrinth of Solitude* which is about Mexican national identity. As you read the passage, consider carefully how Paz is presenting the conventional forms of storytelling, myth, fairy tales, plays, epic, and poetry. Do you think that his concept of 'ritual' is an adherence to, or a deviation from, the conventions of these literary forms?

In myth – as in religious fiestas or children's stories – time has no dates: 'Once upon a time ...' 'In the days when animals could talk ...' 'In the beginning ...' And that beginning, which is not such-and-such a year of day, contains all beginnings and ushers us into living time where everything truly begins every instant. Through ritual, which realizes and reproduces a mythical account, and also through poetry and fairy tales, man gains access to a world in which opposites are reconciled and united. As Van der Leeuw said, 'all rituals have the property of taking place in the now, at this very instant.' Every poem we read is a re-creation, that is, a ceremonial ritual, a fiesta.

(Octavio Paz 210–11)

The theatre and the epic are also fiestas. In theatrical performances and in the reciting of poetry, ordinary time ceases to operate and is replaced by original time.

Octavio Paz is writing about stories, myths, and their relation to identity, particularly national identity. He is thinking also about the conventions of literary forms such as myths and children's stories, as well as theatre and epic. A 'fiesta' is a religious festival, a celebration or a party and perhaps Paz is suggesting that a performance of an individual story, poem, or play is actually a celebration of the history of intertextual connections up until that point.

ACTIVITY 4

The Labyrinth of Solitude by Octavio Paz

Work through these three quotations from the extract and, for each one, answer the specific questions as well as asking yourself what you think Paz is saying about intertextuality, literary forms and the relationship between narrative and identity. Then compare your responses to the notes on page 431.

- 1 'In myth ... time has no dates: "Once upon a time ..." "In the days when animals could talk ..." "In the beginning ..."' Why do you think we start fairy tales with 'Once upon a time'?
- 2 'Every poem we read is a re-creation ... a fiesta.' What do you think the work 're-creation' suggests here?
- 3 'The theatre and the epic are also fiestas.' How might a public performance of a literary text also be a celebration?

Octavio Paz

Octavio Paz was a Mexican writer and diplomat who wrote in Spanish. He was born in Mexico in 1914 and died in 1998. He was a prolific poet, but is also very well known for his essays with *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, his mediation on Mexican identity, being perhaps his most famous. Paz was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1990.

EE Links: Non-fiction texts – essays

Lots of poets, playwrights and novelists are also essayists and writers of non-fiction. The essay is a very old form which has developed in all sorts of interesting ways. If you are interested in writing your extended essay on non-fiction texts, you might consider writing it about essays. While there are thousands of collections to choose from, just to get you started, you might consider (in addition to Walcott and Paz) Michel De Montaigne (often considered one of the originators of the modern essay), Susan Sontag, Salman Rushdie, Clive James, William Hazlitt and Zadie Smith.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the shifting ways in which poetry, drama, and **prose** texts have adhered to and deviated from various literary conventions and forms, and looked at how literary forms have both stayed consistent and have shifted over time. We have seen how so many writers have a keen sense of their intertextual connections with other writers and, in the next chapter, we will explore those points of intertextual similarity in even more detail.

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3.3

In what ways can diverse literary texts share points of similarity?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To explore texts from diverse periods and traditions
- ▶ To examine the way in which diverse texts can have various points of similarity
- ▶ To look at the ways those different texts use the points of similarity for different purposes
- ▶ To explore the ways in which these very different texts are in conversation with each other over time and space

Introduction

In this chapter, we will explore the ways in which texts that, at first glance at least, appear to be very different from each other, actually share many points of similarity. In fact, they are often deliberately in conversation with each other, making references to previous texts, quoting each other, and exploring some of the perennial issues, joys and problems that human beings face. By looking at texts which interact in such ways, we will see how relatively diverse traditions respond to each other, both acknowledging the skill and psychological depth of preceding texts, but always aiming to ‘rewrite’ them: to forge from them new messages for new moments in history.

We will begin this chapter’s journey in a metaphorical ‘Heart of Darkness’, and will go on to look at how a Joseph Conrad novella from the nineteenth century enters into an intertextual relationship with a twentieth-century African novel by Chinua Achebe, how the two are linked by an early-twentieth-century Irish poem by William Butler Yeats, and how the intertextual journey reaches a conclusion of sorts in both a 1970s film about the horrors of the Vietnam War and a 1997 Indian novel about ‘a rare breed of Siamese twins’ (Roy 2).

An intertextual journey

Our first text in this journey is a **fin-de-siècle** novella, *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. It is classified as fin-de-siècle as it was written just at the moment when the nineteenth century became the twentieth – a time of great social, political and cultural change.

Joseph Conrad

Joseph Conrad was born in 1857 in the Ukraine. A Polish and Russian speaker, he wrote mostly in his third language, English. Conrad ultimately became a British national in 1886. He was himself a seaman, like the narrator, Marlow, in *Heart of Darkness* (his novella of 1899). In fact, he was even a captain of a steamboat on the Congo river, exactly like Marlow. Conrad’s prose style, which is often thought to bridge nineteenth-century naturalism and twentieth-century modernism, was highly influenced by his experiences as a sailor.



Heart of Darkness is set in the Belgian Congo during the colonial era. The European imperialists are in the Congo to make money, and one of the ways they do this is through the brutal murder of elephants to claim only their tusks and send this ivory back to Europe. Marlow, the narrator and

the captain of a river steamboat, is on a mission to locate a rogue ivory merchant, Kurtz. His job is to captain the boat on its journey up the river Congo to find this imperialist trader who appears, according to various pieces of information he picks up along the way, to have become insane. As he retells the story of his journey to a group of seafarers, on a boat moored on the Thames while waiting for the tide to turn, his narrative becomes increasingly mystical and impressionistic.

In the passage we will look at, he describes the emotions he feels while travelling up the great River Congo and becoming overwhelmed by the solitary, surreal nature of his experience. This passage comes near the start of the second section of the just-over-100-page novella. Marlow is speaking (hence the speech marks) and you'll notice that, at the end of the extract, his narrative is interrupted by an unnamed further speaker, perhaps to remind us to beware of trusting our narrator: the person telling the story isn't always telling the truth. As you read the passage, try to look out for its linguistic features and the ways in which the description and mood are handled by the writer.

'Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sand-banks

5 hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side. The broadening waters flowed through a mob of wooded islands; you lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once – somewhere – far away – in another existence perhaps. There were moments

10 when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare for yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder among the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect. I got used to it afterwards; I did not see it any more; I had no time. I had to keep guessing at the channel; I had to discern, mostly by inspiration, the signs

15 of hidden banks; I watched for sunken stones; I was learning to clap my teeth smartly before my heart flew out, when I shaved by a fluke some infernal sly old snag that would have ripped the life out of the tin-pot steamboat and drowned all the pilgrims; I had to keep a lookout for the signs of dead wood we could cut up in the night for next day's steaming. When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality – the reality, I tell you – fades. The inner truth is hidden – luckily,

20 luckily. But I felt it all the same; I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tight-ropes for – what is it? half-a-crown a tumble–'

'Try to be civil, Marlow,' growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself.

(Joseph Conrad 30)

Hopefully you are now becoming a more sophisticated reader of texts and will have noticed some of the features of this extract. Here are some you might have considered.

The passage uses **personification** when it describes how the vegetation 'rioted' (line 1). This application of human qualities to the plants seems to imply they have motive and agency. It certainly makes them threatening, in the same way as is achieved when the natural world is described in line 13 as looking 'with a vengeful aspect'. The narrative certainly suggests that there is something to fear in this natural environment.

Equally, however, that environment lulls the narrator into a meditative state. **Lists of adjectives** in line 3 give the world around the river a dense, suffocating quality that is ‘warm, thick, heavy, sluggish’ and suggests a languorous, almost hallucinatory experience. That experience is reinforced by the use of **fragmented sentences**, where the narrative’s hesitations, uncertainties and ambivalences (‘once – somewhere – far away – in another existence perhaps’ in line 8) take us into the realm of the spiritual. **Ambiguous, mystical language** is also found in the strangely imprecise and suggestive ‘implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention’ (lines 12–13). This is a world that our narrator, at least, is not easily able to make sense of.

Are there other features of the language and the narrative that you find interesting? At the end of the passage, the hallucinatory voice is interrupted by one of the people listening to the story. It is a strange moment in the novella where we are reminded, as so often in novels, that we should not necessarily trust the person who is telling us the story.

Heart of Darkness is a remarkable novella, but it is – historically, socially, and culturally – very much of its time even if, in terms of its literary style, it might be considered *ahead* of its time. If you go on to read the whole novella, you will see that it raises very interesting and important questions about how literature can present episodes from history, and the extent to which that work might be seen to be critical of or accepting of the actions of the past.

● TOK Links: Reflecting ethical values

Much of Conrad’s writing is concerned with empire and the actions of imperialism. Critics disagree about how critical he was of European imperial actions. *Heart of Darkness* is, for example, largely set in the imperial Belgian Congo and many read it as highly critical of imperial abuses. Nevertheless, the novel uses racist language. We saw a similar effect when we looked at Flannery O’Connor’s short story, ‘Revelation’, in Chapter 1.2. One question for readers to ask is: is Conrad describing the linguistic reality of an imperial world, and in doing so highlighting its terrible and terrifying abuses? Or, as Chinua Achebe has argued, is Conrad, by using racist language, inevitably perpetuating racist attitudes? Is ‘that was the prevailing attitude at the time’ an acceptable excuse for attitudes and ideas that we might find in literature which would be unacceptable today?

CONCEPT CONNECTION

REPRESENTATION

The way in which language and literature relate to reality has been the subject of much debate among linguists and literary theorists across time. Statements and manifestos by writers have made claims about this relationship, which range from affirming that literature should represent reality as accurately as possible, to claiming that art can have absolute detachment and freedom from reality and any duty to represent it in the work of art. Irrespective of such a discussion, the concept is a central one to the subject in connection with the way in which form and structure interact with, and relate to, meaning.

As we have seen, *Heart of Darkness* can be mystical, spiritual and transcendent. These are all qualities which it shares with our next, otherwise very diverse, piece of literature: a rhetorically-charged poem about faith, fear and the uncertain future. Irish poet William Butler Yeats wrote ‘The Second Coming’ in 1919. It is a poem that employs images from Christianity, the Bible, and of the apocalypse. It is a deeply spiritual meditation on faith and fear and ends with an ambiguous, nightmarish image of a religious ‘second coming’.

As you read the poem, you should note its density of images, its rich rhetorical voice and its apocalyptic **register**. You will also note that it is written in loose **iambic pentameter**, which helps to give the poem its ominous, prophetic tone. You should read the poem out loud and, as you read, imagine in your head the powerful images it creates.

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 5 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 10 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 15 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 20 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

(William Butler Yeats)

To begin, we will focus on the first stanza of the poem, which is where we will find the line which Nigerian poet and writer Chinua Achebe chose to use as the title for his first novel: *Things Fall Apart*.

In the first stanza – the first octet, or eight lines – the narrator encourages the reader to imagine a falcon (which in this case is a trained bird of prey) circling out of the control of the falconer, its trainer, who is relying on it returning to his gloved hand. In a dense passage of metaphorical language, the stanza then introduces a number of apocalyptic images before ending with a provocative and contentious statement about good and evil in the world.

The following commentary on the first stanza focuses on how the reader might respond and why.

The poem starts with **repetition** as ‘Turning and turning’ conveys a sense of the falcon circling out of control (a ‘gyre’ is a circular motion). When a falconer has trained a falcon, the falconer is in control and expects the bird to return; however, once the falcon is out of earshot, that bond of control and influence is lost which is emphasized by the ‘widening’ gap. The falconer and the falcon, therefore, operate as a **metaphor** for a controlling power and a subordinate one which,

once out of range, is no longer able to exercise that control, which might be authoritative or political. Indeed, when the falconer ('the centre') loses his ability to control (his 'hold') then, at that point things 'fall apart': existing power structures are rendered impotent and everything about how we imagine the world is organized is called into question.

The poet underlines this apocalyptic turn of events with further **metaphors**: the releasing of 'anarchy' (the absence of all rule, law and traditional structures) is represented as a 'blood-dimmed tide' being 'loosed upon the world'. The metaphor works in part because representing a force as a 'tide' or a flood conveys the sense that it is an unstoppable force that will destroy everything in its path and drown any life forms in its wake. That the metaphorical tide is stained with blood further reinforces its life-threatening and apocalyptic qualities.

The reference to the 'ceremony of innocence' makes an **intertextual allusion** to the massacre of the innocents which is described in the Gospel of Matthew, in the New Testament of the Bible. This event, where King Herod is claimed to have ordered the murder of all children under two years old, with the intention of killing the young Jesus, is closely associated with the biblical narrative of the coming of Christ, and therefore establishes a powerful context for this poem's nightmarish reimagining of a possible religious second coming of God on Earth.

The final couplet of this opening stanza uses a pair of apparent **paradoxes** to challenge the reader's assumptions about what constitutes good and bad behaviour. This couplet proposes that the 'best' people are without 'conviction' (perhaps suggesting strong opinions or beliefs) while the 'worst' are characterized by 'passionate intensity' (perhaps suggesting deep commitment to a cause).

William Butler Yeats

The poet and playwright WB Yeats was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1865. He has sometimes been associated with the symbolist movement in poetry. He was an Irish nationalist who returned to Ireland from England later in his life, where he continued to explore his interest in the occult and in spiritualism. Yeats won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923.



● TOK Links: Contradictory beliefs

The IB's mission statement concludes that its programmes have the aim of encouraging students 'to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right' (International Baccalaureate Organization). Yeats' poem suggests, and perhaps it is being deliberately provocative, that 'passionate intensity' might be a negative quality and, yet, many of the people who, throughout history, have arguably made the world a better place have been inspired by an intense passion. Without their 'conviction' they would have struggled to make the difference they did. Do you think there is a contradiction between having your own strong and passionate beliefs and acknowledging that other people with equally strong and passionate, but very different and sometimes contradictory, beliefs 'can also be right'?

'The Second Coming' is an incredibly powerful poem. As such, it has also inspired other writers and challenged them to respond to its provocations and construct narratives that tell stories which develop its ideas. The novelist Chinua Achebe chose to call his first novel *Things Fall Apart*, taking the title as a direct quotation from the Yeats' poem. The next stop in our intertextual journey, therefore, is this seminal post-colonial novel. It is another diverse literary text but, as we will see, that initial point of similarity makes for some very interesting comparisons.

Things Fall Apart (which we previously encountered in Chapter 2.5) can be considered an example of post-colonial literature. In order to make sense of this, we need to have a basic historical understanding of colonialism: this is when one country imposes its rule on another country, and exerts power and control over it while exploiting its resources in its own interests. During the nineteenth century a number of European countries exercised political and military control over other countries around the world; for example, Britain in India and Belgium in the Congo. Post-colonial literature aims to tell the stories of the colonized, to give a voice to those who previously didn't have one, and to provide a powerful counter-narrative to colonial viewpoints.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: CULTURE, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

When you are reading some of the texts in this chapter – and works throughout your course – you should always try to consider the ways in which works explore aspects of family, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender and sexuality, and the way these impact on individuals and societies. Specifically, the works in this chapter might help you to focus on global issues concerning migration, colonialism and nationalism under the culture, identity and community field of inquiry.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is the central, and deeply flawed, protagonist. The novel centres on his difficult life, his struggles to deal with the legacy of his artistic, affable but penniless father, and his awkward successes and failures in his village. The novel also narrates the arrival of European missionaries and explores the confrontations that ensue between Igbo and Christian cultures. One of the most powerful aspects of the novel is its capacity to withhold reductive binary judgments: it rejects a view of the world which is easily divisible into good and evil. Indeed, all the characters and cultures in the novel are presented as having flaws as well as strengths.

At the end of the novel, Okonkwo commits suicide. His body is hanging from a tree in the compound when the European District Commissioner arrives with an armed guard. This passage is the short final chapter of the novel.

SENSITIVE CONTENT

Caution: this extract contains explicit references to suicide.

Such a topic may be uncomfortable to think about and discuss or may force you to consider viewpoints at odds with your own, but they are central to the themes of identity and human behaviour at the heart of this book. It is important to feel challenged intellectually, personally and culturally throughout your Diploma course but you should not ever feel any undue anxiety, stress, pain or discomfort.

Remember when you are discussing sensitive matters to adhere to the IB's principles of international mindedness and intercultural respect and exercise sensitivity to local and international cultures.

When the district commissioner arrived at Okonkwo's compound at the head of an armed band of soldiers and court messengers he found a small crowd of men sitting wearily in the *obi*. He commanded them to come outside, and they obeyed without a murmur.

'Which among you is called Okonkwo?' he asked through his interpreter.

5 'He is not here,' replied Obierika.

'Where is he?'

'He is not here!' The Commissioner became angry and red in the face. He warned the men that unless they produced Okonkwo forthwith he would lock them all up. The men murmured among themselves, and Obierika spoke again.

10 'We can take you where he is, and perhaps your men will help us.'

The Commissioner did not understand what Obierika meant when he said, 'Perhaps your men will help us.' One of the most infuriating habits of these people was their love of superfluous words, he thought.

Obierika with five or six others led the way. The Commissioner and his men followed their firearms held at the ready. He had warned Obierika that if he and his men played any monkey tricks they would be shot.

15 And so they went.

There was a small bush behind Okonkwo's compound. The only opening into this bush from the compound was a little round hole in the red-earth wall through which fowls went in and out in their endless search for food. The hole would not let a man through. It was to this bush that Obierika led the Commissioner and his men. They skirted round the compound, keeping close to the wall. The only sound

20 they made was with their feet as they crushed dry leaves.

Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead.

'Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him,' said Obierika. 'We have sent for strangers from another village to do it for us, but they may be a long time coming.'

The District Commissioner changed instantaneously. The resolute administrator in him gave way to the

25 student of primitive customs.

'Why can't you take him down yourselves?' he asked.

'It is against our custom,' said one of the men. 'It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offence against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. That is why we ask your people to bring him down, because you

30 are strangers.'

'Will you bury him like any other man?' asked the Commissioner.

'We cannot bury him. Only strangers can. We shall pay your men to do it. When he has been buried we will then do our duty by him. We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land.'

Obierika, who had been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously: 'That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself and now he will be buried like a dog ...' He could not say any more. His voice trembled and choked his words.

35

'Shut up!' shouted one of the messengers, quite unnecessarily.

'Take down the body,' the Commissioner ordered his chief messenger, 'and bring it and all these people to the court.'

40 'Yes, sah,' the messenger said, saluting.

The Commissioner went away, taking three or four of the soldiers with him. In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting a hanged man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book

45 which he planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of
50 the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

(Chinua Achebe 166–8)

This chapter ends the novel and the story of Okonkwo. The following commentary focuses on how the reader might respond and why.

The carefully chosen **verbs** and **adverbs** in the first paragraph convey a powerful difference between the armed men and the villagers. The latter are ‘sitting wearily’: the verb suggests inaction and the qualifying adverb ‘wearily’ conveys a further element of lethargy or uncertainty. In contrast, the verbs employed by the commissioner connote authority and conviction (‘commanded’) and the submission of the villagers (‘they obeyed’).

The **dialogue** in this passage highlights the differences between the dignity of the villagers, who are keen to ‘make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land’ (line 33) and the brutal language of the white men whose ‘Shut up!’ is said ‘unnecessarily’ (line 38). Indeed, the commissioner describes the villagers’ manner of speech as one of their ‘infuriating habits’ (line 12).

Point of view in this chapter is interestingly suspended between the villagers and the armed imperialists. However, the narrative’s sympathies at this point are mostly with the villagers: in line 34 Obierika is described as meditatively ‘gazing steadily at his friend’s dangling body’; the dignity of his actions are in direct contrast to the emotional volatility of the commissioner who is described as becoming ‘angry and red in the face’ (line 7).

The novel ends with a paragraph where the point of view is firmly located with the district commissioner. This is an example of **free indirect discourse** because, although the narrative voice is ostensibly still the detached third person that it has been throughout the novel, here we are clearly seeing things through the eyes of this particular character and being offered a temporary and privileged glimpse into the way that he sees the world.

Read the passage again and see if there are any other narrative techniques that you think are particularly interesting.

As *Things Fall Apart* closes, the reader experiences the horrifying thought that the humanity and culture of the people that have been described over the course of the novel are likely to be reduced to a paragraph in an as-yet-unwritten work of imperialist anthropology. The novel’s closing image, which centres on the dreams of the commissioner to write such a book, takes us back, one final time, to *Heart of Darkness*. In Conrad’s novella, Kurtz is also charged with writing just such a book. He has been commissioned by the obviously racist ‘International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs’ to make a report ‘for its future guidance’. And notwithstanding the fact that Kurtz is clearly meant, on some level, to be a representation of European imperialism as a whole (‘His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz’) *Heart of Darkness* is, however unreliably, still narrated from the **point of view** of white imperialism.

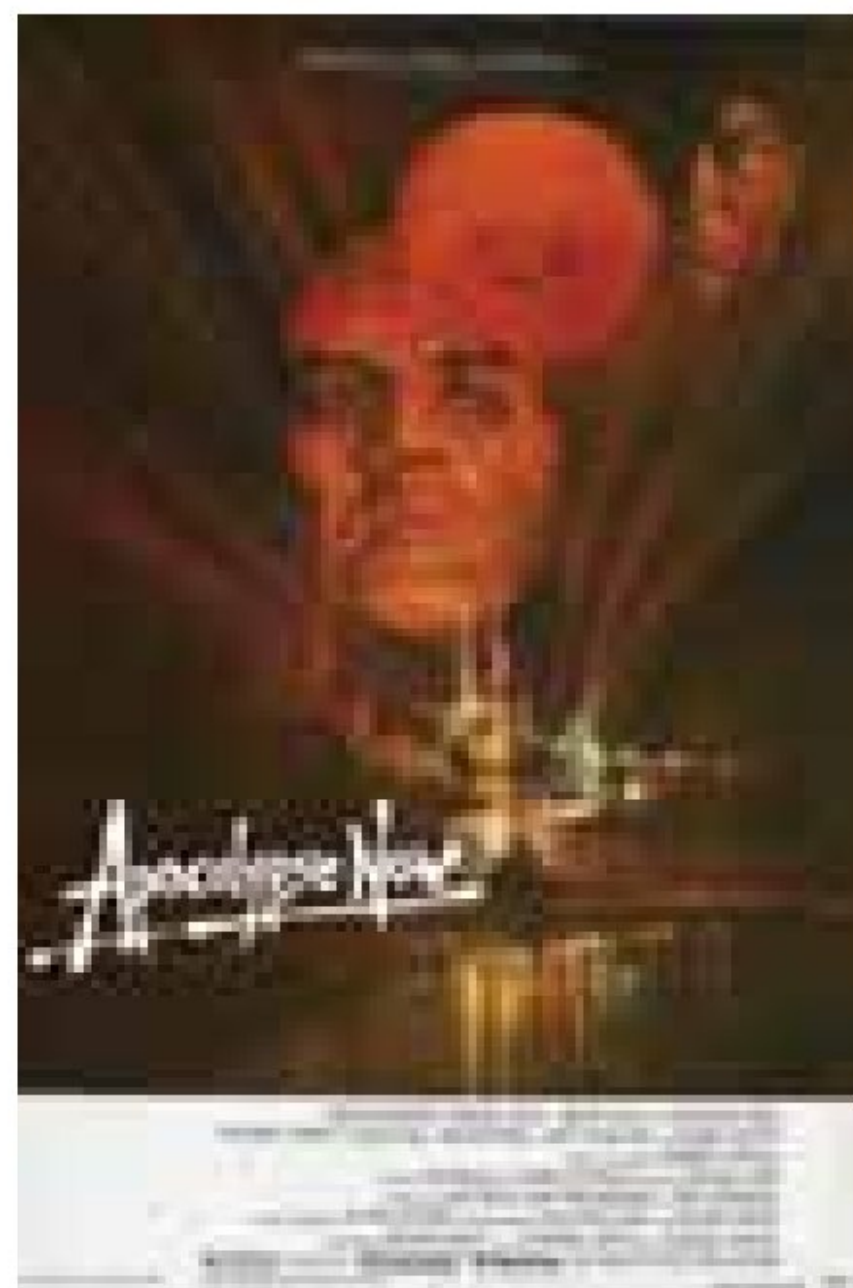
The ending to *Things Fall Apart* plays with the possibility that the same fate might befall its narrative; however, the text is written. The novel has told us the story of Okonkwo. Its ironic intertextual reference to *Heart of Darkness* with the citing of a ‘reasonable paragraph’ in ‘*The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*’ (lines 48 and 50), only serves to remind us that *Things Fall Apart*, written by an African novelist from a post-colonial **perspective**, has told us Okonkwo’s story and, however flawed his life, the existence of the text refutes his reduction to a note in an imperialist textbook.

The intertextual journey in this chapter has taken us from an eighteenth-century **modernist** novella, to an early-twentieth-century symbolist poem, to a mid-twentieth-century post-colonial novel. However, it has a couple of further steps to take. Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979 film *Apocalypse Now* is about the horrors of the Vietnam War. It is, however, also a retelling of *Heart of Darkness*. In the film, a Captain Willard is given a mission to find a renegade Colonel (‘Kurtz’, exactly as in Conrad’s novella) and takes control of the boat which navigates a river – just like the one in *Heart of Darkness* – en route to discovering Kurtz, who has gone rogue and insane.

When Willard finally confronts Kurtz, he finds him, in a further intertextual moment, quoting the poem ‘The Hollow Men’ by TS Eliot. Indeed, Eliot had originally considered using a quotation from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (‘The horror! The horror!’) as **epigraph** for his modernist poem *The Waste Land*. When Francis Ford Coppola’s wife, Eleanor, made a film about the making of *Apocalypse Now* – which was beset by problems – she called it, in one further intertextual reference, ‘Hearts of Darkness’.

This might seem like a very modern horror story but it, too, is timeless and echoes throughout the literature of the ages. At the very end of Shakespeare’s play *King Lear*, for instance, the elderly Lear comes onto the stage holding in his arms the dead body of his one loyal daughter, Cordelia. He has virtually no words to describe the terrible grief that causes his imminent death. His opening words are the guttural cry: ‘Howl, howl, howl, howl!’ This is remarkably similar to Kurtz’s ‘The horror! The horror!’ as an expression of indescribable agony. In response to Lear’s pitifully tragic situation, Kent asks: ‘Is this the promis’d end?’ to which Edgar answers: ‘Or image of that horror?’ (Act 5 Scene 3, lines 256–263). The image of horror finds its expression in remarkably similar terms, whether it be a 1604 play, an 1899 novella, or a 1979 film.

The image of the ‘Heart of Darkness’ continues to reverberate intertextually in even more contemporary literature. The final step in our journey is to encounter Arundhati Roy’s 1997 novel, *The God of Small Things*. Throughout the novel, the idea of ‘The History House’ is used as a metaphor for family and national history; however, in the chapter entitled ‘The History House’, it is both a **metaphor** and a physical location where Velutha, a lower-caste character who has been banished for having a relationship with a higher-caste character, is being hunted by the police, accused of a crime he didn’t commit. The following passage describes the policemen making their way to ‘The History House’ where Velutha is hiding. When they find him they brutally beat him; in the passage we feel both the impending sense that something bad is about to happen but also the beauty of the natural world, which is oblivious to the malevolence of the human beings trampling through it.



■ Film poster for Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979, *Apocalypse Now*

Crimson dragonflies mated in the air. Doubledeckered. Deft. One admiring policeman watched and wondered briefly about the dynamics of dragonfly sex, and what went into what. Then his mind clicked to attention and Police Thoughts returned.

Onwards.

5 Past tall anthills congealed in the rain. Slumped like drugged sentries asleep at the gates of Paradise.

Past butterflies drifting through the air like happy messages.

Huge ferns.

A chameleon.

A startling shoeflower.

10 The scurry of grey jungle fowl running for cover.

The nutmeg tree that Vellya Paapen hadn't found.

A forked canal. Still. Choked with duckweed. Like a dead green snake. A tree trunk fallen across it. The Touchable policemen minced across. Twirling polished bamboo batons.

Hairy fairies with lethal wands.

15 Then the sunlight was fractured by thin trunks of tilting trees. Dark of Heartness tiptoed into the Heart of Darkness. The sound of stridulating crickets swelled.

Grey squirrels streaked down mottled trunks of rubber trees that slanted towards the sun. Old scars slashed across their bark. Sealed. Healed. Untapped.

Acres of this, and then, a clearing. A house.

20 The History House.

(Arundhati Roy 305–6)

The playful spoonerism (the first letters of 'Heart' and 'Darkness' are transposed to make 'Dark of Heartness') cannot disguise the very real sense of menace in this episode. Arundhati Roy's **prose** style is unconventional – she uses extremely short sentences and paragraphs – but the journey to the 'Heart of Darkness' is an unmistakably intertextual reference to the trope that we have been exploring in this chapter. It marks a site of danger and is a metaphor for the madness of evil human behaviour.

Arundhati Roy

Arundhati Roy is an Indian writer and human rights and environmental campaigner. Her most famous work, *The God of Small Things*, won the Man Booker Prize in 1997. For most of her childhood she lived in Kerala, in South India, where most of *The God of Small Things* is set, among the 'backwaters' – a unique network of lakes, rivers and lagoons.



ACTIVITY 1

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy

Now re-read this passage and attempt a close analysis of the ways Arundhati Roy creates a vivid impression of this particular aspect of the natural world. You should look particularly closely at her language choices and the effect the structure of her sentences and paragraphs has on our experience of reading this passage. Once you have finished, compare your responses to the notes on page 431.

EE Links: Making explicit intertextual links

If you have enjoyed studying the various intertextual connections in this chapter, you might consider writing an extended essay that makes explicit intertextual links between works. You could, for instance, directly investigate the **intertextuality** of Roy's novel with *Heart of Darkness* or *Things Fall Apart* with *Heart of Darkness*. Indeed, any time one work refers so integrally to another, there may well be an opportunity for an extended essay subject.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to ask in what ways diverse literary texts can share points of similarity and, in looking at a range of different literary (and film) forms over more than a century, we have seen how those points of similarity are often remarkable. Because their relationship is an intertextual one, these very different texts are in conversation with each other over time and space.

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3.4

How valid is the notion of a 'classic' literary text?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To explore what conventionally has been meant by the notion of a classic
- ▶ To explore the idea of a canon of works
- ▶ To examine some of the problems with, and the debate around, the notion of 'classic' and so-called canonical texts
- ▶ To explore how other writers have defined 'classic'
- ▶ To look at some of the texts traditionally termed 'classics' and to examine why they might have been classed as such

Introduction

There are certain famous lines from literature that resonate even outside of the context of their original stories. Earlier, we read the famous opening lines to Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*: 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'. Perhaps you've heard of the equally famous opening to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*: 'Call me Ishmael'. These are considered by many readers to be classic lines from classic novels. This chapter will explore 'classic' texts such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, with its celebrated opening: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'. It will explore the idea of a canon, and will ask, with Hamlet: 'To be, or not to be, that is the question'. It will also ask: are these texts classics? Does everyone agree? And what might be some of the problems with the idea of a classic?

What defines a classic?

Many publishers have a special range of texts that they issue under the imprint of a 'classic'. It is one of the many ways that texts can be marked as classic: as having stood the test of time, or been read by enough people or, in the case of 'Modern Classics', perhaps, received an appropriate level of critical appreciation. There are a multitude of ways in which we might define a classic, and this chapter aims to explore some of those possible definitions, to look at the problems with some of them, and to interrogate the validity of the notion of a classic.

■ What is a canon of works?

A good place to start is with the canon. A literary 'canon' is basically a list of works of literature that are considered great. Traditionally, these might be the texts that are taught in schools, or universities, or the texts that might be held in libraries or, as we have seen, the books that publishers have decided constitute a classic. A book becomes 'canonical', therefore, when someone, or a group of people, *decides* it is a classic. The problem with that is that people disagree, even experts, and people change their minds over time. Something that seemed to have all of the hallmarks of a classic 100 years ago might very well not be viewed in the same light today, and the decision to call a work a classic is always subjective rather than objective.

It is also worth noting that 'English Literature' as a university subject is a relatively recent phenomenon. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, it was not really a subject you were able to study. The universities offered courses in 'Classics', but that meant the study of Greek and

Latin literature. The idea, therefore, of a canon of works that should be taught is something that has been developed mostly over the last century or so. When universities and schools decide what to put on their curricula, they are contributing to the idea of what the canon might look like. In the same vein, when the International Baccalaureate publishes its prescribed reading list, they are bestowing canonical value on the works on that list for IB teachers and students across the world.

The IB's reading list is a rich, multinational, multilingual collection of works. However, traditionally, many such lists have been heavily weighted in favour of Western literature. You will study texts in translation as part of your IB course, but it is mainly a course in *English* literature. But even the decision to write in English, as we explored in Chapter 3.2, can be a source of tension. Wherever we look on syllabi, curricula and reading lists, we find areas of tension and dispute. It is not representative, for instance that, traditionally, many of the texts chosen to be taught in school and university curricula have been overwhelmingly written by 'DWEM's, that is: dead, white, European males. Different people have strong views about how much of a problem this is, but it is certainly something that, historically, has affected judgments about the notion of a classic and continues to be a problem for the validity of such a notion.

● TOK Links: Who decides what is 'good'?

One of the problems with deciding what is a classic and which works are 'canonized' is that those judgments are subjective. Think about the nexus of interweaving ideas and influences that might cause someone to make the judgments they do. Who do you think should make these decisions? Should it be 'experts'? And, if so, what do experts in this field look like? Should we judge something as classic because it has been read the most? But how would we measure this? And would this not mean that publishers were still ultimately deciding? Should a classic have 'passed the test of time'? Or is that problematic, because it automatically excludes what might be brilliant contemporary writing? How long, in fact, is 'the test of time'?

If we believe that experts are actually in the best position to decide what a classic is, then perhaps this should be a job for literary academics; however, even in this field, there are many competing views. One academic who has made an explicit contribution to this debate is the American literary critic Harold Bloom. Bloom is phenomenally well-read, so some people would see this as a strong case for his being an expert; nevertheless, his judgments, like those of all readers, remain subjective. His book, *The Western Canon*, constructs a list of the books he thinks are the best in the 'Western tradition' and makes the case for a number of key players with Shakespeare, for example, being at the centre. Bloom gives several examples of the kind of qualities associated with a classic; he also has criteria for the decisions he makes. He argues, for instance:

One mark of an originality that can win canonical status for a literary work is a strangeness that we either never altogether assimilate, or that becomes such a given that we are blinded to its idiosyncrasies ...

(Harold Bloom 4)

That might be a beautiful distinction, but it is a very subjective one. Lots of people disagree with Bloom and think that his canon, like so many throughout history, once again privileges a range of elites – mostly white, European men.

Later on in this chapter, we will look at some other writers' definitions of what makes a classic and you will be able to think about what your position on the debate is. We will all have our own views and they will, perhaps inevitably, be shaped by our own backgrounds, cultures, traditions and reading.

■ Problems with the notion of a classic

In Chapter 3.1, we came across the concept of the Renaissance: that great flowering of European culture that started in Italy in about the fourteenth century. The Renaissance is the root of many of the canonical choices we will encounter; many renaissance writers are considered classics, and Shakespeare, at the centre of Bloom's (and many other critics') canon was, of course, writing during this period. If there's an emblematic image of the Renaissance, then it might well be Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* (have a look via the QR code). This famous image seems to encapsulate the great flourishing of the arts and the sciences, and the celebration of human ingenuity and creativity.



However, one key problem with the image is in its title: this is an image of Renaissance *man*. The question we might want to ask, therefore, is: what about Renaissance *woman*? We have the male 'classics', what about the female 'classics' from that crucial moment for English literature? The great feminist critic Joan Kelly addresses that question in an important essay entitled 'Did Women have a Renaissance?' And, sadly, her simple answer is: no. If we agree with her argument, then that is one reason why there are relatively so few works by women from that period: women simply lacked the same opportunities as men (Kelly 19–50).

It is difficult to write without access to education, to books, to materials to write with, and to somewhere to write. Virginia Woolf's twentieth-century essay 'A Room of One's Own' makes the case that simply having the time and space needed to write is absolutely key and throughout history women, and many other groups, have simply not had access to these basic things. In 'A Room of One's Own', Woolf imagines what would have happened had Shakespeare had a twin sister (Woolf calls her Judith) with similar talents and similar ambitions. She concludes that she, Shakespeare's sister, would have been inevitably defeated by the culture of the society of her time and it would have been almost impossible for her to be able to write in the way that it was for her brother. But even if writers are able to overcome these huge systemic problems and manage to write, that is still no guarantee that their work will get read, let alone be published or survive for future generations.

In her polemical essay, Woolf calls upon her contemporary female students of Oxford and Cambridge (in their segregated, minority colleges) to uncover the lives of women like 'Judith Shakespeare' – and, in the intervening period, many have. Scholars have discovered many female writers who have been disregarded or ignored by history: one example is Catherine des Roches, a non-aristocratic spinner who lived in Poitiers, France, in the late-sixteenth century and published jointly with her daughter. She is an excellent example of a rich vein of writing by women which has not made it into the canon and not been preserved as a classic. One wonderful sonnet by des Roches concludes:

Ayant dans la main le fuzeau, et la plume

That is:

In my hand the spindle ... and the pen

(Jones)

It is a wonderful creative self-fashioning of the worker as simultaneously an artist. Here we hear a powerful female voice from the 'middling sort' echoing down the ages. However, decisions made mostly by powerful men over the years have reduced the diversity in the historical canon which has come down to us.

The voices we hear from the Renaissance period are overwhelmingly male. But are they also mostly white men? Again, the simple answer is yes. There are, though, some remarkable

exceptions. Black Africans in Renaissance Europe generally suffered a horrid existence. Legally inferior, if not literally slaves, they nevertheless made up a substantial proportion of many civic communities: almost 10% of Seville in 1565, for instance. In another Spanish city, Granada, a remarkable black man, Juan Latino, in an act of self-fashioning genius, constructed a powerful poetic image of himself as a descendant of biblical Ethiopia. Once he had been set free from slavery he was appointed Chair of Grammar and Latin Language at Granada University, a post that he held for twenty years.

Sadly, though, his was not a common experience and involved, as it did for so many other successful figures of the Renaissance, an act of ingratiating self-fashioning. So the simple answer to the question 'Was the European Renaissance largely concerned with white men?' is yes – however, there is room for optimism. Scholars continue to reanimate voices from the past from different backgrounds and traditions and it is a vital and burgeoning field. The canon is becoming diversified, from the medieval and Renaissance periods onwards, but it is a slow process.

● EE Links: Unusual choices

You might think about writing an extended essay on texts that are not usually covered or voices that are not often heard. Every year lots of students write – albeit often very good – extended essays on the same, limited, range of texts. You might be intellectually excited by the idea of finding something niche: perhaps there is a writer from your part of the world or your culture, or writing in your language that you're particularly interested in. Or perhaps you might be interested in a particular period, and want to do some research to find out about writers who were active at the time but are much less well known?

The example of the European Renaissance period captures a process which has been mirrored in different cultures at different times throughout the history of literature. Something can only become a classic if its writer finds themselves in the conditions to write it in the first place, and if it gets published or preserved so that it can be read in the future. As we have seen, therefore, there are plenty of historical problems with the notion of a classic. Nevertheless, of those works that do get written and do get published, there is still debate about which should have the status of a classic conferred upon them, and whether that notion is really valid.

■ Other writers' definition of a classic

In his novel, *Changing Places*, David Lodge invents a game for literary academics to play called 'humiliation'. Remembering that literary professionals are expected to have read very widely, and particularly to have read the classics, the game involves each player having to admit to a book that they *haven't* read. The winner is the person who names the book which everyone else considers to be the most classic, in other words, the text they possibly really should have read. In the novel, Howard Ringbaum, not a particularly pleasant academic, chooses *Hamlet* as his work to admit to not having read. Lodge's narrator tells the story of what happens next:

A piquant incident, you must admit – but wait till I tell you the sequel. Howard Ringbaum unexpectedly flunked his review three days later and it is generally supposed that this was because the English Department dared not give tenure to a man who publicly admitted to not having read *Hamlet* ...

(David Lodge 120)

Ringbaum wins the game, then, but loses his job. This is a comic incident in a comic novel, but this incident also involved the loss of somebody's livelihood (admittedly a fictional character in this instance). People really care about how we classify works and, as we will see, how different people decide what makes a classic is fraught with difficulty. As we look at some examples of other writers' 'definitions' of the notion of a classic, you might be thinking about how useful, or otherwise, you think the term is.

● TOK Links: Telling the truth

In the extract you've just read from David Lodge's novel, *Changing Places*, one of the characters tells his colleagues a truth (that he hasn't read *Hamlet*) that results in him losing his job. However, there is not much evidence that not having read the play is having a negative effect on his ability to do his job and he volunteers the information rather than being asked it directly – it is an interesting dilemma. Whenever we tell 'truths', we are presenting a version of something: we edit, nudge, adjust and caress the 'truth'. The line between truth and lies is a very blurred one. What do you think it means to be 'honest'? Is 'telling the truth' always the best thing to do?

The great Italian novelist and critic, Italo Calvino, wrote a book called *Why read the classics?* This **non-fiction** text starts with fourteen propositions about what the notion of a classic literary text might actually be. Read Calvino's list carefully and think about which of the statements resonate most powerfully for you.

- 1 The classics are those books about which you usually hear people saying: 'I'm re-reading ...', never 'I'm reading ...'
- 2 The classics are those books which constitute a treasured experience for those who have read and loved them; but they remain just as rich an experience for those who reserve the chance to read them for when they are in the best condition to enjoy them.
- 3 The classics are books which exercise a particular influence, both when they imprint themselves on our imagination as unforgettable, and when they hide in the layers of memory disguised as the individual's or the collective unconscious.
- 4 A classic is a book which with each re-reading offers as much of a sense of discovery as the first reading.
- 5 A classic is a book which even when we read it for the first time gives the sense of re-reading something we have read before.
- 6 A classic is a book which has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers.
- 7 The classics are those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures (or just in the languages and customs) through which they have passed.
- 8 A classic is a work which constantly generates a pulviscular cloud of critical discourse around it, but which always shakes the particles off.
- 9 Classics are books which, the more we think we know them through hearsay, the more original, unexpected, and innovative we find them when we actually read them.

- 10 A classic is the term given to any book which comes to represent the whole universe, a book on a par with ancient talismans.
- 11 'Your' classic is a book to which you cannot remain indifferent, and which helps you define yourself in relation or even in opposition to it.
- 12 A classic is a work that comes before other classics; but those who have read other classics first immediately recognize its place in the genealogy of classic works.
- 13 A classic is a work which relegates the noise of the present to a background hum, which at the same time the classics cannot exist without.
- 14 A classic is a work which persists as a background noise even when a present that is totally incompatible with it holds sway.

(Italo Calvino 3–8)

ACTIVITY 1

Considering the notion of a 'classic'

Once you have read Calvino's list carefully and considered each of the statements, have a go at these two activities, making sure that you are asking yourself questions about how valid you think the notion of a 'classic' literary text is.

- 1 Firstly, next to as many of the fourteen numbered points as possible, write the name of a work that you have read which you think corresponds to that point.
- 2 Secondly, decide which five of these fourteen definitions you think are your favourites and make a list of your choices. You should be able to defend and explain the reasons for the choices you have made.

Calvino has a strong personal sense of what might count as a classic, and hopefully you, too, are beginning to develop your opinions. Calvino's eleventh point is: "Your" classic is a book to which you cannot remain indifferent, and which helps you define yourself in relation or even in opposition to it. Do you have a book that you feel similarly about? A book that, even if you're not sure how much you still like it, continues to shape your world view and continues to influence the way you think about other books? Such decisions are always very personal. Would you agree, however, that Calvino's highly personal definition means that a collection of works resulting from this standard would be highly unlikely to consist largely of works by dead, white, European men?

Italo Calvino

Italo Calvino was a prolific novelist and critic who lived from 1923–1985. His work spans both fiction and non-fiction and is notably experimental. Particularly interesting texts to explore might include *Invisible Cities*, which describes various cities using the device of interspersed conversations between Marco Polo (the explorer) and Kublai Khan (the emperor), and Calvino's experimental novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*, with its postmodernist, self-referential direct addresses to the reader.

Many other writers have contributed to the debates about the notion of what constitutes classic literature. The British writer Zadie Smith, for example, has also written about what the characteristics of a classic, in her case novel, might be. In her book *Changing My Mind: Occasional*

Essays, she takes George Eliot's great nineteenth-century novel *Middlemarch* as her starting point for a meditation on what characterizes novelistic greatness.

These must be the most famous lines in *Middlemarch*:

'If we had a keen vision and feeling for all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.'

- 5 Why do we like them so much? Because they seem so human. We are moved that it should pain Eliot so to draw a border around her attention, that she is so alive to the mass of existence lying unnarrated on the other side of silence. She seems to care for people, indiscriminately and in their entity, as it was once said God did. She finds it a sin to write always of Dorothea! [...]

- 10 What is universal and timeless in literature is *need* – we continue to *need* novelists who seem to know and feel, and who move between these two modes of operation with wondrous fluidity. What is not universal or timeless, though, is form. Forms, styles, structures – whatever word you prefer – should change like skirt lengths. They have to; otherwise we make a rule, a religion, of one form; we say, 'This form here, *this* is what reality is like,' and it pleases us to say that (especially if we're English) because it means we don't have to read any more, or think, or feel ...

- 15 What twenty-first-century novelists inherit from Eliot is the radical freedom to push the novel's form to its limits, wherever they may be. It's a mistake to hate *Middlemarch* because the Ichabods love it. That would be to denude oneself of one of those good things of the world that Spinoza advised we cling to. *Feeling into knowledge, knowledge into feeling ...* When we say Eliot was the greatest of Victorian novelists, we mean this process worked more fluidly in her than anyone else.

(Zadie Smith)

Do you agree with Smith's criteria for classic status for great novels that:

- 'we like them so much' because 'they seem so human'?
- what is 'universal and timeless in literature is *need*'?
- the process of turning '*Feeling into knowledge, knowledge into feeling ...* worked more fluidly' in the greatest novelists?

We can find another viewpoint in TS Eliot's essay 'What is a Classic?' The extract below suggests some interesting ideas.

We must accordingly add, to our list of characteristics of the classic, that of comprehensiveness. The classic must, within its formal limitations, express the maximum possible of the whole range of feeling which represents the character of the people who speak that language. It will represent this at its best, and it will also have the widest appeal: among the people to which it belongs, it will find its response

- 5 among all classes and conditions of men.

(TS Eliot 67)

ACTIVITY 2

'What is a Classic?' by TS Eliot

Once you've read the extract on the previous page, answer the following questions and then check them against the notes on page 432.

- 1 Why do you think that Eliot values 'comprehensiveness'? What do you think he means by this?
- 2 When you think about some of the works that we have looked at in this book, do you think it really is important that a classic 'express the maximum possible of the whole range of feeling'?
- 3 Do you think it is reasonable to talk about 'the character of the people who speak [a particular] language'? Do we share characteristics with other people just on the grounds of speaking the same language as them?
- 4 Do you agree that something having 'the widest appeal' is an important consideration in judging something a classic?
- 5 Even if we accept that Eliot's 'men' is talking about people in general and not just males, do you think that any piece of literature can really appeal to 'all classes and conditions'?

The idea that a classic should appeal to 'all classes and conditions' is potentially a problematic one. Eliot was himself a **modernist** poet and many have considered modernist poetry deliberately difficult and divisively exclusive. In his 2005 book, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, Professor John Carey argues that:

Modernist literature and art can be seen as a hostile reaction to the unprecedentedly large reading public created by late nineteenth century educational reforms. The purpose of modernist writing ... was to exclude these newly educated (or 'semi-educated') readers, and so to preserve the intellectual's seclusion from the 'mass'.

(John Carey vii)

Can something be a classic, therefore, if it is exclusive and if many readers are not able to appreciate it? While most teachers and educators, at least, would agree that Shakespeare's works are classic, the proportion of readers who can actually read his plays on their own is still quite small. Indeed, there are some famous authors who have not necessarily agreed with the consensus position on Shakespeare. The famous Russian author, Leo Tolstoy, wrote in 1906:

I remember the astonishment I felt when I first read Shakespeare. I expected to receive a powerful aesthetic pleasure, but having read, one after the other, works regarded as his best ... not only did I feel no delight, but I felt an irresistible repulsion and tedium.

(Leo Tolstoy)

And, in his poem 'When I read Shakespeare', the British author DH Lawrence wrote:

*When I read Shakespeare I am struck with wonder
that such trivial people should muse and thunder
in such lovely language*

(*The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*)

There is not always agreement. But perhaps that is part of the appeal of literature, that it does not lend itself to a single, definitive reading. Perhaps inevitably, therefore, this chapter has opened up more questions than it has provided answers. Hopefully, however, it has provided you with a

range of ideas to start considering and to decide how you feel about the validity of the notion of a classic, as we go on to look at a number of texts that have been regularly branded as classics and ask why this might be the case.

■ A traditional classic

You may remember that, in Chapter 3.2, we looked very briefly at the first line of Hamlet's very famous speech at the beginning of Act 3 of his play. At the time, we looked at how it was a line of ostensibly **iambic pentameter** which, nevertheless, didn't quite fit. You will also remember from earlier in this chapter that it is the fictional character of Howard Ringbaum who loses his job as an English professor after publicly admitting to not having read *Hamlet*.

Hamlet is a play which some commentators would refer to as being at the centre of the canon, and it is certainly a work which exercises a tremendous hold over literary culture. In the theatre, 'playing the Dane' – which interpreting the part of Hamlet is often referred to as – is still considered one of acting's central challenges. There are very few people who would not admit that, at some level at least, therefore, that *Hamlet* is undoubtedly a classic.

We will now read a slightly longer extract from the **soliloquy** we mentioned before. A soliloquy is a dramatic convention which allows the playwright to afford the audience a privileged glimpse into what the character on stage is thinking: here Hamlet shares his thoughts about life and death. Read it carefully and think about whether you think that this writing for the theatre contains any of the characteristics that you are beginning to consider might constitute a classic:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 5 And by opposing end them. To die – to sleep –
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end
 The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die – to sleep.
 10 To sleep – perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub!
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause. There's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life.

(*Hamlet Act 3 Scene 1*)

This is a speech that has been written about thousands of times and we are not going to look at it in particular detail here. If you are interested in following it up then you will find plenty of interesting analyses online to start with. For the moment, the following commentary asks simply: does this passage have any of the features that we might associate with a classic? We have read several suggestions about what may or may not be the features of a classic in this chapter; do you agree that this passage meets some of those criteria?

Firstly, this speech is, quite simply, famous. Its first image and its opening question are particularly **memorable**. 'To be, or not to be, that is the question' is a phrase that you undoubtedly have heard and it rings intertextually through the history of literature in English. Its memorability

is also encapsulated in its tenacious **metaphors**: the unpredictability of life is suggested by 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', where the metaphors are battlefield weapons with their suggestion of threat and danger; the difficulties we often face in life are 'a sea of troubles'. The powerful image of the impenetrable ocean suggests something unstoppable and all-consuming which would be futile to 'to take arms against' or to confront.

The speech might also be considered to be **universal**. When Hamlet describes 'The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to', he is speaking to the human condition. Regardless of where we come from, all of our lives are characterized by 'natural shocks'; we are all 'flesh' and 'heir to' that flesh, as human beings exist in an ineluctable cycle of birth and death. That universality might also suggest a quality of **timelessness**. Throughout history, humans have worried about an afterlife: almost all cultures and religions provide a framework to consider what might happen after we die. Hamlet's speech uses the metaphor of death as a sleep: 'To die – to sleep. / To sleep – perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub!' Sleep, however, is not final; we also dream, and Shakespeare extends the metaphor to question what those dreams (after death) might look like. For Hamlet, this afterlife (and in the play he has seen the ghost of his father in purgatory, where he is suffering after his death) is the 'rub' or the problem. We could also consider this treatment of death, and this meditation on the afterlife, an example of **comprehensiveness**. Not only does Hamlet deal with these philosophical thoughts in detail, he speaks to a universal audience and provides us with a memorable metaphorical language to describe the 'dreams' that 'may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil'. Just as a snake sheds its skin, Hamlet is suggesting that we unclasp ourselves, by shuffling off, of one life in preparation to enter the next. Another quality that might render this passage a key element in a classic text is that it has been so frequently repeated and reproduced. The play is regularly performed, it is relentlessly written about, and its 'so long life' has resonated around the cultural arena for centuries. Mere repetition and re-reading do not make a work a classic but, without it, it is impossible for it to maintain that classic status.

Finally, the speech, and the play as a whole, has enjoyed an enduring influence intertextually: to take one example among thousands, the speaker of TS Eliot's poem 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' exclaims 'No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be' (Eliot 17) and, as so often, the poet is here expecting his reader to recognize the **allusion** and to know the play *Hamlet*.

Not everyone would agree about these points, however, and these various 'categories' of what might define a classic are very subjective and fluid. Nevertheless, these are some of the many reasons why some readers, and audience members, over time, have come to consider various works as 'classics'.

Hamlet is a stage work from 1601. The next work that we will examine in terms of how many readers consider it a classic is a nineteenth-century novel. In Chapter 1.3 of the **readers, writers and texts** section of this book, you read an extract from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. In that context, you were considering how the author uses language in order to convey character. One of the features of your IB English Literature course is that all the works you study can be considered from many **perspectives**. To demonstrate that, we will consider another passage from *Pride and Prejudice*, the passage preceding the one you read before, from a different perspective and, this time, we will consider the novel in terms of its status as a classic work.

The novel starts with the famous ironic line: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife' (Austen 1). It is, of course, ironic, because it is not necessarily 'a truth' at all that all rich, single men are looking for wives. The novel starts off, therefore, with a playful, ironic voice which provides a perfect platform for Austen's scrutiny of various domestic arrangements and her light-hearted critical presentation of her society and culture.

The passage we are about to read comes from Chapter 1 of the novel. It is largely a dialogue between Mr and Mrs Bennet, who are discussing the imminent arrival in their neighbourhood of a rich, young, single man, Mr Bingley, and the possible consequences of his arrival for their five unmarried daughters. Mr and Mrs Bennet are spectacularly mismatched as a couple. Austen describes Mr Bennet as possessing ‘sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice’. He is a natural ally to Lizzy, one of his daughters, and the antithesis of his shallow, gossiping wife. For him, life is a game and the ironic tone of the opening chapters captures the spirit of playfulness that characterizes Mr Bennet’s view of life. In Chapter 3, Austen describes how the women of the family ganged up on him: ‘They attacked him in various ways; with barefaced questions, ingenious suppositions, and distant surmises’. The **metaphor** is from contact sport (‘they attacked him’) and suggests the ferocity of their conversations and, just as in a sport like boxing, tactics are all important: Mr Bennet is battered by a triplet of rhetorical skills, ‘questions ... suppositions ... surmises’. However, it is in the adjectives that Austen employs to describe these techniques that we see her playfulness: ‘barefaced’ suggesting the Bennets’ lightness of conversation and ‘ingenious’ and ‘distant’ their elusive, ironical manner. At this early stage of the novel, Mr Bennet’s playfulness nevertheless triumphs: ‘he eluded the skill of them all’. In this passage we see him being reserved, ironic, and waiting for his moment to pounce.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

‘My dear Mr Bennet,’ said his lady to him one day, ‘have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?’

5 Mr Bennet replied that he had not.

‘But it is,’ returned she; ‘for Mrs Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.’

Mr Bennet made no answer.

‘Do you not want to know who has taken it?’ cried his wife impatiently.

‘You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.’

10 This was invitation enough.

‘Why, my dear, you must know, Mrs Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and was so much delighted with it, that he agreed with Mr Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before Michaelmas, and some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week.’

15 ‘What is his name?’

‘Bingley.’

‘Is he married or single?’

‘Oh! Single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!’

20 ‘How so? How can it affect them?’

‘My dear Mr Bennet,’ replied his wife, ‘how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them.’

'Is that his design in settling here?'

25 'Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must visit him as soon as he comes.'

'I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr Bingley may like you the best of the party.'

30 'My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be anything extraordinary now. When a woman has five grown-up daughters, she ought to give over thinking of her own beauty.'

'In such cases, a woman has not often much beauty to think of.'

'But, my dear, you must indeed go and see Mr Bingley when he comes into the neighbourhood.'

'It is more than I engage for, I assure you.'

35 'But consider your daughters. Only think what an establishment it would be for one of them. Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go, merely on that account, for in general, you know, they visit no newcomers. Indeed you must go, for it will be impossible for us to visit him if you do not.'

'You are over-scrupulous, surely. I dare say Mr Bingley will be very glad to see you; and I will send a few lines by you to assure him of my hearty consent to his marrying whichever he chooses of the girls; though I must throw in a good word for my little Lizzy.'

40 'I desire you will do no such thing. Lizzy is not a bit better than the others; and I am sure she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good-humoured as Lydia. But you are always giving her the preference.'

'They have none of them much to recommend them,' replied he; 'they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters.'

45 'Mr Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion for my poor nerves.'

'You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these last twenty years at least.'

'Ah, you do not know what I suffer.'

50 'But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood.'

'It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come, since you will not visit them.'

'Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all.'

55 Mr Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news.

(Jane Austen)

Now read this short commentary and consider whether you think that some of these features are ways in which this work might also be considered a classic, particularly perhaps a comic classic. The extract is full of **dialogue** and yet carefully registers Mr Bennet's reluctance to speak and his relative taciturnity: 'Mr Bennet replied that he had not' and 'Mr Bennet made no answer' (lines 5 and 7). The ironically uneven dialogue has the effect of showing the reader that Mr Bennet is already anticipating what his wife is going to say, and simultaneously satirizing her for it. So, when Mrs Bennett asks, 'Do you not want to know who has taken it?' He replies, ironically: 'You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it' (lines 8 and 9). The **irony** (its intended meaning is probably the opposite of what is actually being said) is that he does seem to object to hearing it! In a similar vein, Mr Bennet seems to revel in pretending not to know what his wife means. When (talking about the arrival of Mr Bingley) she says 'What a fine thing for our girls!', Mrs Bennet is clearly thinking about the possibility of marriage (lines 18–19). However, Mr Bennet's response in line 20 is the deliberately obtuse: 'How so? How can it affect them?' Ironically, while the reader registers his intention, his wife, sadly, doesn't. A similar effect is achieved when Mrs Bennet, frustrated by her husband's refusal to admit to understanding her, says: 'You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them' (lines 21–2). His reply is **comically ironic** (line 23): 'Is that his design in settling here?' 'Design' is deliberately overzealous on Mr Bennet's part: designed, indeed, to irritate and fluster his poor wife even further.

After pretending not to be interested, and teasing his wife, about the arrival of Mr Bingley, the next chapter brings an interesting surprise: 'Mr Bennet was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr Bingley. He had always intended to visit him, though to the last always assuring his wife that he should not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid she had no knowledge of it' (Austen). Not only had he always intended to visit as his wife was encouraging him to do but, when he did, he did so without telling her. It is a great comic moment in this novel.

Another way in which this text might be considered a classic is the manner in which it has become a cultural artefact and influence beyond the existence of the novel itself. For instance, there have been many film versions and television adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, and some of the other works that we have considered in this chapter. When this happens, these classic stories and characters can take on a life of their own beyond their original creation.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

TRANSFORMATION

One of the ways in which classic texts attain their cultural status is through transformation. *Pride and Prejudice* has exercised a particularly powerful grip on popular culture through its transformation in various media. Two transformations which stayed relatively true to the original story were the 1995 BBC TV adaptation starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle, and the 2005 film with Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen – both transformations were popular and successful. However, the reach of the story, its characters and their influence has extended further: in 2004, for instance, Gurinder Chadha directed a Bollywood version, loosely based on Jane Austen's novel, called *Bride and Prejudice* and, in 2016, the film *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* came out, based on Seth Grahame-Smith's 2009 novel, both texts of which were obviously strongly influenced by Jane Austen.

Similarly to *Pride and Prejudice*, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, published in full in 1861, has also taken on a life beyond the limits of the pages of the original novel. Many twentieth-century viewers knew the story and its characters through the 1946 British film directed by David Lean. Similarly, many twenty-first-century viewers and readers know them through the 1998 film

adaptation directed by Alfonso Cuarón and starring Ethan Hawke and Gwyneth Paltrow, and, even more recently, a 2011 BBC series featured Gillian Anderson as Miss Havisham.

The next passage is from Chapter 2 of *Great Expectations*. The narrator, Pip, is an orphan and is being brought up by his cruel sister and her kind husband, Joe Gargery. Read the passage carefully and think about how Dickens is using language and creating characters. When he describes his upbringing, rather ironically, as being 'by hand', Pip is referring, sadly, to the fact that his sister used to hit him regularly.

My sister, Mrs Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbours because she had brought me up 'by hand'. Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe
5 Gargery and I were both brought up by hand.

She was not a good-looking woman, my sister; and I had a general impression that she must have made Joe Gargery marry her by hand. Joe was a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue that they seemed to have somehow got mixed with their own whites. He was a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow, – a
10 sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness.

My sister, Mrs Joe, with black hair and eyes, had such a prevailing redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap. She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles. She made it a powerful
15 merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe, that she wore this apron so much. Though I really see no reason why she should have worn it at all; or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off, every day of her life.

Joe's forge adjoined our house, which was a wooden house, as many of the dwellings in our country were, – most of them, at that time. When I ran home from the churchyard, the forge was shut up, and
20 Joe was sitting alone in the kitchen. Joe and I being fellow-sufferers, and having confidences as such, Joe imparted a confidence to me, the moment I raised the latch of the door and peeped in at him opposite to it, sitting in the chimney corner.

(Charles Dickens)

ACTIVITY 3

What constitutes a 'classic'?

Read back over the chapter and make a list of the various conditions that different writers and thinkers have suggested for what might constitute a classic.

- 1 Try to find at least 8–10 different qualities which others have seen as the constituents of a classic at various times.
- 2 Once you've constructed your list, use it to ask questions of this extract from *Great Expectations* (and, indeed, other extracts in this chapter). Can you find evidence in these texts to satisfy the various criteria that have been suggested for what a classic work might be? Do you agree that *Great Expectations*, or any of the other texts described here, is a classic? Do you think this is a useful term to use about works of literature?

When you have finished, compare your responses to the notes on page 432.

Having looked at drama and **prose**, the final work in this section asking the question, ‘What does a traditional classic look like?’, is a poem. Read the following poem by Emily Dickinson carefully a couple of times and consider how this poem might be seen as a classic by many readers, then read the commentary that follows.

There’s a certain Slant of light

There’s a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

5 Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference –
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –
10 ‘Tis the seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
15 When it goes, ‘tis like the Distance
On the look of Death –

(Emily Dickinson)

The first interesting thing to note about the poem is its almost entire lack of punctuation, except those multiple **dashes**. They punctuate the poem like intakes of breath, spacing out this meditation on life and death.

The poem starts with the **motif** or **metaphor** of ‘a certain Slant of light’. The mention of the ‘cathedral’ in line 4 might mean that, retrospectively, we go back and think of this ‘slant’ as coming through a stained-glass window in a church, perhaps imbuing the poem with a spiritual quality. The quality of the ‘Slant of light’ – oblique, unknowable, engagingly beautiful – makes it an interesting and immediately un-pin-down-able metaphor. Is it a thought? An idea? A concern?

The **pathetic fallacy** of ‘Winter Afternoons’ intrudes to suggest a negative **connotation** to what we might originally have considered a positive image. That negativity continues in both the **verb** ‘oppresses’ and its linked **simile**, ‘like the Heft / Of Cathedral Tunes’. The ‘heft’ or ‘weight’ of the ‘cathedral tunes’ (the hymns?) weighs down like the slant of light. It is the weight, perhaps, of a spiritual awareness of thought of something beyond the immediate present, a sensation which is something we might well experience in a spiritual or religious sense.

In the second stanza, the poem registers the **psychological** nature of the pain being described when it describes the ‘Heavenly Hurt, it gives us – / We can find no scar’. A ‘scar’ would be a marker of a physical injury; here, rather, the **alliterative** ‘Heavenly Hurt’ suggests an unquiet mind which is troubled by thoughts, perhaps of a god or a heaven. The poem’s movement towards ‘internal difference’ – an inner mental conflict, perhaps suggest that ‘Where the Meanings, are’ is in our minds.

The **final stanza** of the poem returns to the slant of light which, 'When it comes', encourages the 'Landscape' to listen: its effect is natural and persuasive. The **final image** is of the receding light being 'like the Distance / On the look of Death'. It is that last image – the introduction of the idea of 'Death' – that haunts and has been haunting the poem, and is only named in its concluding word. Perhaps that light, after all, is a memento mori, a constant reminder of the inevitability and omnipresence of death in life.

It is a beautiful, haunting and endlessly re-readable poem, and many might consider those adjectives condition enough to mark the poem as a classic. It has also passed the test of time and has been regularly anthologized and chosen, therefore, by experts as a classic. It is playfully ambiguous – it is not easy to pin down exactly what the poem is saying – and this is a quality shared by many classics. We are certainly reminded of a viewpoint we came across earlier in this chapter when Harold Bloom argues that: 'One mark of an originality that can win canonical status for a literary work ... is a strangeness that we either never altogether assimilate, or that becomes such a given that we are blinded to its idiosyncrasies' (Bloom 4). However, it may just be that so many people have enjoyed reading this poem over time means that those many readers consider this to be a classic. Perhaps, when you've read this poem over and again, you too will agree?

Emily Dickinson

The nineteenth-century American poet Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) was reclusive (she rarely met people outside of her family) and was considered eccentric. Indeed, her poems themselves are often rather eccentric, in that they challenge various conventions. Only a handful of the hundreds of poems she wrote were published within her lifetime; nevertheless, those poems are now considered some of the very finest American verse. Her slight, lyrical poems dispense with conventional punctuation and frequently use the dash to signify a pause or a breath in her verse.



■ A modern classic

Having looked at various examples of works that have traditionally been considered classics, we turn, at the end of this chapter, to ask one final question: what does a modern classic look like? Of course, one of the possible definitions of classic status that we explored was whether a work had survived a period of time and was something that people returned to. For some readers, therefore, the concept of a 'modern classic' is an oxymoron, in that it is not possible to be both a classic and modern because one definitional condition of classic is that it is not modern; but, as we have seen, the concept of a classic is also understood by many readers to signify a work of a certain quality, regardless of when it was written. Many publishers concur, and some have imprints of books with titles like 'modern classics'.

Isabel Allende's magic realist novel, *The House of the Spirits*, is one of those works that is considered by some readers and critics to warrant the status of a 'modern classic'. We will read one very short section, which happens to be the very end of the novel.

My grandmother wrote in her notebooks that bore witness to life for fifty years. Smuggled out by certain friendly spirits, they miraculously escaped the miraculous pyre in which so many other family papers perished. I have them here at my feet, bound with coloured ribbons, divided according to events and not in chronological order, just as she arranged them before she left. Clara wrote them so they would help me
 5 now to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own. The first is an ordinary school copybook with twenty pages, written in a child's delicate calligraphy. It begins like this: Barrabas came to us by sea ...

(Isabel Allende 491)

Even in this very short passage we can note some features which might suggest that we are in the presence of a classic. The first line of the novel, mirrored in the last line, is '*Barrabas came to us by sea, the child Clara wrote in her delicate calligraphy*'. The text, therefore, is self-referentially cyclical: it suggests that its ending point is also its start, just like many fairy tales and myths. The novel is rooted in its intertextual relationships with other texts and traditions. This self-reflexive awareness of texts and textuality, and the focus on the telling of stories (the 'notebooks that bore witness to life'), might be considered another classic feature. Even as the novel closes, its historical sweep is evident, as is the power of stories to 'reclaim the past and overcome terrors'. It is yet another feature that is often found in texts that are considered to be classic.

These features, as we have seen, are by no means exclusive, nor are they necessarily markers of classic texts. However, we hope that you are now beginning to be able to recognize some of the literary features, themes and structures which might mark a text as classic.

Isabel Allende

Isabel Allende is a Chilean writer who was born in Peru in 1942. Allende writes in both Spanish and English. *The House of the Spirits* was written in Spanish in 1982 and was her first novel. Allende often writes in the style sometimes referred to as 'magic realism', where writers include references to magic or the supernatural in situations and events which might otherwise be seen as realistic. *The House of the Spirits* is written in this style, mixing myth and real-world situations.

The final text in this chapter is often considered a modern American classic. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a novel which mixes history, the horrors of the past, myth and politics, and is an extraordinarily imaginative work. This haunting scene comes from the beginning of the novel.

Baby Suggs died shortly after the brothers left, with no interest whatsoever in their leave taking or hers, and right afterward Sethe and Denver decided to end the persecution by calling forth the ghost that tried them so. Perhaps a conversation, they thought, an exchange of views or something would help. So they held hands and said, 'Come on. Come on. You may as well just come on.'

5 The sideboard took a step forward but nothing else did.

'Grandma Baby must be stopping it,' said Denver. She was ten and still mad at Baby Suggs for dying.

Sethe opened her eyes. 'I doubt that,' she said.

'Then why don't it come?'

10 'You forgetting how little it is,' said her mother. 'She wasn't even two years old when she died. Too little to understand. Too little to talk much even.'

'Maybe she don't want to understand,' said Denver.

'Maybe. But if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her.'

Sethe released her daughter's hand and together they pushed the sideboard back against the wall. Outside a driver whipped his horse into the gallop local people felt necessary when they passed.

15 'For a baby she throws a powerful spell,' said Denver.

'No more powerful than the way I loved her,' Sethe answered and there it was again. The welcoming cool of unchiseled headstones; the one she selected to lean against on tiptoe, her knees wide open as any grave. Pink as a fingernail it was, and sprinkled with glittering chips. Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I'll do it for free.

20 Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have gotten 'Dearly' too? She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her still that it might have been possible – that for twenty minutes, a half hour, say, she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and that there was to say, surely) engraved on her baby's headstone: Dearly Beloved. But what she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered. She thought it would be enough, rutting among the headstones with
25 the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so old; the appetite in it quite new. That should certainly be enough. Enough to answer one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust.

Counting on the stillness of her own soul, she had forgotten the other one: the soul of her baby girl. Who would have thought that a little old baby could harbor so much rage? Rutting among the stones under
30 the eyes of the engraver's son was not enough. Not only did she have to live out their years in a house palsied by the baby's fury at having its throat cut, but those ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-colored stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil.

(Toni Morrison 4–5)

Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison (1931–2019) was born in Ohio in the United States of America. She was an African-American novelist, essayist, teacher and professor emeritus at Princeton University. *Beloved* was awarded the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and Morrison was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993.



This compelling and haunting story of an escape from slavery is considered by many to be a modern classic. Having spent this chapter considering in depth what might constitute a classic, and whether the concept of a classic is even valid, end the chapter by answering these questions in relation to the passage from *Beloved* that you've just read.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: POLITICS, POWER AND JUSTICE

Beloved features a harrowing account of the horrors of slavery – one of the great stains on many societies. You could investigate it as a global issue in the politics, power and justice field of inquiry by identifying narratives that explore it in different ways: those written in different eras, different continents and from different character perspectives. How do the different perspectives represent the issue? How authentically can it be represented?

ACTIVITY 4

Beloved by Toni Morrison

Answer the questions on the extract from *Beloved*, then check your answers against the notes on page 433.

- 1 Are there any themes that you think emerge in this passage that are similar to themes in other widely-named classic literature?
- 2 How does the dialogue compare to other examples of dialogue in this chapter and in the book as a whole?
- 3 What features of the language Morrison uses are classically literary?
- 4 Can you identify literary features that you've come across already, both in this chapter and in the book as a whole?
- 5 Read a bit more about *Beloved* (hopefully you've been inspired to read the novel in full!). Do you think it has the hallmarks of a modern classic?

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored what conventionally has been meant by the notion of a classic and a canon of works, and we have examined some of the problems with, and the debate around, the notion of classic and so-called canonical texts. We have explored how other writers have defined 'classic' and looked at some of the texts traditionally termed 'classics', and examined why they might have been classed as such. Hopefully this has given you plenty of material to think about whether you think the notion of a classic is a useful one, and to understand some of the debates around how helpful or problematic this is.

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3.5

How can literary texts offer multiple perspectives of a single issue, topic or theme?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To examine how individual texts can be interpreted in different ways
- ▶ To examine how individual texts can be interpreted in different ways depending on the different contextual information we might have
- ▶ To examine how different texts can offer multiple perspectives on the same issues, topic or theme
- ▶ To examine how texts can reinterpret different issues, topics or themes

Introduction

Literature provides us with multiple different windows on the world. It helps us to empathize, to see things from different **perspectives** and it shines a light on ways of thinking about things that we might not have considered before. By offering us multiple perspectives, literature can challenge us to see the world in a different way.

Uncovering multiple perspectives

We will start this chapter by reading a poem called ‘Snow’ by Louis MacNeice. In the poem, the narrator experiences a kind of epiphany – a moment of sudden revelation – when the room he is sitting in is rendered ‘suddenly rich’ as he starts to see the world in different ways, to recognize its extraordinary diversity and to realize the human capacity to see things from multiple perspectives.

Read the poem carefully a couple of times before reading the short commentary which follows.

Snow

The room was suddenly rich and the great bay-window was
 Spawning snow and pink rose against it
 Soundlessly collateral and incompatible:
 World is suddener than we fancy it.

- 5 World is crazier and more of it than we think,
 Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
 A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
 The drunkenness of things being various.

- And the fire flames with a bubbling sound for world
 10 Is more spiteful and gay than one supposes –
 On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one’s hands –
 There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses.

(Louis MacNeice)

Louis MacNeice

Louis MacNeice (1907–1963) was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland. As well as a poet, he was a translator, literary critic, autobiographer and playwright. For many years he worked for the BBC as a producer. ‘Snow’, which was written in 1935, is a **lyric poem** exploring its narrator’s experience of seeing snow and roses at the same time.

MacNeice’s narrator is looking out of the window and eating a tangerine. These are very normal actions, and yet his experience is anything but ordinary as his mind wanders in considering the multiple **perspectives** through which we can engage with the world around us.

The poem starts with the room becoming ‘suddenly rich’ (line 1): this **adjective** (‘rich’) conveys a layering of experience – in the way that we might describe a chocolate cake as being rich – rather than registering its primary sense of monetary wealth.

As the narrator looks out of the huge window he sees two things that you wouldn’t normally expect to see together outside: snow and roses. It is this experience which leads him to consider that ‘World is crazier and more of it than we think’ (line 5). The lack of the **definite article** (‘the’) in front of ‘World’ seems to lend weight to how difficult it is to pin down one definite version of anything. Indeed, the moment of epiphany seems to render everything ‘Incorrigibly plural’ (line 6). The use of the **adverb** ‘incorrigibly’ (meaning unable to be corrected or changed) seems to convey to us that this is the way the world is, whether we like it or not. ‘Plural’ suggests that it is always multiple: there is always more than one way of seeing things.

At the centre of the poem, MacNeice narrates the speaker’s actions as he prepares to eat a tangerine: ‘I peel and portion / A tangerine and spit the pips’ (lines 6–7). At each stage, the tangerine multiplies: it starts as a single piece of fruit but the peel is removed to reveal different – multiple – portions, which themselves contain pips and, as the narrator spits those pips out, he realizes that, as seeds, they contain the potential for infinite further tangerines. It is a moment of realization that makes him ‘feel / The drunkenness of things being various’ (lines 7–8), where ‘drunkenness’ suggests a feeling of vertiginous lack of control as he recognizes the incorrigible plurality of everything around him.

This newly-fashioned sensitivity marks every experience as heightened. The fire (presumably behind him, as he is looking out of the window) is described: ‘fire flames with a bubbling sound’ (line 9). It is telling that his experience of the fire is **auditory** (he describes hearing it) rather than **visual**, and interesting that, at this point, the poem employs two literary techniques which are all about sound: **alliteration** (‘fire flames’) and **onomatopoeia** (‘bubbling’).

The realization that we experience the world in a multi-sensory way resonates through the penultimate line of the poem, which references the multiple senses of taste, sight, hearing and touch: ‘On the tongue on the eyes on the ears in the palms of one’s hands’. The poem ends with the line: ‘There is more than glass between the snow and the huge roses’. Firstly, we realize that the roses are on the windowsill, hence explaining how the narrator can see these two ‘incompatible’ things (roses and snow) simultaneously. Secondly, the poem **registers** again its observance that ‘There is more’. There is, it seems to be arguing, always more: there are always multiple perspectives.

Louis MacNeice styles the realization that there is always more as: ‘World is crazier and more of it than we think, / Incorrigibly plural’. It is a similar idea to that expressed by Edward St Aubyn in the Patrick Melrose novels when he asks:

What else is there to do but read too much into things? What a poor, thin, dull world we’d live in if we didn’t. Besides, is it possible? There’s always more meaning than we can lay our hands on.

(Edward St Aubyn 279)

Being able to hold two opposing or conflicting ideas in your head at the same time and to consider both of them valid is an interesting phenomenon. We might call it **cognitive dissonance** – sometimes the idea hurts but, equally, sometimes it is a wonderful realization of the inevitable and unavoidable difference and possibility of the world around us. This is probably the sort of thing that the Romantic poet John Keats had in mind when – thinking of Shakespeare – he coined the term ‘negative capability’: he was describing the way in which truly great artists are able to transcend contexts and celebrate how our human world is always characterized by infinite depth – and it is often literary texts which are able to provide us with those multiple perspectives.

ACTIVITY 1

Encountering unfamiliar terms

In the paragraph above you have encountered two terms that you may have found quite difficult on first reading them: ‘cognitive dissonance’ and ‘negative capability’. Whenever you encounter new terms you should try to explore different contexts within which they are used. If you have access to the internet, look up these terms and make notes in your journal about how they are used in different contexts and how different websites explain what they mean.

■ Interpreting texts in different ways

We have seen how literature can encourage us to see the world in all its multiplicity. We will now look at how a single text can offer multiple **perspectives** when it is interpreted in different ways. William Blake’s ‘The Sick Rose’ was published in a collection called *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* from 1789 onwards. The collection was subtitled: ‘Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul’. The poem we are going to look at, ‘The Sick Rose’, is found in the ‘Experience’ section which is, generally, more pessimistic and more worldly.

It is an exceptionally concise poem comprised of two short **quatrains**, and containing only 34 words in total. Despite this, it is an extraordinarily rich poem in terms of the interpretative possibilities it offers readers. Read the poem carefully a couple of times and then think about the questions that follow.

The Sick Rose

O Rose thou art sick
The invisible worm
That flies in the night
In the howling storm

5 Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy

(William Blake)

ACTIVITY 2

Symbolic value

In the poem, there are a number of things which seem to suggest further significance than their surface meanings. They might even be considered to have a certain **symbolic** value.

Do you think there may be a deeper symbolic significance to these ideas and, if so, what do you think they might be?

- 'The Sick Rose' (title)
- 'The invisible worm' (line 2)
- The act of flying (line 3)
- 'the night' (line 3)
- 'the howling storm' (line 4)
- the 'bed / Of crimson joy' (lines 5–6)
- the 'dark secret love' (line 7)

The poem offers us further interpretative possibilities if we consider various possible contexts that might inform our reading, or if we approach the poem with a particular critical stance. The following sections suggests a number of different possible approaches about how this ostensibly slight literary work can offer multiple perspectives to its readers.

A poem about revolutionary and political upheaval?

We saw, in Section 2 of this book, how the social and cultural context in which a work was written can influence its meaning. William Blake was writing at about the time of the French Revolution (which started in 1789). As a radical poet and free-thinker, his sympathies may very well have been with the revolutionary forces in France which were seeking to overthrow the 'Ancient Regime' – the existing, authoritarian power structures. In this sense, the poem could be an examination of the political ramifications of revolution. Adopting this reading, we might interpret the poem as follows. The capitalization of 'Sick Rose' suggests that it is a **proper noun**, and this could be the poet's way of addressing the state where the 'Rose' stands as a **symbol** for the state, and either its corruption or its fragility, given that it is 'sick'. The 'Rose' could also be considered a **symbol** of monarchy; for instance, the Tudor rose was a symbol of British royalty for a long period of time.

The 'invisible worm' could be like the revolutionary forces which cannot be identified. A worm can be a parasite: a hidden destructive force.

The **pathetic fallacy** of the 'howling storm' might convey the instability and unpredictability of the political situation; it might also symbolize general commotion and chaos.

Perhaps the ruling classes are embedded in 'crimson joy': their joy is built on others' suffering. Crimson is both the colour of royalty and the colour of blood, and a bed is often associated with comfort and security.

A poem about sexual liberation and repression?

Another way we could read this poem is in terms of sexual liberation and repression. In this interpretation, 'The Sick Rose' might become a poem about sexual politics and about the joys and dangers inherent in sexual relationships, licit and illicit. Adopting this reading, we might interpret the poem as follows.

The relationship is described as a 'dark secret love': these two **adjectives** give a sense of troubled intimacy as darkness has a negative connotation, and the 'love' definitely appears to be prohibited. The 'crimson joy' might signify qualities of passion and anger, to emphasize a possibly toxic and adulterous relationship. Furthermore, the interesting **contrast** between the blood-like

connotations of the 'crimson' and the elation ('joy') might connote a turbulent relationship which is, nevertheless, appealing.

The 'invisible worm' acts during a 'howling storm'. The **adjective** 'invisible' might suggest that the relationship is characterized by secrecy and mystery. The 'worm' might well be phallic, further suggesting a secretive, clandestine sexual relationship. 'Howling storm' might be **metaphorical**, representing sexual violence and transgression. We might note that a rose is both beautiful and dangerous, given its thorns.

Thus, we might read the poem as an argument that repressed love leads to destruction, or that attempts to transcend the boundaries of acceptability might prove fatal.

A poem about the craft of writing?

Like many poets and writers, Blake was very interested in the craft of writing. He was by trade an engraver and didn't publish his work in what today might be considered a conventional form. In fact, all his poems were first issued as engraved plates. Have a look at a reproduction of the original engraving plate that he published as 'The Sick Rose' below.



■ 'The Sick Rose' engraved plate, by William Blake

Adopting this reading, we might interpret the poem as follows.

The rose could be a symbol of beauty and art, where 'Crimson' accentuates the vibrancy and colour of art and the association of the 'rose' with love standing for the passion of writing.

The concept of the rose being 'sick' could suggest Blake's frustration at the contemporary world of art and publishing. It could suggest that conventional and traditional forms of art, such as the engraved plates on which Blake published his poems, are no longer being valued as once, perhaps, they were. The imagery of flying in the night might suggest the lack of recognition of art in the

contemporary society, and its invisibility and lack of contemporary value. The ‘howling storm’ could be an embodiment of the poet’s distraught frustration and discontent with the process of deterioration of art and the craft of writing.

When we examine the plate and observe the way in which the thorns are framing the image of the rose and the words of the poem, then this might underline the reading of the poem as being about something repressed and trapped, and about the containment and constriction of artistic expression.

GLOBAL ISSUES

FIELD OF INQUIRY: ART, CREATIVITY AND THE IMAGINATION

The way that we think about art (visual art and music as well as literature) changes and shifts depending on the various cultural, social and historical forces in operation at any one time. Blake’s poem, ‘The Sick Rose’, might act as an interesting example here of a poem suggesting that the value of art as viewed by the artist might be quite at odds with the value of art from the perspective of the reader or viewer, that this value changes over time and is not fixed. What one period in history or place considers great is not necessarily replicated everywhere. Do you think that there are works of art that might be considered universally great, or do you think that all works are subject to the relative judgments of a particular time and space?

A poem about biblical stories?

Finally, we might read this text as a religious poem about the ‘fall of man’ from Genesis in the Bible. Adopting this reading, we might interpret the poem as follows.

The idea of a ‘Rose’ might initially suggest the beauty and heavenly figures of Adam and Eve, living in the purity of a paradise. However, the fact that the rose is ‘sick’ suggests the corruption of temptation: Adam and Eve’s perfect and ideal garden is being disrupted and threatened by an infectious sickness. The ‘invisible worm’ could be Satan, disguised as a serpent to tempt Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The ‘dark secret love’ might suggest the ‘sin’ of sexual desire and shame which is only experienced after temptation and the fall. The poem ends with an image of something destroying ‘thy life’, which might well be a reference to original sin.

ACTIVITY 3

Differing interpretations of a single text

Many readers and critics have, in fact, interpreted this poem in completely different ways from the four approaches suggested on the previous pages. Which reading do you prefer? Why do you find one more persuasive than another? Can you think of, or can you find, any further and different readings of the poem? What other perspectives might you explore?

In this section we have seen how an individual text can offer multiple **perspectives**. We are now going to look at how different texts can provide multiple perspectives on a single issue, topic or theme.

■ Multiple perspectives on the same issues, topics or themes

In this section, we are going to look at a pair of texts which provide very interesting multiple perspectives on a single character and set of events. Charlotte Brontë’s novel, *Jane Eyre*, was written in 1847 and is a first-person narrative which tells the story of its eponymous heroine through her own words. At the end of the novel, Jane eventually marries Edward Rochester, the master of Thornfield Hall. However, Rochester has been married before, to Bertha Mason, and, for much of the novel Bertha is imprisoned as a lunatic in the attic at Thornfield, guarded

(not always successfully) by the alcoholic Grace Poole. When Rochester introduces Jane to Bertha, she is described in animalistic and bestial terms. Bertha ultimately sets fire to Thornfield and dies falling from the roof. Rochester is blinded in the fire and it is only at this point that he marries Jane, once Bertha is dead.

Bertha is an extremely problematic character. She is presented as violent and mad and there is little sympathy for her in the novel. The description of her when Jane meets her is horrific:

In the deep shade, at the farther end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.

(Charlotte Brontë 250)

Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1816. Soon after her birth, her family moved to Haworth, and they lived in the Haworth parsonage, which is now a Brontë museum, for the rest of their lives. Brontë was part of an extraordinary literary family with her sisters Anne and Emily, the latter best known

as the author of *Wuthering Heights*, also being very successful writers. Like her sisters, Brontë published under a pseudonym: hers was Currer Bell. *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847, was her second novel and the work for which she is now best known. Brontë died, aged 38, in 1855.

TOK Links: Pseudonyms and anonymity

Like a number of contemporary female writers, Anne, Charlotte and Emily Brontë published their poems and novels under pseudonyms: Acton, Currer, and Ellis Bell. The pseudonyms obviously have the same initials as their actual names. Do you think it changes the way we read if we don't know who the author is? And do you think some readers sometimes approach a work differently if they think that it is written either by a man or by a woman? We saw in Chapter 1.4 that JK Rowling published crime novels under the name Robert Galbraith. You might also be interested in the stories of writers like American Thomas Pynchon, who never gives interviews and who keeps his identity secret. Indeed, some writers have taken the idea of a pseudonym one stage further and have published anonymously. What do you think some of the implications might be for reading a work which is anonymous?

The next passage we will read is when Mr Rochester's former butler is telling Jane the story of the fire at Thornfield, which was started by Bertha Mason. Read the passage carefully and consider the ways in which it offers a particular perspective on Bertha Mason and on the fire at Thornfield Hall, then read the short commentary that follows.

'You shall tell me this part of the story another time,' I said; 'but now I have a particular reason for wishing to hear all about the fire. Was it suspected that this lunatic, Mrs Rochester, had any hand in it?'

'You've hit it, ma'am: it's quite certain that it was her, and nobody but her, that set it going. She had a woman to take care of her called Mrs Poole – an able woman in her line, and very trustworthy, but for one fault – a fault common to a deal of them nurses and matrons – she kept a private bottle of gin by her, and now and then took a drop over-much. It is excusable, for she had a hard life of it: but still it was dangerous; for when Mrs Poole was fast asleep after the gin and water, the mad lady, who was as cunning as a witch,

would take the keys out of her pocket, let herself out of her chamber, and go roaming about the house, doing any wild mischief that came into her head. They say she had nearly burnt her husband in his bed
 10 once: but I don't know about that. However, on this night, she set fire first to the hangings of the room next her own, and then she got down to a lower storey, and made her way to the chamber that had been the governess's – (she was like as if she knew somehow how matters had gone on, and had a spite at her) – and she kindled the bed there; but there was nobody sleeping in it, fortunately. The governess had run away two months before; and for all Mr Rochester sought her as if she had been the most precious thing he had
 15 in the world, he never could hear a word of her; and he grew savage – quite savage on his disappointment: he never was a wild man, but he got dangerous after he lost her. He would be alone, too. He sent Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper, away to her friends at a distance; but he did it handsomely, for he settled an annuity on her for life: and she deserved it – she was a very good woman. Miss Adèle, a ward he had, was put to school. He broke off acquaintance with all the gentry, and shut himself up like a hermit at the Hall.'

20 'What! did he not leave England?'

'Leave England? Bless you, no! He would not cross the door-stones of the house, except at night, when he walked just like a ghost about the grounds and in the orchard as if he had lost his senses – which it is my opinion he had; for a more spirited, bolder, keener gentleman than he was before that midge of a
 25 governess crossed him, you never saw, ma'am. He was not a man given to wine, or cards, or racing, as some are, and he was not so very handsome; but he had a courage and a will of his own, if ever man had. I knew him from a boy, you see: and for my part, I have often wished that Miss Eyre had been sunk in the sea before she came to Thornfield Hall.'

'Then Mr Rochester was at home when the fire broke out?'

'Yes, indeed was he; and he went up to the attics when all was burning above and below, and got the
 30 servants out of their beds and helped them down himself, and went back to get his mad wife out of her cell. And then they called out to him that she was on the roof, where she was standing, waving her arms, above the battlements, and shouting out till they could hear her a mile off: I saw her and heard her with my own eyes. She was a big woman, and had long black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood. I witnessed, and several more witnessed, Mr Rochester ascend through the sky-light
 35 on to the roof; we heard him call 'Bertha!' We saw him approach her; and then, ma'am, she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement.'

(Charlotte Brontë 364–5)

Mrs Rochester is referred to dismissively as 'this lunatic' (line 2), as if her mental illness stands for her character, and she is denied other description and explanation. By comparison, Mrs Poole is ironically labelled 'an able woman in her line' and 'very trustworthy' in line 4 because, regardless of the possible validity of these judgments, her 'one fault' (her predilection for alcohol) renders her incapable of successfully completing the task she has been assigned. The 'mad lady' is described as being 'as cunning as a witch' (line 7). This **simile** plays on conventional misogynistic imagery and, once again, has the effect of dehumanizing Bertha, who is also described as 'doing any wild mischief that came into her head' (line 9). Here the vagueness and lack of specificity of such mischief, illustrated through the word 'any', accentuates its unpredictability, and in turn its danger. That the mischief is 'wild', however, is a further projection of the animalistic qualities of Bertha that are constantly being stressed. The strangely **synesthetic** (whereby the senses are confused) 'I saw her and heard her with my own eyes' in lines 32–3 suggests that describing

Bertha is beyond our normal sensory capacities. There is an extraordinary brutality to the image of the ‘mad wife ... smashed on the pavement’ (lines 30 and 36).

In contrast, Rochester ‘shut himself up like a hermit’ (line 19), where the **simile** here presents how, heartbroken from the governess’ sudden departure, he refuses any social interactions or relationships. Rochester ‘walked just like a ghost’ in line 22, almost as if haunted and (almost) ‘savage’ in line 15, but – unlike Bertha – he is presented as able to maintain his civility, his composure and humanity.

Bertha Mason is a strangely sinister madwoman in the attic. She is a haunting presence throughout the text, but one who, as a character, is really denied any autonomy or humanity. To this end, in 1966, the Dominican writer Jean Rhys published an extraordinary novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In it she offers a completely different perspective on Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre*, telling her story from the time of her childhood in Jamaica to her marriage (to an unnamed English gentleman whom we presume to be Rochester), to her forced move to England and incarceration in an attic room. The Rochester figure renames ‘Antoinette’ as ‘Bertha’, and declares that she is mad.

Jean Rhys

Jean Rhys (1890–1979) was born in Dominica in the West Indies, which was a British Colony at the time. Rhys was sent to live in England when she was 16 and spent most of the rest of her life there. She completed *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her most famous novel, in 1966 at the age of 76, having worked on it for many years. In 1978, Rhys was awarded the Order of the British Empire for her writing.



In the extract that we will read from the very end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is telling her story and offering a radically different **perspective** on her treatment and on the starting of the fire. As you read the extract, try to compare the different perspectives offered across the two works: *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

That was the third time I had my dream, and it ended. I know now that the flight of steps leads to this room where I lie watching the woman asleep with her head on her arms. In my dream I waited till she began to snore, then I got up, took the keys and let myself out with a candle in my hand. It was easier this time than ever before and I walked as though I were flying.

5 [...]

Suddenly I was in Aunt Cora’s room. I saw the sunlight coming through the window, the tree outside and the shadows of the leaves on the floor, but I saw the wax candles too and I hated them. So I knocked them all down. Most of them went out but one caught the thin curtains that were behind the red ones. I laughed when I saw the lovely colour spreading so fast, but I did not stay to watch it. I went into the hall
10 again with the tall candle in my hand. It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her. I dropped the candle I was carrying and it caught the end of a tablecloth and I saw flames shoot up. As I ran or perhaps floated or flew I called help me Christophine help me and looking behind me I saw that I had been helped. There was a wall of fire protecting me but it was too hot, it scorched me and I went away from it.

15 There were more candles on a table and I took one of them and ran up the first flight of stairs and the second. On the second floor I threw away the candle. But I did not stay to watch. I ran up the last flight of stairs and along the passage. I passed the room where they brought me yesterday or the day before yesterday, I don't remember. Perhaps it was quite long ago for I seemed to know the house quite well. I knew how to get away from the heat and the shouting, for there was shouting now. When I was out on
 20 the battlements it was cool and I could hardly hear them. I sat there quietly. I don't know how long I sat. Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colour, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns, the gold ferns and the silver and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. I saw my doll's house
 25 and the books and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est là? Qui est là?* and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tia was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed. I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man's voice, Bertha!
 30 Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, *Why did I scream?* I called 'Tia!' and jumped and woke.

Grace Poole was sitting at the table but she had heard the scream too, for she said, 'What was that?' She got up, came over and looked at me. I lay still, breathing evenly with my eyes shut. 'I must have been dreaming,' she said. Then she went back, not to the table but to her bed. I waited a long time after I
 35 heard her snore, then I got up, took the keys and unlocked the door. I was outside holding my candle. Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage.

(Jean Rhys 122–4)

This is an extraordinary rendition of Antoinette/Bertha's point of view and a very specific and explicit example of a writer offering a very different perspective on an issue. Writers like Helen Tiffin have termed what Jean Rhys is doing 'canonical counter-discourse', a strategy 'in which a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils these assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial reasons' (Tiffin 97). This is a fascinating intertextual moment and an excellent example of literary texts offering up multiple perspectives.

ACTIVITY 4

Considering multiple perspectives

Having read the extracts from both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, make a list of the events that happen in the first text which also happen in the second. For each of those events, write notes on how they are presented. What are the similarities and what are the differences? Which quotations from the two texts work best to exemplify the points you are making? How do these two literary texts offer us multiple perspectives on a single idea? When you have answered the question, have a look at the notes on page 433 for comparison.

Reinterpretations of issues, topics or themes

In this section we will examine how a number of texts reinterpret different themes.

Intertextuality – the way works interact with each other – can be a conversation between texts, a method of revealing inspirations and influences, or even be paying homage to texts that have come before. Sometimes, however, by forging intertextual comparisons, texts can change how we interpret other texts and re-shape our ideas and viewpoints. This section will look at the transformative effects of intertextuality: it will argue that the way that literature makes comparisons, and the manner in which the reader interprets these, can transform how we see the world.

In a literature course, the focus is obviously on poems, **prose** and drama. Nevertheless, literature often enjoys intertextual relationships with ‘texts’ outside of the literary genres. In this vein, one interesting literary form or mode is that of **ekphrasis**: this is a **conceit** where a description or reference to a work of art is employed as a literary device. What we find, in effect, is a piece of writing entering into a conversation with a painting or a number of paintings.

Many writers have employed this technique in a variety of different and interesting ways. In this chapter we will look at how art, and also music, work as intertextual points of reference in literary texts, and how these comparisons can have a transformative effect on how we interpret the world around us.

We will start with WH Auden’s poem, ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’. This poem is a meditation on how, even at the moments of the greatest suffering, other people, unconnected to the suffering, are simply getting on with their everyday lives. The poem’s title refers to a Belgian art gallery which Auden visited at the end of the 1930s. The narrator of the poem describes several paintings that he sees in the gallery, to show the reader how the great painters of the past understood the idea that immense suffering and the very ordinary are simultaneous. In other words, even while terrible events are taking place, there are, at the same time, people who are unaffected by those events, who are simply getting on with their everyday lives.

WH Auden

Wystan Hugh Auden was a British poet and essayist who lived from 1907–1973. One of the most famous English voices in twentieth-century poetry, Auden was technically supremely gifted and prolific. He studied English at Christ Church, Oxford, the college he was to return to at the end of his life. He was briefly a teacher before moving to the United States in 1939 and becoming an American citizen in 1946. ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’ was written in December 1938.



The poem asks its reader to imagine the painting it references. As you read the poem, therefore, try to visualise the various paintings that are being described. What is happening in them and why do you think these events might be relevant to the poem’s concerns?

Musée des Beaux Arts

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;

5 How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot

10 That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away

15 Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
20 Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

(WH Auden)

While the paintings referred to in the first stanza of the poem are not named, the second stanza specifically names the particular work of art to which it is referring. The explicit **ekphrasis** – ‘In Breughel's Icarus, for instance’ – draws our attention to a direct point of comparison and the poem offers a commentary on, or an interpretation of, the painting. Look carefully at *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, which is reproduced on the next page. You will notice the ploughman in the foreground. He is the apparent subject, and yet he is turned away in an unusual gesture for a figure at the focal point of a composition. The light also picks out the ship, which might also be considered the painting's subject. But if you look closely, directly below the stern of the ship you will be able to make out two legs disappearing into the sea. As the title of the work of art informs us, these legs belong to Icarus. In Greek mythology, Icarus and his father Daedalus, the creator of the Labyrinth, attempt to escape from Crete with wings made from feathers and wax. Icarus' father tells him not to fly too close to the Sun – but he does, the wax in his wings melts, and he tumbles out of the sky and into the sea. The legs of Icarus, disappearing into the sea, are the only sign of that tragedy: the loss of a young man's life. The painting shows us how, while terrible suffering is taking place in the world, other things continue as normal and unaffected.



■ *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* by Pieter Bruegel II

Let us examine the way the poem focuses on its interaction with works of art the narrator has seen in the ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’, and the way in which it compares and interprets these paintings.

The opening two lines employ an interesting **inverted sentence structure**. Normally sentences start with a subject, followed by a verb and then an object. In this sentence, the subject is ‘The Old Masters’, the verb is ‘to be wrong about’, and the object is ‘suffering’. As you can see, however, this is inverted, so the poem starts: ‘About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters’. The effect of this is to shine a spotlight on the ‘suffering’ which is, of course, the subject of the poem, if not the sentence. ‘Old Masters’ is a general term for painters working in Europe largely before about 1800, a group which includes Bruegel, several of whose works Auden would have seen in the ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’.

The poem’s **form and structure** carefully mirror its content. So, for instance, we notice that line 4 is significantly longer than the surrounding lines. In fact, it is artificially long because it is representing ordinary life and registering the way in which it continues in a banal, mundane and unnecessarily elongated manner.

The line’s **register** also signals its everyday focus: the quotidian present continuous verbs (‘eating’; ‘opening’; ‘walking’) and the prosaic adverb ‘dully’ in line 4 combine to present a powerful sense of the unvaried, unremarkable, even tedious, reality of day-to-day existence.

Line length is equally important in terms of signaling the poem’s concerns. The shortest line in the poem (line 9: ‘They never forgot’) refocuses the reader’s eye on the artists’ insistence that ordinariness is just as much a feature as extraordinariness. It is appropriate to find a short, memorable line describing a fact that is never forgotten.



The most important painting for the poem is the one alluded to in the title: 'The Fall of Icarus'. However, the first stanza is clearly referring to other paintings. One suggestion is that Auden is referencing 'The Census at Bethlehem' by Pieter Brueghel II. If you look at the painting (via the QR code provided) can you make out figures 'eating or opening a window or just walking dully along' (line 4) or, indeed, 'Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating / On a pond at the edge of the wood' (lines 7–8)?

Another method for registering the ordinariness of some of the images created at the end of the first stanza is the use of unadorned and **colloquial** language. The narrator describes very plainly, 'some untidy spot' (line 11); equally line 12, the line that describes how 'the dogs go on with their doggy life', is repetitive ('dogs'; 'doggy') and unostentatious ('go on with').

The apparent **paradox** that a critically important mythical event is not important to someone who, in effect, witnessed the event, is underlined by describing Icarus' death with the seemingly paradoxical 'not an important failure' (line 17).

As the poem reaches its conclusion, it returns to the triumph of the ordinary. We read that 'the sun shone / As it had to' (lines 17–18). The line break here is interesting. The **enjambment** creates a slight pause before we realize that the Sun's shining is not something that we are being encouraged to celebrate, but something that is recognized as inevitable and unavoidable. The new line shifts the tone as we realize that it shines because 'it had to'.

The final two lines of the poem create an interesting **juxtaposition** of the extraordinary and the ordinary. On the one hand there is 'Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky' while, on the other, the ship 'Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on'. The contrast between the **adjective** 'amazing' and the **adverb** 'calmly' refocuses the reader's attention on the comparison between remarkable suffering and life continuing normally.

Having read the poem and the commentary carefully, hopefully you agree that it has opened up a different **perspective** on the original painting and that you now 'read' that painting in a different way. However, actually it is doing even more than this: by using the painting as a starting point to consider the theme of suffering, this poem is, in fact, offering a fresh perspective on that single theme. As we will see over the next few paragraphs, William Carlos Williams has used the same starting point to add to the multiple perspectives that literature is able offer on a single theme – in this case, suffering.

● TOK Links: On suffering

Brueghel's painting, and Auden and Carlos Williams' poems, offer us multiple perspectives on the theme of suffering, but they all seem to suggest an air of inevitability about the human necessity to continue, regardless of others' suffering. When suffering occurs, and when bad things happen, it is often a difficult moral question as to whether to get involved or not to try and improve the situation. John Stuart Mill wrote in 1867: 'Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing' (Mill). However, sometimes interfering from a position of ignorance (with however good intentions) can make situations worse. Can you think of times when you feel a moral imperative to intervene and help in situations you've come across in life, perhaps when others have stood by? Are there also occasions when it is probably better not to intervene because you might actually make someone else's suffering worse?

You will remember reading William Carlos Williams' 'This Is Just To Say' in a previous chapter. He is one of the many poets who has also written ekphrastic poetry and, like Auden, he too has written about this Brueghel painting. As you read 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus', which was written in 1960, you will notice many similarities and differences between it and 'Musée des Beaux Arts'. Williams' poem is a similar interpretation of the Icarus story 'According to Brueghel', but formally and structurally his poem is very different. You will notice, for instance,

the brief three-line stanzas and the absence of punctuation. You will also notice the similarities: what, for Auden is ‘not an important failure’ is, for Williams, ‘unsignificantly’ interesting and something that is ‘quite unnoticed’. Read the poem carefully at least twice and then attempt the activity that follows.

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

5 a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

10 the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
15 the wings’ wax
unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash
20 this was
Icarus drowning

(William Carlos Williams)

ACTIVITY 5

Textual comparison: Auden and Williams

Once you’ve read the poem carefully, go back and re-read the Auden poem before attempting these two activities:

- 1 Make a list of all the similarities and differences between WH Auden’s and William Carlos Williams’ poems. Why do you think that the poets have made the formal and structural decisions they have? Do you think Carlos Williams had read the Auden poem before writing his own? What evidence might you find either for or against this idea? Which poem do you prefer, and why?
- 2 Write a commentary on Williams’ poem using the worked analytical response to the Auden poem as a guide.

Once you have finished, compare your answers to the notes on page 434.

EE Links: Art and literature

One possible idea for an extended essay could be to write a comparison of some ekphrastic texts and to explore in detail the relationship between art and literature. To give you just a small taste of the vast literature in this mode, you might look at, among many others: ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ by John Keats; ‘Cloud Study’ by Donald Platt; ‘Two Hangings from Ovid’ by Ange Mlinko; ‘Ekphrastic’ by Rebecca Wolff; ‘Night Magic (Blue Jester)’ by Lorna Dee Cervantes; ‘Joan Miró’ by Shuzo Takiguchi; ‘Describe Turner to MLK’ by Tod Marshall; and many, many more, including ‘Not My Best Side’ by UA Fanthorpe, which we will look at in more detail later on in this chapter.

The two poems that we have just looked at have centred on intertextual interpretations of works of art. They have used the artworks in order to create a narrative by comparing and reinterpreting. Art, in this way, can be seen to infuse all sorts of writing and help shape many different narratives in different genres and forms. In the next text we will read, which is an extract from a **non-fiction** work, the writer experiences a transformative moment of recognition as he explores the relationship between art, landscape and literature.

One final example of how an ekphrastic intertextual moment can be transformative can be found in UA Fanthorpe’s poem, ‘Not my Best Side’. Paolo Uccello’s painting *Saint George and the Dragon* hangs in the National Gallery in London. It is one interpretation of the story of St George who, by killing the dragon, saved a maiden who was to be its next human victim. Uccello’s painting is highly stylized; you will notice, for example, a backdrop which (as we will see in the next chapter) is just as Fermor describes, ‘fluted mountains that are dim or gleaming under skies with no

more clouds than a decorative wreath of white vapour' (Fermor 27), although there is apparently a storm brewing on the right-hand side of the picture, perhaps foreshadowing the death of the dragon. The traditional way to read this myth is to see St George as the hero, the maiden as the victim, and the dragon as evil. On the surface, this is Uccello's interpretation; however, by entering into an intertextual relationship with this painting, 'Not My Best Side' transforms the way we might interpret the story.

UA Fanthorpe

UA Fanthorpe was a British poet who lived from 1929–2009. She studied English at Oxford University, where she achieved a first-class degree. Originally a teacher, she later worked in a range of jobs before publishing her first volume of poetry in 1978. Fanthorpe was made CBE for her services to poetry in 2001 and awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 2003.



Fanthorpe's poem is divided into three sections. Each is told from the **point of view** of one of the characters in the painting: the dragon, the maiden, and St George. As you read the poem, think about how Fanthorpe's interpretation transforms our reading of the painting and of the myth.



■ *Saint George and the Dragon* by Paolo Uccello

Not my Best Side

I

Not my best side, I'm afraid.

The artist didn't give me a chance to

Pose properly, and as you can see,

5 Poor chap, he had this obsession with

Triangles, so he left off two of my

Feet. I didn't comment at the time

(What, after all, are two feet

To a monster?) but afterwards

10 I was sorry for the bad publicity.

Why, I said to myself, should my conqueror

Be so ostentatiously beardless, and ride

A horse with a deformed neck and square hoofs?

Why should my victim be so

15 Unattractive as to be inedible,

And why should she have me literally

On a string? I don't mind dying

Ritually, since I always rise again,

But I should have liked a little more blood

20 To show they were taking me seriously.

II

It's hard for a girl to be sure if

She wants to be rescued. I mean, I quite

Took to the dragon. It's nice to be

25 Liked, if you know what I mean. He was

So nicely physical, with his claws

And lovely green skin, and that sexy tail,

And the way he looked at me,

He made me feel he was all ready to

30 Eat me. And any girl enjoys that.

So when this boy turned up, wearing machinery,

On a really dangerous horse, to be honest

I didn't much fancy him. I mean,

What was he like underneath the hardware?

35 He might have acne, blackheads or even

Bad breath for all I could tell, but the dragon –

Well, you could see all his equipment

At a glance. Still, what could I do?

The dragon got himself beaten by the boy,

40 And a girl's got to think of her future.

III
I have diplomas in Dragon
Management and Virgin Reclamation.
My horse is the latest model, with
45 Automatic transmission and built-in
Obsolescence. My spear is custom-built,
And my prototype armour
Still on the secret list. You can't
Do better than me at the moment.
50 I'm qualified and equipped to the
Eyebrow. So why be difficult?
Don't you want to be killed and/or rescued
In the most contemporary way? Don't
You want to carry out the roles
55 That sociology and myth have designed for you?
Don't you realize that, by being choosy,
You are endangering job prospects
In the spear- and horse-building industries?
What, in any case, does it matter what
60 You want? You're in my way.

(UA Fanthorpe 42–3)

ACTIVITY 6

'Not my Best Side' by UA Fanthorpe

Having read the poem carefully several times, write a commentary on the ways in which Fanthorpe's interpretation of the Uccello painting is transformative in terms of our understanding of the story and the role of the characters within it. Alternatively, discuss with other students how you interpret the poem, particularly focusing on how it offers its readers multiple perspectives, not just on the characters in the poem but also on the original work of art. You can compare your responses to the notes on page 434.

Different perspectives on issues and themes

This chapter has been looking at how literary texts offer multiple **perspectives** on the world around us. One further way in which they can do this is by challenging prevailing viewpoints and beliefs, that many readers and audiences would have held, in the world at the time of the production of the text. In this vein, our final text in this chapter is a piece of drama in translation. Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, first performed in 1879, presents strained marital relations on stage. The play has often been read as espousing a proto-feminist agenda, as it offers a perspective on the role of women within marriage in the nineteenth century which was far from conventional.

Henrik Ibsen

Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) was a playwright who was born in southern Norway. He is often considered a **modernist** writer, whose famous works include *Peer Gynt*, *An Enemy of the People*, *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Ghosts*, and *The Master Builder*, many of which were considered radical at the time. His plays, which were originally written in Danish, have been translated into many languages and are very frequently performed across the globe.



The extract we are going to read comes from the beginning of Act 3. The married couple, Helmer and Nora, return from a party upstairs in their block to find Mrs Linde, a friend of Nora's from the past, waiting for them in the apartment below; her third-party presence works theatrically to highlight the awkwardness and hostility within the marital relationship. Read the extract carefully a couple of times. If you have the opportunity, take parts and read it with other students.

- MRS LINDE [tidying up the room and laying her hat and cloak ready]. What a difference! what a difference! Someone to work for and live for – a home to bring comfort into. That I will do, indeed. I wish they would be quick and come – [Listens.] Ah, there they are now. I must put on my things.
- 5 [Takes up her hat and cloak. Helmer's and Nora's voices are heard outside; a key is turned, and Helmer brings Nora almost by force into the hall. She is in an Italian costume with a large black shawl around her; he is in evening dress, and a black domino which is flying open.]
- NORA [hanging back in the doorway, and struggling with him]. No, no, no! – don't take me in. I want to go upstairs again; I don't want to leave so early.
- 10 HELMER But, my dearest Nora–
- NORA Please, Torvald dear – please, please – only an hour more.
- HELMER Not a single minute, my sweet Nora. You know that was our agreement. Come along into the room; you are catching cold standing there. [He brings her gently into the room, in spite of her resistance.]
- 15 MRS LINDE Good evening.
- NORA Christine!
- HELMER You here, so late, Mrs Linde?
- MRS LINDE Yes, you must excuse me; I was so anxious to see Nora in her dress.
- NORA Have you been sitting here waiting for me?
- 20 MRS LINDE Yes, unfortunately I came too late, you had already gone upstairs; and I thought I couldn't go away again without having seen you.
- HELMER [taking off Nora's shawl] Yes, take a good look at her. I think she is worth looking at. Isn't she charming, Mrs Linde?
- MRS LINDE Yes, indeed she is.
- 25 HELMER Doesn't she look remarkably pretty? Everyone thought so at the dance. But she is terribly self-willed, this sweet little person. What are we to do with her? You will hardly believe that I had almost to bring her away by force.
- NORA Torvald, you will repent not having let me stay, even if it were only for half an hour.
- HELMER Listen to her, Mrs Linde! She had danced her Tarantella, and it had been a tremendous success, as it deserved – although possibly the performance was a trifle too realistic – a little more so, I mean, than was strictly compatible with the limitations of art. But never mind about that! The chief thing is, she had made a success – she had made a tremendous
- 30

35 success. Do you think I was going to let her remain there after that, and spoil the effect? No, indeed! I took my charming little Capri maiden – my capricious little Capri maiden, I should say – on my arm; took one quick turn round the room; a curtsy on either side, and, as they say in novels, the beautiful apparition disappeared. An exit ought always to be effective, Mrs Linde; but that is what I cannot make Nora understand. Pooh! this room is hot. [Throws his domino on a chair, and opens the door of his room.] Hullo! it's all dark in here. Oh, of course – excuse me. [He goes in, and lights some candles.]

40 NORA [in a hurried and breathless whisper] Well?

MRS LINDE [in a low voice] I have had a talk with him.

NORA Yes, and–

MRS LINDE Nora, you must tell your husband all about it.

NORA [in an expressionless voice] I knew it.

45 MRS LINDE You have nothing to be afraid of as far as Krogstad is concerned; but you must tell him.

(Henrik Ibsen 70–3)

This passage is taken from the start of Act 3 where the relationship between Helmer and Nora is presented as terminally strained, and the physical and emotional tensions between them are made manifest. Read the commentary that follows and consider the various ways in which this extract offers us different perspectives on the power dynamics within the institution of marriage, especially as we see how the play in performance might well foreground some of the awkward tensions in this relationship.

As the married couple enter, the **stage directions** tell us that Helmer leads Nora ‘almost forcibly’; in performance, that strained almost-violence can begin to look like domestic abuse as we see Nora ‘resisting’ his advances. What starts as a deeply uncomfortable sense of physical threat shifts into abusive manhandling, as Helmer then leads his wife against her will and ‘despite her efforts to resist him’. Indeed, Nora’s plangent ‘No, no, no’ articulates her resistance to Helmer’s perverse and obstructive behaviour which, in the presence of Mrs Linde, takes on a further level of recalcitrance as he physically manoeuvres Nora into a position of statuesque obsequience.

As Helmer literally undresses his ‘doll-wife’ by taking off her shawl, he presents her as a figure to be observed and gazed at. As he casts a long, lingering stare over Nora, he invites Mrs Linde (as an awkward co-viewer) to ‘take a good look at her’. Brutally transfigured into a material object and reified as a sexual but barely sentient being by Helmer’s male gaze, Nora is **objectified** as a doll-like figure of beauty for Helmer’s eyes, and for his sole use, and abuse. She is (in Helmer’s terms) ‘dreadfully stubborn’, as an animal might be, but again, like an animal, Helmer has tamed her, recalibrated her as a mere artistic creation – a ‘beautiful apparition’ – not on her own terms, or in reality, but ‘as they say in novels’.

Nora is the victim: she has no voice, no volition, no autonomy. Not only is she forced to conform to Helmer’s fantasy of her as a beautiful but submissive creature that he can possess, but when she resists, that resistance is brutally suppressed. After all, Helmer ‘practically had to use force’ (which we might read as an ironic admission of physical violence against his wife) in order to coerce Nora to submit to his deluded sense of her as a consenting and acquiescent partner.

This play, from the end of the nineteenth century, offers us radically different perspectives on the issue of marriage and domestic relations from those that might have been conventionally accepted by many contemporaries. Indeed, at the end of *A Doll's House*, Nora leaves both her husband and her children. This text really does offer a very different perspective from what might be considered mainstream contemporary views on marriage and the roles of husbands and wives and families.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

PERSPECTIVE

In the last chapter, we looked at the problem of the lack of representation of female writers in some curricula. One interesting question to ask is around the concept of perspective. In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen, a male writer, powerfully evokes a female perspective on marriage. Can you imagine any problems with the idea of a male writer being heralded as an advocate for female emancipation (from a claustrophobic, controlling marriage, in this instance)? Would you feel differently if the play were written by a woman? To what extent do you think that writers can represent the thoughts, feelings and concerns of people whose experiences of life are very different from their own?

Conclusion

This chapter has considered how literary texts offer multiple **perspectives** of a single issue, topic or theme. We have looked at how a single work can contain multiple perspectives within it, how different works can provide multiple perspectives on single characters, how a range of texts can provide multiple perspectives on a theme, and how texts can open up issues and topics by providing different perspectives – perhaps from the prevailing contemporary view, perhaps from the viewpoint of an earlier text, or perhaps just to challenge the reader to reconsider their perspectives on issues, topics and themes they come across in everyday life. We started this chapter by looking at the multiple different windows on the world that literature provides. As we approach the end of this book, hopefully you are developing a strong sense of how texts offer us convincing multiple perspectives on the world and how they encourage us to view the world around us in interesting and different ways.

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3.6

In what ways can comparison and interpretation be transformative?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- ▶ To examine the ways in which making comparisons between texts can transform our reading of the texts being compared
- ▶ To examine the ways in which different interpretations can transform the ways we read texts
- ▶ To examine the ways in which comparing texts to other works of art and other experiences can also be transformative
- ▶ To reflect on the ways in which we have found our experiences of reading literature to be transformative in the course of thinking about intertextuality in this section of the book

Introduction

Whenever we read a work of literature, our appreciation and our interpretation of it are shaped by a number of factors. As we have explored over the last few chapters, the way that we read is always conditioned by what we have read before. Texts are in intertextual conversations and relationships with each other and it is impossible not to make comparisons and equally impossible to avoid contexts. That said, sometimes we read a work of literature and develop a strong sense of what we think it is saying; we forge a ‘reading’ or an interpretation out of our response to the text we have just read. But that interpretation isn’t fixed – indeed, sometimes it can be completely transformed. Sometimes, when we make a comparison, or hear or read someone else’s interpretation, we can completely change our mind and overturn or add to our original response. This chapter, therefore, will be focused on those experiences: the ways in which comparison and interpretation of literary texts can be transformative.

How interpretation changes meaning

In the 1994 film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, the character of Matthew (played by John Hannah) reads a poem at the funeral of his partner Gareth (played by Simon Callow). Hannah reads the poem beautifully, his voice quivering with grief – the effect is heart-rending. The poem brilliantly captures his sadness and loss. The poem itself is by WH Auden, and is variously called ‘Funeral Blues’, ‘Stop all the Clocks’ and the first of ‘Two Songs for Hedli Anderson’. Regardless, in the context of the film, it is a hugely moving funeral oration (the ‘funeral’ of the film’s title).

Read the poem carefully to yourself and consider the ways in which it is appropriate for its context in the film, as part of an emotional funeral service.

Funeral Blues

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

- 5 Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,
Put crêpe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

- He was my North, my South, my East and West,
10 My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

- The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
15 Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

(WH Auden)

In using the poem in this way the film – its writer, director and producer – are offering a clear interpretation of it. Clearly, they are interpreting the poem as a heartfelt song of loss and, on the surface at least, the poem clearly fits this interpretation. However, if we look closely, might there be any clues to suggest that there are other interpretations which could transform our reading of the poem? Are the **register** and tone of the poem consistently solemn and sombre? So, for instance, could we interpret the tone in a different way?

The **imperative** ‘Prevent the dog from barking’ in line 2 demands silence, but there is something slightly comic, isn’t there, about ‘with a juicy bone’ – where the **adjective** ‘juicy’ doesn’t seem to have the appropriate weight and gravity? That the ‘aeroplanes circle moaning overhead’ (line 5) might seem appropriate, but then the **verb** ‘Scribbling’ in the next line doesn’t quite seem to fit. It might not seem sufficiently serious. Then, when you think about it, isn’t there something faintly ridiculous, rather than grave, about the idea of putting ‘crêpe bows round the white necks of the public doves’ (line 7)? Might it not almost be a **parody** of grief?

ACTIVITY 1

‘Funeral Blues’ by WH Auden

You are hopefully by now starting to develop powerful personal responses to the texts you have read. When you read this poem, some of the lines will have resonated with you. Choose three lines that you particularly like or that seem particularly effective to you and write a few lines in your journal to explain why each of your choices is particularly effective.

When you have answered the question, have a look at the notes on page 435 for comparison.

You may or may not agree, but the way we interpret these lines certainly transforms their meaning. In fact, the poem first appeared in a very different context: in a play called *The Ascent of F6* by Auden and Christopher Isherwood. The play is about how authorities and regimes use and manipulate private human actions for their political ends. In the play, the poem appears in a different form: the first two stanzas are the same but the next two are very different. The third stanza in the original version of the play reads as follows.

The Ascent of F6

Hold up your umbrellas to keep off the rain
From Doctor Williams while he opens a vein;
Like, he pronounces, it is finally extinct.
Sergeant, arrest that man who said he winked.

(WH Auden 92)

The register is very different. As Seamus Perry has written: ‘The words are the same, but the feeling could not be further from the personal pathos of the poem in *Four Weddings*’, and he reads the first two lines of the second stanza as ‘a ragged, satirically pantomimic version of the ostentatious trumpery involved in a state funeral: “Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead / Scribbling on the sky the message: He is dead” (Perry). That register and tone continue into the final stanza which reads:

The Ascent of F6

And Gunn, of course, will drive the motor-hearse:
None could drive it better, most would drive it worse.
He’ll open up the throttle to its fullest power
And drive him to the grave at ninety miles an hour.

(WH Auden 92)

There is nothing about that final rhyming couplet that suggests the serious melancholic tone of our first impression of the poem. This interpretation now makes going back to the first two stanzas and reading them in the same light difficult. Indeed, our interpretation of the poem (in whatever version) is almost certainly transformed.

The meaning of Auden’s poem is transformed by its interpretation and by its context. We interpret in order to make meaning for ourselves. We can read it as ironic, perhaps even satirical, but that meaning can be transformed into a genuine expression of grief by our interpretation. Perhaps the poem can work *both* as a satire *and* as an elegy. When we read literature we make its meaning in the moment of that literature and public reading; for example, if read at a rite of passage such as a funeral or a wedding, this does transform our sense of how we understand that piece. Consider, in the same vein, Thomas Hardy’s poem ‘Afterwards’. This is a poem which, like Auden’s, can work very well in an elegiac context, and perhaps as a reading at a funeral, at which point our interpretation can be transformed by personal context.

Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet who was born in Dorset, England – where most of his novels were set – in 1840. He died, aged 87, in 1928. Thomas Hardy has the unique quality of being a nineteenth-century novelist and a twentieth-century poet because *Jude the Obscure*, the last of his many novels, was written in 1895 and most of his famous poetry was written after 1900. His best known works include *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.



Read the poem carefully a couple of times and then consider the short commentary that follows.

Afterwards

When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
‘He was a man who used to notice such things’?

5 If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid’s soundless blink,
The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may think,
To him this must have been a familiar sight.’

10 If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, ‘He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is gone.’

15 If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,
Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more,
‘He was one who had an eye for such mysteries’?

20 And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell’s boom,
‘He hears it not now, but used to notice such things’?

(Thomas Hardy)

The title 'Afterwards' describes the poem's interest in creating a legacy, of mapping out the territory for how the speaker would like to be remembered after his death. The poem's theme is, therefore, what happens after our 'tremulous stay' on Earth (line 1). The **metaphor** it uses for death is the **personified** 'Present' having 'latched its postern' (closed the gate) on life.

The **conceit** (its structuring metaphor) is to imagine at the end of each of the five stanzas (in speech marks) what the speaker would like people to say about him after his death. So when, in the first stanza, for instance, the poem fashions a very poetic image of the month of May as a butterfly, where the **alliterative** 'glad green' leaves are 'like wings' (using a **simile**) and are 'Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk' (using two **compound adjectives**). This level of precision of the observation of nature is something that the narrator himself wants to be remembered for. In fact, he hopes that his neighbours will say (and he's quoting them, imagining their future voices): 'He was a man who used to notice such things' (line 4).

The quality and precision of the poem's observations are heightened by the use of literary features, such as the **simile** in line 5 that describes the movement of the hawk 'like an eyelid's soundless blink'. The **alliteration** of 'wind-warped' (line 7) and the **sensory** description 'mothy and warm' (line 9) contribute to this sense of the narrator's sensitivity to nature.

As he imagines his funeral bell ringing in the final stanza, the poet employs **alliteration** and **onomatopoeia** in 'a new bell's boom' to bring the sound to life and to make it more convincing that people might really say in the future: 'He hears it not now, but used to notice such things'.

ACTIVITY 2

'Afterwards' by Thomas Hardy

'Afterwards' is a poem that makes powerful use of metaphorical language and particularly **similes** which make a direct comparison and use the words 'like' or 'as'. After you have read the poem, make a list of all of the similes you can find in the poem and then, for each, explain what two things are being compared and how that comparison creates a powerful impression on the reader. You might find it useful to use a table to organize your thoughts (there is an example on page 435).

Unlike the Auden poem, there is little chance that this poem could be interpreted ironically or that we might detect a satirical register in its lines. Nevertheless, our individual interpretation of the poem can be transformative in terms of how we think about the world around us and how we want to be remembered, or want to remember our loved ones. When we read something, particularly in an emotional context, it is difficult not to make our interpretation of the work fit our own lives. This can have a powerful cathartic effect at the moment of a rite of passage, such as a funeral or a wedding. For that moment, the text is transformed. As students of literature, however, we need to take a step back and try to unpick our personal emotions as, in our writing and talking about literature, we aim to show *how* works and writers are able to trigger these emotional responses, and what it is about the words and the order in which they appear which can be so powerful, particularly in performance.

As we have seen, interpretation can transform how we read. We will finish this section with one brief further example.

Philip Larkin

Philip Larkin (1922–1985) was a British poet, novelist, editor, jazz critic and librarian. For 30 years he was the University Librarian at Hull University. After writing two early novels, he came to prominence with three slight collections of poetry, each published at 10-year intervals: *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964), and *High Windows* (1974). He was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry but turned down the position of Poet Laureate in 1984.

We are now going to read the Philip Larkin's poem 'Afternoons'. It was published in *The Whitsun Weddings* in England in the 1960s and Larkin has, subsequently at least, developed a reputation for being a reactionary figure. When you read the start to this poem, think about the opening image. How would you interpret the idea of summer fading and the leaves falling 'in ones and twos / From trees bordering / The new recreation ground' in lines 2–4? What does this image suggest to you?

Afternoons

Summer is fading:

The leaves fall in ones and twos

From trees bordering

The new recreation ground.

5 In the hollows of afternoons

Young mothers assembly

At swing and sandpit

Setting free their children.

Behind them, at intervals,

10 Stand husbands in skilled trades,

An estateful of washing,

And the albums, lettered

Our Wedding, lying

Near the television:

15 Before them, the wind

Is ruining their courting-places

That are still courting-places

(But the lovers are all in school),

And their children, so intent on

20 Finding more unripe acorns,

Expect to be taken home.

Their beauty has thickened.

Something is pushing them

To the side of their own lives.

(Philip Larkin)

We are going to concentrate on the opening image of the opening stanza. When we read it the tone seems to be wistful and melancholic, with the 'fading' summer and 'the hollows of afternoons'.

Summer is often a **metaphor** for the high point of something; 'fading' suggests that something is getting worse; the trees are losing their leaves and becoming denuded; the recreation ground may be 'new' but what has it replaced? Might we even see the 'bordering' as hedging or fencing in?

The critic Tom Paulin, writing in *Minatour: Poetry and the Nation State* in 1992, suggested a reading of this poem where the opening is a metaphor for the disintegration of empire, and the leaves falling in 'ones and twos' are like colonies regaining independence from the empire. And although several critics have subsequently challenged Paulin's interpretation, it is one of those

interpretations which sticks: once you've heard it, it does transform your reading of the poem and, even if you subsequently decide you disagree with it, you can't forget it. It is an interpretation which has proved transformative; it is a reading which then complicates how we read lines 6–8, about the 'Young mothers ... Setting free their children'. What sounds on the surface like an act of release could suddenly have a more political nuance, or might even be read as an ironic criticism of the mothers and of the society in which they live. Once we have read a powerful interpretation of a text, it is always present in shaping and transforming our own subsequent readings, a process which is further inflected if we start reading about the life of a writer, as thinking about what we know about their life might also influence how we read their writing.

● TOK Links: Ways of unknowing

Your TOK course is focused on ways of knowing; however, once we 'know' something, it is almost impossible to 'unknow' it, however much we would like to. Sometimes the things we 'know' turn out to be things, or ideas, or interpretations, that we would almost rather 'unknow' because they continue to shape the way we think even after we have decided that, intellectually, we reject these ideas. Can you think of any interpretations or ideas that continue to guide your thinking, even though you've decided that actually you don't agree with them or don't think them particularly helpful any more?

Read the poem again and decide what you think it means and how you want to interpret it. Do you find that it is difficult to get the idea of the empire falling apart out of your mind, once it is there? Different interpretations, as we have seen, are sometimes powerfully transformative, even at the point where we resist those interpretations.

How comparison transforms understanding

■ Example 1

In this section we will look more at comparison and how it relates to interpretation as we examine how two very different writers have looked to make comparisons with the canonical classic *King Lear* by William Shakespeare.

We will start with an extract from *King Lear*. At the start of the play *Lear*, the elderly King of England, invites his three daughters to tell him, in front of the court, how much they love him. On the basis of what they say, he intends to give them shares of his kingdom. He is hoping that his favourite daughter, Cordelia, will say the right thing and get the best share; however, when she is unable to perform the public ceremony of praise that Lear expects, he goes into a rage and banishes her. In his anger he then divides his kingdom between his two other daughters, Goneril and Regan, and makes a plan to spend half of his time with each of them on a rotation.

Lear, however, does not realize that these two daughters do not actually love him. They very soon they grow tired of having to host their father, especially as he insists on keeping a retinue (a group) of 50 knights with him while he is at their houses. By the end of Act 2, Goneril and Regan confront their father and issue him with an ultimatum: if he wants to continue staying with them then he will have to reduce the number of men he keeps with him. This, once again, triggers Lear's rage as, from his **point of view**, his daughters are being completely unreasonable and ungrateful after he gave them all his lands – although he did insist on still being king!

In the first episode we will read, Goneril and Regan are joining forces to argue against their father's stated need to have so many followers. Read the passage carefully, taking parts and reading aloud if you are able, and then read the short commentary that follows.

LEAR Is this well spoken?
 REGAN I dare avouch it, sir. What, fifty followers?
 Is it not well? What should you need of more?
 Yea, or so many, sith that both charge and danger
 5 Speak 'gainst so great a number? How, in one house,
 Should many people, under two commands,
 Hold amity? 'Tis hard; almost impossible.

GONERIL Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance
 From those that she calls servants, or from mine?
 10 REGAN Why not, my lord? If then they chanc'd to slack ye,
 We could control them. If you will come to me
 (For now I spy a danger), I entreat you
 To bring but five-and-twenty. To no more
 Will I give place or notice.

15 LEAR I gave you all—
 REGAN And in good time you gave it!
 LEAR Made you my guardians, my depositaries;
 But kept a reservation to be followed
 With such a number. What, must I come to you
 20 With five-and-twenty, Regan? Said you so?
 REGAN And speak't again my lord. No more with me.
 LEAR Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favour'd
 When others are more wicked; not being the worst
 Stands in some rank of praise. [To Goneril] I'll go with thee.
 25 Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty,
 And thou art twice her love.

GONERIL Hear, me, my lord.
 What need you five-and-twenty, ten, or five,
 To follow in a house where twice so many
 30 Have a command to tend you?
 REGAN What need one?
 LEAR O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
 Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
 Allow not nature more than nature needs,
 35 Man's life is cheap as beast's.

(King Lear, Act 4 Scene 2)

Despite Lear's anger and desperation ('I gave you all'; 'wicked creatures'; 'O, reason not the need!'), his daughters are coldly calculating as they 'negotiate' him down from 50 followers to none. Lear is being tricked by his daughters, but he has created most of the conditions of his own downfall. At the beginning of the extract, Goneril is reasonable and logical when she asks in lines 8 and 9 why Lear can't be served by 'those that she calls servants, or from mine?' Regan's clever **rhetorical response** to Lear's 'I gave you all', 'And in good time you gave it!' (lines 15–16) plays on Lear's weakness, old age, and weak bargaining position. As the daughters try to reduce the number of

followers Lear might expect, he is forced into a sad equation of numbers for love (his original mistake): ‘Thy fifty yet doth double five-and-twenty, / And thou art twice her love’. Regan then challenges Lear with what, for him, is an emasculating question: ‘What need one?’ Lear’s response ‘O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous’ evokes our sympathy and certainly contains an element of psychological truth, but nevertheless registers his defeat at the hands of his daughters in this exchange. Soon Lear will be homeless, cast out by the very daughters he gave his lands to at the start of the play. He is a powerful, patriarchal father, fuelled by rage, and unable to make his relationships with his daughters work.

Shakespeare wrote Lear’s story at the beginning of the seventeenth century; however, his is a universal theme. It is a story that is told through the ages (Shakespeare was adapting an older story himself), and it is a story which changes and mutates through time and gains power through comparison and interpretation.

Jane Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres* transposes the story of *King Lear* to Zebulon County, Iowa. The parallels and correspondences between the texts are manifold. For example, Ginny, Rose, and Caroline are Lear’s daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. The Clarks are the Gloucester family: Gloucester himself and his two sons, Edgar and Edmund. Finally, at the centre of the novel is the patriarch Larry Cook, King Lear himself.

Jane Smiley

Jane Smiley was born in California in 1949. She was a Professor of English at Iowa State University from 1981–1996, where she taught creative writing. Smiley has written many novels, shorts stories, non-fiction books and novels for young adults. She published *A Thousand Acres* in 1991 and it went on to win the 1992 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction in 1991 and was made into a film in 1997.



This extract from *A Thousand Acres* describes Larry’s rage and Rose’s dogged indefatigability in response. As you read the extract, think about how the comparison with the extract from *King Lear* that you’ve just read might prove transformative in terms of your interpretation of this scene. Once we have read both works, it is impossible to read either in quite the same light: they are both transformed by the intertextual comparisons forged between them.

‘It’s you girls that make me crazy! I gave you everything, and I get nothing in return, just some orders about doing this and being that and seeing points of view.’

Rose stood like a fence post, straight, unmoved, her arms crossed over her chest. ‘We didn’t ask for what you gave us. We never asked for what you gave us, but maybe it was high time we got some reward for
5 what we gave you! You say you know all about Ginny, well, Daddy, I know all about you, and you

know I know. This is what we've got to offer, this same life, nothing more nothing less. If you don't want it go elsewhere. Get someone else to take you in, because I for one have had it.' Her voice was low but penetrating, as deadly serious as ice picks.

Now he looked at me again. 'You hear her? She talks to me worse than you do.' Now he sounded almost
 10 conciliatory, as if he could divide us and conquer us. I stepped back. All at once I had a distinct memory
 of a time when Rose and I were nine and eleven, and we had kept him waiting after a school Halloween
 party that he hadn't wanted us to go to in the first place. I had lost a shoe in the cloakroom, and Rose
 and I looked for it madly while the other children put on their coats and left. We never found it, and we
 were the very last, by five or ten minutes, to come out of the school. Daddy was waiting in the pickup.
 15 Rose got in first, in her princess costume, and I got in beside the door, careful to conceal my stockinged
 foot. I was dressed as a hobo. Daddy was seething, and we knew we would get it just for being late
 when we got home. There was no telling what would happen if he found out about the shoe.

It was Mommy who betrayed me. When I walked in the door, she said, 'Ginny! Where's your shoe?' and
 Daddy turned and looked at my foot, and it was like he turned to fire right there. He came for me and
 20 started spanking me with the flat of his hand, on the rear and the thighs. I backed up till I got between
 the range and the window, and I could hear Mommy saying, 'Larry! Larry! This is crazy!' He turned to her
 and said, 'You on her side?'

Mommy said, 'No, but—'

'Then you tell her to come out from behind there. There's only one side here, and you'd better be on it.'

(Jane Smiley 182–3)

This is a portrait of a family in crisis: a deeply unhappy and troubled set of relations are pervasive. Larry Cook is unstable and furious; his rage echoes Lear's emotionally and linguistically ('I gave you all'): 'It's you girls that make me crazy! I gave you everything, and I get nothing in return' (line 1). Rose, like Regan, is steadfastly unmoved and sinisterly calculating. In line 3 she 'stood like a fence post' where the **simile** – specific to the farm setting of the novel – suggested her fixed, implacable nature. A further **simile** is used to describe her voice, which was 'low but penetrating, as deadly serious as ice picks' (lines 7–8). The warning and danger in the comparison register the threat that Rose poses and her intransigence. Her father's anger, like Lear's, is unabated: 'Daddy was seething' (line 16).

Lear makes lots of mistakes, but he is also mistreated, and many audiences would agree with his judgment: 'I am a man more sinned against than sinning'. But while we might feel sympathy for Lear, ultimately we don't for Larry. Jane Smiley transforms our response to his character as the novel reveals that Larry has abused his daughters. It is a seriously disturbing moment of shocking realization, which suddenly changes the way that we respond to Larry and how we understand the behaviour of his daughters, but it is a moment that has profound implications for how we return to *Lear*. Once Smiley's interpretation of the story is in our heads, it is difficult to read or watch *Lear* without asking questions about why his daughters behave in the terrible way that they do and why he is so full of rage.

Smiley's novel shows us how European ideas transformed the American landscape: the farm is a type of kingdom, isolated and patriarchal; it is, in many ways, a kind of feminist *King Lear*.

But it is also the story of terrible abuse which renders the return to Shakespeare's play a difficult experience. Our understanding of both works is transformed by the comparison between them.

At the centre of *King Lear*, in Act 3, Lear is alienated and excluded. When his daughters throw him out, Lear is left out on the moor in the middle of a storm with only his fool, his loyal servant Kent, and the 'mad' Edgar as company. As his mind deteriorates, Lear continues to rant about the culpability of his daughters in creating the terrible situation in which he finds himself.

We rejoin Lear on the heath in the middle of the storm. Read the passage carefully and think about the ways in which Shakespeare is presenting Lear's mental instability in this extract.

Storm still.

LEAR What, have his daughters brought him to this pass?
Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give 'em all?

FOOL Nay, he reserv'd a blanket, else we had been all sham'd.

5 LEAR Now all the plagues that in the pendulous air
Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!

KENT He hath no daughters, sir.

LEAR Death, traitor! nothing could have subdu'd nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.

10 Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'Twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters.

EDGAR Pillicock sat on Pillicock's Hill. 'Allow, 'allow, loo, loo!

15 FOOL This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen.

EDGAR Take heed o' th' foul fiend; obey thy parents: keep thy word justly;
swear not; commit not with man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet
heart on proud array. Tom's acold.

(*King Lear, Act 3 Scene 4*)

As Lear raves in madness in the hovel with only the madly loyal Kent, the maddening fool, and the madman Edgar for company, his mind can think only of his daughters. Observing Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom, he can imagine only that he has been brought to this point by being mistreated by his daughters and, at this point (lines 5–6), he curses them: 'Now all the plagues that in the pendulous air / Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!' When Kent points out in the following line that 'He hath no daughters, sir', Lear replies 'Death, traitor!' because, in his state of mind there is only one explanation: 'nothing could have subdu'd nature / To such a lowness but his unkind daughters' (lines 8–9).

But there is method in his madness – Lear has been mistreated. Gloucester recognizes Lear's daughters' hard commands. Goneril and Regan speak with the same voice as Rose in *A Thousand Acres*: 'If you don't want it go elsewhere. Get someone else to take you in, because I for one have had it.' Here we can see the explicit links between Smiley's novel and Shakespeare's play.

In 2017, Edward St Aubyn's *Dunbar* was published. It is another novel which works by retelling or recasting the story of Lear. Reviewing St Aubyn's *Dunbar* in the *Guardian*, Kate Clancy makes the connection between *Lear*, *A Thousand Acres*, and *Dunbar*, when she writes:

Jane Smiley demonstrated in A Thousand Acres that it is possible to make King Lear say something new: she did it by taking the point of view of Goneril, and slowly showing, over many years and pages, that Daddy's favourite daughter may be a prig; that the rage of another daughter may have causes; and that even bastards can be complex. St Aubyn's Dunbar ... recounts the tale of how painful it is when an old, powerful man loses everything.

(Kate Clancy)

In the extract that we will read, we will see the pain of a man with nothing, alone, and hunted.

Edward St Aubyn

Edward St Aubyn is an English novelist and journalist who was born in 1960. He read English at Keble College, Oxford, before going on to become a writer. He is the author of several novels, perhaps the most famous of which are the *Patrick Melrose* novels, which are sometimes loosely based on parts of his own difficult childhood and early life. In 2018, the novels were made into a television miniseries starring Benedict Cumberbatch. *Dunbar* was published as part of the Hogarth Shakespeare series in 2017.



In *Dunbar*, Lear is Henry Dunbar, a modern-day media billionaire. Two of his daughters, in a bid to control his financial empire, have had the elderly Lear sectioned and forcibly confined in a 'care home' in the Lake District in England. When Dunbar manages to escape, the daughters come after him, and Dunbar finds himself alone out in the bleak countryside in the middle of a storm. Read this short passage carefully and consider the ways in which it invites comparison with *King Lear* before reading the commentary that follows.

No. he would not go back down the hill. He would not debase himself; he would not be ruled by his children and insulted by his jailers. Hunger could digest his stomach and frost shatter his blood before he would bow down. He forced himself to start walking again. His pursuers were gone for the moment and he must get as far ahead of them as he could. Like a pack of hounds distracted by a false trail, they were panting their way over the pass to Merewater, but they were moving so fast that when they found nothing on the other side they would be back, yelping and barking and pouring over fences, driving him further and further into the hills, like a stag with burning lungs and trembling limbs, splashing through rivers, hoping to put them off the scent, only to get trapped in a thicket of a pond, hounded to exhaustion. He had seen the whole thing in the Loire valley once. They fed the entrails to the dogs as a reward for not dismembering the cornered stag, for having the discipline to leave the Master of the Hunt the pleasure of piercing that wild animal through the heart.

(Edward St Aubyn 100)

In this extract, Dunbar, an old man, is in the wild countryside in a storm and is being hunted by both his two nasty, selfish daughters and by his loving daughter, who wants to help and take care of him. The passage has a third-person narrator but is closely aligned with Dunbar's point of view as he imagines himself being hunted.

The passage starts with a **one word sentence**, 'No.' Dunbar is speaking to himself. This **free indirect narrative** allows the reader to hear his voice through the third person: 'he would not go back down the hill. He would not debase himself'. We can hear him talking to himself. The **triplet** of 'would nots' culminated with the statement: 'he would not be ruled by his children' taking us straight back into the world of King Lear, like Dunbar, railing against his filial mistreatment.

Like Lear, his **imagery** is visceral and powerful: 'Hunger could digest his stomach and frost shatter his blood before he would bow down' (lines 2–3). The imagery of frost shattering his blood is apocalyptic.

Line 4 uses **simile** to describe those hunting Dunbar down as being 'Like a pack of hounds distracted by a false trail'. The comparison is direct and makes explicit the **extended metaphor** in this passage of a hunt: of an animal being tracked down and preyed on by a pack of dogs. Those dogs are vividly described using the **onomatopoeia** 'yelping and barking' and the **metaphor** 'pouring over fences' in line 6, where their fluidity and ease of passage is accentuated by the comparison with flowing water. Dunbar, in contrast, is described in line 7 (using a **simile**) as 'like a stag with burning lungs and trembling limbs'. He is cast as the prey, and the **adjectives** 'burning' and 'trembling' help convey his fragility and suffering.

Once we have read *King Lear*, it is impossible to read this scene without making the comparisons in our head between Dunbar, this modern-day billionaire, and the old king, both raging against the elements and their daughters in the terrible British weather. Both are confronting their own pasts and their own mistakes: we hear Lear's heartfelt exultation of guilt and remorse ('I am a man more sinned against than sinning') in Dunbar's desperate situation. Both texts are transformed by the knowledge of, and comparison with, the other and both are, in many ways, enriched by their intertextual relationship.

■ Example 2

The next section of this chapter will examine another powerful experience of how reading can be transformed by intertextual comparison. We will look at a scene from a novel written at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and a very similar one from the beginning of the twentieth century, to examine the ways in which not only are they similar but, importantly, how making a comparison registers critical transformative changes in the social worlds of the situations described.

The first extract is from EM Forster's novel, *Howards End*, in which a concert is described. Present at the concert are the well-to-do Schlegel family, represented by Helen, Margaret and Tibby, but also a young man, Leonard Bast, from a far less privileged background. In fact, Leonard feels uncomfortable being at the concert – it is not his usual social scene – even though he is desperately keen to hear the music. His social discomfort is compounded when Helen Schlegel unthinkingly takes his umbrella as she leaves the concert hall, flustered by her emotional response to the music; Leonard doesn't know what to do to get it back.

EM Forster

Edward Morgan Forster lived from 1879–1970. He was an English novelist who published five novels in his lifetime, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), *Howards End* (1910), *A Passage to India* (1924), and one posthumously, *Maurice* (1971). Forster was made an honorary fellow of King's College, Cambridge, in 1946 and spent much of his life living in the college.



The passage starts by describing the music, Beethoven's 'Fifth Symphony', that they are listening to.

Beethoven chose to make all right in the end. He built the ramparts up. He blew with his mouth for the second time, and again the goblins were scattered. He brought back the gusts of splendour, the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and of death, and, amid vast roarings of a superhuman joy, he led his Fifth Symphony to its conclusion. But the goblins were there. They could return. He had said so bravely,
5 and that is why one can trust Beethoven when he says other things.

Helen pushed her way out during the applause. She desired to be alone. The music summed up to her all that had happened or could happen in her career. She read it as a tangible statement, which could never be superseded. The notes meant this and that to her, and they could have no other meaning, and life could have no other meaning. She pushed right out of the building, and walked slowly down the outside
10 staircase, breathing the autumnal air, and then she strolled home.

'Margaret,' called Mrs Munt, 'is Helen all right?'

'Oh yes.'

'She is always going away in the middle of a programme,' said Tibby.

'The music has evidently moved her deeply,' said Fräulein Mosebach.

15 'Excuse me,' said Margaret's young man, who had for some time been preparing a sentence, 'but that lady has, quite inadvertently, taken my umbrella.'

'Oh, good gracious me! – I am so sorry. Tibby, run after Helen.'

'I shall miss the Four Serious Songs if I do.'

'Tibby love, you must go.'

20 'It isn't of any consequence,' said the young man, in truth a little uneasy about his umbrella.

'But of course it is. Tibby! Tibby!'

Tibby rose to his feet, and wilfully caught his person on the backs of the chairs. By the time he had tipped up the seat and had found his hat, and had deposited his full score in safety, it was 'too late' to go after Helen. The Four Serious Songs had begun, and one could not move during their performance.

25 'My sister is so careless,' whispered Margaret.

'Not at all,' replied the young man; but his voice was dead and cold.

'If you would give me your address—'

'Oh, not at all, not at all,' and he wrapped his greatcoat over his knees.

Then the Four Serious Songs rang shallow in Margaret's ears. Brahms, for all his grumbling and grizzling,
 30 had never guessed what it felt like to be suspected of stealing an umbrella. For this fool of a young man
 thought that she and Helen and Tibby had been playing the confidence trick on him, and that if he gave
 his address they would break into his rooms some midnight or other and steal his walking stick too. Most
 ladies would have laughed, but Margaret really minded, for it gave her a glimpse into squalor. To trust
 people is a luxury in which only the wealthy can indulge; the poor cannot afford it. As soon as Brahms
 35 had grunted himself out, she gave him her card and said, 'That is where we live; if you preferred, you
 could call for the umbrella after the concert, but I didn't like to trouble you when it has all been our fault.'

(EM Forster 47–8)

Howards End was made into a film in 1992 with a screenplay by Ruth Praver Jhabvala and directed by James Ivory. It is an excellent film that captures the social tensions and awkwardness that Leonard Bast feels in this extract.

As you read the commentary below, think about how you might interpret various elements of the text and whether you agree with the interpretations suggested here.

The experience of listening to music at the concert is represented in **metaphorical** terms: with reference to his Fifth Symphony, Beethoven is described as building 'the ramparts up' (line 1). The music is being physically constructed. It is an edifice, but also one that has a metaphorically emotional presence as line 2 describes how 'the goblins were scattered': the music invades the narrative like the haunting presence of 'goblins' and then they're chased away again. The narrator continues in lines 2 and 3 to describe the effect of the music in effusive, emotive terms as 'gusts of splendour'; it is, similarly, 'the heroism, the youth, the magnificence of life and of death, and, amid vast roarings of a superhuman joy'. There is something **hyperbolic** about this description.

It certainly has a powerful emotional effect on Helen, who in the second paragraph 'pushed her way' out because she 'desired to be alone' because 'life could have no other meaning'. This extraordinarily powerful image of her mind's response to the music she's been listening to is immediately contrasted with Leonard's words in lines 15 and 16, which take a similar mental effort to get out. "Excuse me," he says, "but that lady has, quite inadvertently, taken my umbrella," and the narrative tells us that he 'had for some time been preparing a sentence'. We sympathize with what's going on in his mind, even though the reader isn't given quite such a privileged glimpse into its workings as we are with Helen.

The narrative also registers Leonard's ironic social discomfort in line 20: "It isn't of any consequence," said the young man, in truth a little uneasy about his umbrella.' What he says and what he means are at odds, as he doesn't want to let the others know how important the umbrella actually is to him. It is at this point that the narrative really begins to register the gulf in class consciousness as the 'Four Serious Songs' are described as ringing 'shallow in Margaret's ears' because, 'Brahms, for all his grumbling and grizzling, had never guessed what it felt like to be suspected of stealing an umbrella' (lines 29–30). Margaret is revealed as lacking empathy for

Leonard and of being unable to appreciate the delicacy of his situation: he is genuinely concerned about the loss of his umbrella (which would be an item of no importance to the Schlegels) and cannot find the form of words to recover it without displaying his social discomfort.

Indeed, in a moment of **free indirect discourse**, the narrative takes on Margaret's **perspective** as Leonard, from her **point of view**, is described as a 'fool of a young man' who 'thought that she and Helen and Tibby had been playing the confidence trick on him' (lines 30–31). At this point the text reveals Margaret's half-understanding of the class awkwardness of the situation: she 'really minded, for it gave her a glimpse into squalor' and she recognizes, intellectually at least, that 'To trust people is a luxury in which only the wealthy can indulge; the poor cannot afford it' (lines 33–34).

Nevertheless, in lines 34 and 35 when, 'As soon as Brahms had grunted himself out, she gave him her card', she seems not to understand the social awkwardness and concern that Leonard will feel in visiting their house in order to retrieve his umbrella, which has been mislaid through no fault of his own and because of the unintentional but unthinking attitude of the Schlegels.

As we can see, Forster's novel explores some of the class differences and tensions of early-twentieth-century England. Critics have read it in many different ways. The culturally ambitious Leonard Bast never really fits in. He dies, suddenly, when he is killed by a bookcase falling on top of him at the country house that gives its name to the novel's title: *Howards End*. One metaphorical way of reading this might be to see him as being crushed by the weight of his own overreaching intellectual ambitions; another might be to see him as a victim and plaything of the privileged families in the novel. Those interpretations can be transformative, but so can comparison, as we compare this novel with another one from 2005, almost 100 years later.

In Chapter 2.6, you read about how Zadie Smith used language to reveal **identity** in her novel *On Beauty*. The novel features at its centre two families: the liberal and atheist Belseys, with their university professor father and African-American mother, and the Christian Kipps family. It explores the similarities and differences between two families from different social backgrounds, and is also particularly interested in black identity. Zora and Levi, two of the Belsey children, make friends with Carl, who is from a less-privileged background than theirs and who they see as having an identity that is in some ways more authentic than their own. In the extract that follows, Carl is at a Mozart concert when Zora picks up his discman (a portable music-playing device) by mistake. The novel is loosely based on, and is in many ways a homage to, EM Forster's *Howards End*.

Are you beginning to register some of the specific parallels? The music being performed is Mozart rather than Beethoven, but many of the same social tensions are present, just transformed by comparison to a context a century later than, and in a different country from, Forster's novel. Read the extract carefully, thinking particularly about how the description might be transformed by comparison with the previous one, and then attempt the activity that follows.

The family set off, continuing their debate, with the voices of the children now added to the dispute. The black boy with the elegant neck who had been sitting next to Zora strained to hear the disappearing remnants of a conversation he had been interested in, although he had not followed all of it. More and more these days he found himself listening to people talk, wanting to add something. He had wanted to add something just then, a point of information – it was from that movie. According to the film, Mozart died before he finished the thing, right? So someone else must have finished it – so that seemed relevant to that genius thing they were discussing. But he wasn't in the habit of talking to strangers. Besides, the moment passed. It always did. He pulled the baseball cap down his forehead and checked in his pocket for his cell. He reached under his deckchair to retrieve his Discman – it was gone. He swore violently, padded

10 his hand around the area in the darkness and found something, a Discman. But not his. His had a faint sticky residue on the bottom that he could always feel, the remains of a long-gone sticker of a silhouetted naked lady with a big afro. Apart from that the two Discmans were identical. It took him a second to figure it out. He rushed to get his hoddie off the back of his chair, but he got it caught, and he ripped it slightly. That was his best hoodie. At last it was detached – he hurried as best he could after that heavy-set girl with the glasses. With every step more people seemed to place themselves between him and her.

‘Hey! Hey!’

But there was no name to put on the end of Hey and a six foot two athletic black man shouting Hey in a dense crowd does not create easiness wherever he goes.

‘She’s got my Discman, this girl, this lady – just up there – sorry, ‘scuse me, man – yeah, can I just get by here – Hey! Hey sister!’

‘ZORA – wait up!’ came a voice loud by the side of him, and the girl he’d been trying to stop turned around and gave somebody the finger. The white people nearby looked about themselves anxiously. Was there going to be trouble?

(Zadie Smith 72)

When you read this passage carefully you will notice that it is a kind of rewrite of the earlier extract from EM Forster’s *Howards End*. Re-read the passage and consider the ways in which it is both similar to, and different from, the earlier episode and then attempt the activity.

ACTIVITY 3

Textual comparison: Forster and Smith

The passage from Zadie Smith’s novel has many features that it shares with the Forster extract, perhaps most obviously that, at a concert, a young man who feels in some ways socially awkward, finds that someone else has taken an object that belongs to him: an umbrella in the first extract, a discman in the second. Having read the two passages again carefully, make a list of all the similarities and differences that you can note. Then make notes on the ways in which Smith has adapted her narrative to change the context for what is, fundamentally, the same situation and a very similar story. You can compare your responses to the notes on page 435.

When we go back and re-read Zadie Smith’s *On Beauty* or EM Forster’s *Howards End*, we find that our experience of both works is transformed by having read the other. Once we have made the connection and compared the two, then they are fixed in an intertextual relationship which will continue to inform and transform our interpretation of both works. The more you read, the more of these connections and ‘conversations’ you will discover, and the more you will enjoy the experience of recognition, comparison and transformation which is one of the delights of an intertextual understanding of literature.

How comparison can be transformative

The final section of this chapter will look at a remarkable extract from a non-fiction work, where the writer experiences a transformative moment of recognition as he explores the relationship between art, landscape and literature. In this text, the comparisons the writer makes and the interpretations he is about to develop bring about an extraordinarily transformative reading experience.

Patrick Leigh Fermor

Sir Patrick (Paddy) Leigh Fermor lived from 1915–2011. He was a British travel writer who, as a soldier, was crucially involved with the Cretan resistance during the Second World War. In December 1933, and aged just 18, Leigh Fermor set out to walk from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople (Istanbul). Both *A Time of Gifts* (1977) and *Between the Woods and the Water* (1986) describe this journey.

Patrick Leigh Fermor's travelogue *A Time of Gifts* catalogues a journey he made on foot, as a young man in the 1930s, across Europe. It is a wonderful example of travel writing – Fermor creates a vivid sense of the differences between the various places and cultures he encounters – but it is also a text which fizzes with intertextual energy. It is constantly referencing works of literature, music and art.

In the episode we will encounter, the narrator has just set out on his extraordinary journey. Departing from London, he boards a boat which takes him to the Hook of Holland; he then starts his walking journey across the Netherlands, en route to Germany and beyond. In this section, from the chapter entitled 'The Low Countries', Fermor takes in the 'gentle rolling landscape' and experiences a kind of epiphany as he finds the countryside strangely familiar, and realizes that he is recognizing a landscape that he has previously encountered; however, in this moment he registers that he has known the landscape, not first hand, but rather through his appreciation of paintings that he has seen in British galleries. Now that he sees that same landscape materializing before his eyes, he realizes that it is taking 'shape in painting terms'.

A change came over the country. For the first time, next day, the ground was higher than sea-level and with every step the equipoise of the elements tilted more decisively in favour of dry land. A gentle rolling landscape of water-meadow and ploughland and heath, with the snow melting here and there, stretched away northward through the province of Guelderland and south into Brabant. The roadside calvaries and the twinkle of sanctuary lamps in the churches indicated that I had crossed a religious as well as a cartographic contour-line. There were farm-buildings which elms and chestnut trees and birches snugly encompassed and Hobbema-like avenues of wintry trees which ended at the gates of seemly manor-houses – the abodes, I hoped, of mild jonkheers. They were gabled in semi-circles and broken right-angles of weathered brick bordered with white stone. Pigeon-lofts saddled the scales of the roofs and the breeze kept the gilded weather-vanes spinning; and when the leaded windows kindled at lighting-up time, I explored the interiors in my imagination. A deft chiaroscuro illuminated the black and white flagstones; there were massive tables with bulbous legs and Turkey carpets flung over them; convex mirrors distorted the reflections; faded wall-charts hung on the walls; globes and harpsichords and inlaid lutes were elegantly scattered; and Guelderland squires with pale whiskers – or their wives in tight bonnets and goffered ruffs – lifted needle-thin wine-glasses to judge the colour by the light of the branching and globular brass candelabra which were secured on chains to the beams and the coffered ceilings.

Imaginary interiors ... No wonder they took shape in painting terms! Ever since those first hours in Rotterdam a three-dimensional Holland had been springing up all round me and expanding into the distance in conformity with another Holland which was already in existence and in every detail complete. For, if there is a foreign landscape familiar to English eyes by proxy, it is this one; by the time they see the original, a hundred mornings and afternoons in museums and picture galleries and country houses have done their work. These confrontations and recognition-scenes filled the journey with excitement and

delight. The nature of the landscape itself, the colour, the light, the sky, the openness, the expanse and the details of the towns and the villages are leagued together in the weaving of a miraculously consoling
 25 and healing spell. Melancholy is exorcised, chaos chased away and well-being, alacrity of spirit and a thoughtful calm take their place. In my case, the relationship between familiar landscape and reality led to a further train of thought.

A second kind of scenery – the Italian – is almost as well known in England as the Dutch, and for the same gallery-haunting reasons. How familiar, at one remove, are those piazzas and arcades! The towers
 30 and the ribbed cupolas give way to the bridged loops of a river, and the rivers coil into umbered distances between castled hills and walled cities; there are shepherds' hovels and caverns; the fleece of woods succeeds them and the panorama dies away in fluted mountains that are dim or gleaming under skies with no more clouds than a decorative wreath of white vapour. But this scenery is a backcloth, merely, for lily-bearing angels who flutter to earth or play violins and lutes at Nativities; martyrdoms are enacted
 35 in front of it, miracles take place, and mystic marriages, scenes of torture, crucifixions, funerals and resurrections; processions wend, rival armies close in a deadlock of striped lances, an ascetic greybeard strikes his breast with a stone or writes at a lectern while a lion slumbers at his feet; a sainted stripling is riddled with crossbow bolts and gloved prelates collapse with upcast eyes and swords embedded across their tonsures. Now, all these transactions strike the eye with a monopolizing impact; for five centuries
 40 and more, in many thousands of frames, they have been stealing the scene; and when the strange deeds are absent, recognition is much slower than it is in the Low Countries, where the precedence is reversed. In Holland the landscape is the protagonist, and merely human events – even one so extraordinary as Icarus falling head first in the sea because the wax in his artificial wings has melted – are secondary details: next to Brueghel's ploughed field and trees and sailing ship and ploughman, the falling aeronaut
 45 is insignificant. So compelling is the identity of picture and reality that all along my path numberless dawdling afternoons in museums were being summoned back to life and set in motion. Every pace confirmed them. Each scene conjured up its echo. The masts and quays and gables of a river port, the backyard with a besom leaning against a brick wall, the chequer-board floors of churches – there they all were, the entire range of Dutch themes, ending in taverns where I expected to find boors carousing, and
 50 found them; and in every case, like magic, the painter's name would simultaneously impinge. The willows, the roofs and the bell-towers, the cows grazing self-consciously in the foreground meadows – there was no need to ask whose easels they were waiting for as they munched.

(Patrick Leigh Fermor 26–8)

● EE Links: Travel writing

One of the non-fiction options that you might consider for a possible extended essay in your IB English Literature course is the genre of travel writing. Fermor is considered by many critics to be one of the finest travel writers; however, there are many options available to you should you be interested in exploring the possibilities here. Bruce Chatwin, Jan Morris, Freya Stark and Paul Theroux are just four examples of the very many talented writers who excel in this genre.

The passage starts by recognizing that the countryside he is walking through has recently changed: it is now 'higher than sea-level' (previously he has been trekking through the very low parts of the country). The shifting topography is matched by a subtly changing cultural landscape,

as he realizes that he has ‘crossed a religious as well as a cartographic contour-line’ (lines 5–6). Contour-lines literally appear on maps (to which the **adjective** ‘cartographic’ refers) but Fermor also uses them as a **metaphor** to show how his journey has taken him into a world of different faith traditions, marked by roadside crosses and constantly burning church lamps.

As he walks on, his **narrative** begins to transfigure the landscape he sees in front of him. He feels a strong sense that he recognizes the landscape but it turns out that this recognition is only in terms of paintings he has previously looked at in art galleries. The Dutch Golden Age artist, Meindert Hobbema’s painting of ‘The Avenue at Middelharnis’, for instance, is a picture that Leigh Fermor had probably seen hanging in the National Gallery in London. From his experience as a gallery viewer, therefore, he coins the **compound adjective** ‘Hobbema-like’ to reference the ‘avenues of wintry trees’ he encounters on his journey (line 7). This **reference** invites the reader to imagine the painting, to make the intertextual connection, and to experience the transformation that the narrator experiences as he recognizes the natural environment through the prism of the reader’s assumed knowledge of art.

As you look at the painting below, consider how this informs and transforms (through comparison) your understanding of the landscape being described in the extract. Consider Fermor’s description of the ‘avenues of wintry trees which ended at the gates of seemingly manor-houses’, for example. When you look at the painting, when you make the explicit comparison that Fermor is encouraging, our sense of that environment is transformed. It becomes visually alive: we see the bare trunks of the trees and the rutted road, and we see the world of the text differently through comparison with the work of art. This experience of transformation through comparison works in much the same way as **metaphor**.



■ *The Avenue at Middelharnis* by Meindert Hobbema

The French literary theorist Roland Barthes describes our experience of reading in terms of a ‘network of overlapping, culturally determined codes’. According to his argument, each code is ‘one of the voices out of which the text is woven’, so that ‘alongside each utterance’

we always hear the ‘off-stage voices’ (Barthes 21). If we remember an interior from a painting, for example, we are always remembering that image when we read about a similar interior. Barthes uses the weaving together of voices to explain the concept of intertextuality. In fact, intertextuality works like metaphor itself. The word ‘metaphor’ comes from the Greek to ‘carry across’. As this narrative asks its readers to imagine a Dutch interior, so we ‘carry across’ the image that many readers already have in their heads (from looking at Vermeer paintings, among others) and that comparison transforms our sense of what the interiors being described might actually look like. **Metaphor** is a mode of transformation: it always asks us to compare one thing to another. When we encounter metaphor, therefore, our experience of what we are reading is always transformed *through comparison*.

As Fermor trudges on, and as the dusk of ‘lighting-up time’ descends, he finds he is not able to see clearly the insides of the houses because they have small, dark ‘leaded windows’ (line 10). Instead of describing what he sees, therefore, his imagination takes over and, having experienced a moment of recognition of the natural landscape through art, he reverses the process and explores ‘the interiors in [his] imagination’ (line 11). Not actually being able to see those domestic interiors, he describes the world he knows from his gallery visits, imagining that these are the real interiors of the houses he’s passing. He imagines a ‘deft chiaroscuro illuminated the black and white flagstones’ (line 11). At this point he is presumably recalling a painting such as ‘The Concert’, by the seventeenth-century Dutch artist, Johannes Vermeer, which you can see reproduced on the right. What features of this work of art strike you as important in terms of Fermor’s description of the interiors of Dutch buildings?

‘Chiaroscuro’ is the conflation of the two Italian words ‘chiaro’ (literally meaning ‘clear’ or ‘light’) and ‘scuro’ (literally meaning ‘dark’). In art history, the term is used to describe the contrast between light and dark in paintings. In this Vermeer, for instance, you will note the strong light illuminating the seated young woman in contrast to the very dark area in the bottom left of the composition. This is the ‘chiaroscuro’ to which the passage refers; indeed, in this painting we can also observe a carpet ‘flung over’ a ‘massive’ table and the ‘black and white flagstones’: the floor tiles which are also picked out by the stream of light, presumably emanating from an unseen window to the left. Can you notice any other features of this painting which might have a counterpart in Fermor’s **prose**?

This text is using this intertextual technique (inviting us to imagine these interiors from our prior knowledge of art) in order to create powerful visual images of how the insides of these buildings might appear. As Fermor compares the ‘three-dimensional’ world he is encountering on his travels to the representation of that world, learned from a ‘hundred mornings and afternoons in museums and picture galleries and country houses’ (line 21), he finds that both the real environment and the ‘imaginary interiors’ are thus transformed. Art, he seems to be arguing, is ‘in conformity with’ nature and his experience ‘by proxy’ facilitates ‘confrontations and recognition-scenes’ which fill his ‘journey with excitement and delight’ (lines 19, 20 and 22–23). When we read, we are always conditioned by what we have previously read or, in this case, previously seen



■ *The Concert* by Johannes Vermeer

or looked at. Our imaginations are shaped, not just by the words on the page, but the words and images that have come before them. When you read, do you ever find that the images that appear in your mind have been shaped by your previous experiences, perhaps by other things you have read, or images from films you have watched, or even, perhaps, like Fermor, from paintings you have seen? If so, then at these points you, too, are experiencing a moment of transformation through comparison.

Look very carefully at the paintings reproduced in this chapter and consider the stories they are telling and the images they contain. Then re-read the passage. You, too, may be able to experience the moment of transformative comparison which so strikes Fermor at this point in his narrative, that this ‘relationship between familiar landscape and reality’ leads ‘to a further train of thought’ (lines 26–27). He widens his intertextual frame of reference to include not just Dutch but now, also, Italian art. Walking across the low countries and realizing the connection between the environment he is currently experiencing and the art that represents the Netherlands, its landscape and culture, Fermor is reminded of the sharp contrast aesthetically and ideologically between this tradition and that of Italian scenery. He recalls his ‘gallery-haunting’ in line 29 and a different artistic tradition is brought to mind.

ACTIVITY 4

Intertextuality across art forms

Read the final paragraph of the passage again, carefully, and then consider the range of artworks provided via the QR codes below. How many connections from the passage can you make with the various tropes of Italian art? You might, for instance, be looking out for ‘lily-bearing angels ... Nativities ... martyrdoms ... mystic marriages ... rival armies close in a deadlock of striped lances ... an ascetic greybeard ... a sainted stripling ... riddled with crossbow bolts’. Compare your notes to those on page 436.



In Italian art, according to Fermor, ‘transactions strike the eye with a monopolizing impact ... stealing the scene’ (lines 39–40). We are focused on the figures, on the people, on the suffering. When we look in the background, we can see the stylized landscapes, but ‘when the strange deeds are absent, recognition is much slower than it is in the Low Countries, where the precedence is reversed’ (lines 40–41). The ‘transactions’ and the ‘strange deeds’ are the human stories of suffering, joy, hope and fear. The representations of these events and emotions, he argues, push landscape to the back of the painting. Leigh Fermor takes the painting as a marker of the function of landscape in Dutch art. Unlike in Italy, where the paintings are all about the ‘transactions’, in ‘Holland the landscape is the protagonist’ (lines 42). In this argument, ‘merely human events ... are secondary details’ (lines 42–44).

As the passage comes to its conclusion, Fermor's narrative returns us to a familiar image: Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, which you will remember from Chapter 3.5, with its 'ploughed field and trees and sailing ship and ploughman' (line 44). You will remember how Auden uses the painting to make an argument about the 'human position' of suffering. Look again at the painting, Auden's poem, and the poem by William Carlos Williams on pages 379–82. You will have formed your own view about both poems; nevertheless, in part at least, they are equally concerned with the cyclical nature of existence – as one thing dies, another is being born – as, of course, is Fermor's travelogue, *A Time of Gifts*. These texts encourage their their readers to transform their own experiences through these comparisons; we are invited to come afresh to a range of works of art with a newly conditioned sense of how we might read them in comparison with other works.

Walking through the low countries, Fermor, like many of his readers, experiences a profound sense of recognition, almost with the power of an epiphany. His experience of the landscape is transformed through the comparisons he makes between it and the images of paintings that are already in his head. 'So compelling is the identity of picture and reality' (line 45) – this intertextual interaction between words, pictures and reality – that his experience of the world is entirely transformed. Because each 'scene conjured up its echo' (line 47), he is constantly being reminded of previous experiences, and the text invites the reader to share in this experience. Intertextual references are precisely employed to conjure up echoes as we read, echoes of other voices, other texts, and our past experiences. All of these 'simultaneously impinge' (line 50) to forge an intertextual transformation in the moment of reading. This travelogue has a transformative effect on many readers: it helps us to understand how we make sense of the world around us through comparison and interpretation. Once we have read this work, every time we see a painting, or read a description of landscape or people, we realize that how we experience these works has, indeed, been transformed by the comparisons we have been encouraged to make.

We will never quite see any of the paintings we have examined in this chapter again in the same light. Nor, indeed, will we read a description in quite the same way as our intertextual sense of the world around us registers the multiple modes in which we experience that world. At these points, our understanding of the literature we have been reading is transformed by the comparison and the interpretations that we are constantly making, and it is an extraordinary experience.

Conclusion

In this third part of the book, we have thought hard about intertextuality and how texts are connected. Hopefully you now feel much more confident in terms of making connections and talking and writing about the ways in which texts relate to each other. In this chapter, we have been thinking particularly about how comparison and interpretation can be transformative. When you think about the comparisons you can make between works of literature and the ways in which your and other readers' interpretations affect the way we respond to a text, then hopefully you, too, will agree that often this can be transformative. We hope that, during your IB English Literature course, you will be fortunate enough to experience many moments of transformation as you read, and re-read, and re-evaluate texts, and bring new levels of understanding and appreciation to them. The study of literature is an extraordinary endeavour and an extraordinary privilege. As we come to the end of this section and this book, we hope that the journey we have undertaken together has enriched and enlivened your experience of reading, that you have gleaned a lasting sense of the power of intertextuality, and that you will go on enjoying reading throughout your lives.

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Glossary

abstract – something that is not physical or tangible

accent – the pronunciation of words – usually denotes which geographical part of the country someone comes from

adaptation – when a work is transformed for another medium, such as television, that transformation is called an adaptation

aesthetic – our sense of the beautiful, appreciation of beauty

allegory – a story, poem, or image that can be interpreted to have a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one

alliteration – the repetition of initial consonant sounds

allusion – a reference to something without a literal or explicit mention of it

anachronism – an element in an artwork which comes from a different time period than that depicted in the work as a whole

archetype – a character, idea or situation that represents the universal or the human condition

bildungsroman – a novel dealing with a person's formative years or spiritual education

bowdlerization – the editing of a work in order to remove words or ideas which the editor finds offensive

caesura – pause within a line of poetry, often created by punctuation such as a comma, semi-colon or dash

captions – a graphic novel term. The text in a panel that explains what is going on. It is not display lettering and it is not dialogue

climax – usually refers to drama but can be applied to other forms of literature. The crescendo that denotes the turning point for the protagonist

comparative – consider how works are alike and how they are different in their view of the world

compound sentence – a sentence which is made up of two independent clauses (which could stand alone as sentences in their own right) and joined by a coordinating conjunction such as 'and,' 'or' or 'but'

conceit – a type of extended metaphor

conflict – a struggle between two opposing forces

connotation – the ideas provoked beyond the literal meaning

consequentialism – an ethical theory based on the belief that the consequences of an action determine whether that action was good or not

contextual – shape your understanding of the meaning of the work in the context of its historical time and place

critical theory – an approach to interpreting a literary text using established principles such as feminism, marxism, or colonialism

dactyl – a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables

dadaism – an artistic movement whose intention was to ridicule the idea that there is meaning in the modern world

deontology – another word for consequentialism: the belief that the outcome of an action determines whether that action is ethical or not

diction – the words chosen in a text

ekphrasis – a work of art which is based on another work of art. Most commonly, ekphrasis is a poem based on a painting, but other types are possible

emanata – the lines which extend from characters in a cartoon to reveal their words or thoughts

epigraph – a short quotation or saying at the beginning of a book or chapter, intended to suggest its theme

ethical lenses – the use of different ethical theories as a basis for interpreting an action or a work of literature

existentialism – a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will

extended metaphor – a metaphor or symbol that is repeated more than once in a text to connote the same thing

fabula – the fictional world of the literary work

fantasy – a type of fiction that relies on an imaginary universe. It often uses elements of mythology and/or magic

feminine ending – extra unstressed syllable at the end of line (meter)

feminist lens – a type of critical theory in which the work of literature is read from the perspective of what it suggests about women's viewpoints

fiction – something that is not true

fin-de-siècle – relating to or characteristic of the end of a century, especially the nineteenth century

foot/feet – a unit of meter

form fitting function – a feature of a work of literature in which the form of the work mirrors the role that it plays in contributing to meaning

free indirect discourse – a type of narration in which the narrator speaks in such a way as to give us the thoughts of a character. It does not use quotation

marks, so it does not imply speech. Free indirect discourse gives readers access to the viewpoint of a particular character or characters

free verse – an open form of poetry that has no formal or recognized structure

historical fiction – fiction which is based on actual historical events

homonym – two or more words having the same spelling or pronunciation but different meanings and origins

hubris – hubris is a Greek term meaning excessive pride. Often a character's hubris will lead to their downfall

hyperbole – a deliberate exaggeration or overstatement for effect

iambic pentameter – a line of verse with five metrical feet, each consisting of one short (or unstressed) syllable followed by one long (or stressed) syllable. Shakespeare often wrote in iambic pentameter

identity – an identity is a sense of self

immanent – studying literature solely as a work of art, entire of itself

implied reader – the ideal or hypothetical reader the writer is addressing. The implied reader is often different to the actual reader

independent clauses – complete sentences

intertextuality – the ways in which a text is connected to other texts. Intertextuality also includes an exploration of how the reader, bringing with them their life experience and exposure to various works and texts, can shape the meaning of a text and as a result interpret a text in a variety of ways

irony – when the intended meaning is the opposite of what's actually being said

jargon – words that are used in a specific context that may be difficult to understand, often involving technical terminology

juxtaposition – the contrast of two unrelated objects, images or ideas placed next to each other

lexicon – a name for an individual person's vocabulary – all the words that he or she knows

lyric poem – a poem which does not tell a story, but rather creates an emotional effect

magical realism – a genre of fiction which is essentially very realistic, but which incorporates magical elements. It differs from fantasy in that the realistic elements play the largest role in the work

Marxist lens – a type of critical theory in which the work of literature is read from the perspective of how a Marxist would interpret it

metafiction – writing about writing fiction

metaphor – a device that compares one thing to something else without using the words 'like' or 'as ... as', eg, the classroom is a furnace

meter – the arrangement and number of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of a poem or a verse

modernism – a period of artistic development in which modern ideas and ideals predominate. This term particularly applies to art from the late 19th and 20th centuries

monologue – a long speech by one actor in a film or play

narrative poetry – poetry that tells a story

neologism – a newly coined word

non-fiction – something that is rooted in the real world and describes reality as it is

orthography – the conventional spelling system of a language

paradox – a situation in which two contradictory facts or ideas seem to be true at the same time

pastiche – something that consciously imitates something else – usually for humorous effect

personification – a literary strategy in which an author gives inanimate objects characteristics of a human

perspective – point of view

phonetic – spelled the way it sounds

point of view – perspective

polyptoton – a type of repetition in which the root of a word is repeated, but each time it is used, the form is different

post-apocalyptic – a term which describes an imaginary world after some catastrophic event has destroyed much or all of civilization as we know it today

post-colonial lens – a type of literary criticism in which a work of literature is read from the perspective of what it reveals about the world after the end of the colonial period

postmodernism – an artistic movement from the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries which breaks from modernism. It particularly rejects the idea of certainties and the idea that we can explain things scientifically

prose – this is the opposite of verse or poetry – realist drama uses prose for speech rather than blank verse. Prose fiction can include novels, novellas and short stories

quatrain – a four-line stanza

register – the level of formality in writing or speaking

romanticism – a literary movement from the late 18th century which celebrated the individual and the individual viewpoint of the world

roman-à-clef – a novel in which real people and events appear, but under a facade of fiction, so that the names are all changed. Focuses on the relationship between reality and fiction

science fiction – a type of non-realistic fiction in which scientific elements play a central role in the events of the work

semantic change – where the connotations of a particular word morph and we need to understand

contemporary context to read the word in its original publication

sestina – a poetic form: a poem with 6 stanzas of 6 lines each and a final 7th stanza of 3 lines (known as an 'envoi')

sibilance – words that have a repeated 's' or 'sh' sound – can create either a sinister mood or a soft and relaxing mood. Context is important here!

slant rhymes (or half rhymes) – a type of rhyme in which words sound similar to each other, but do not rhyme exactly

soliloquy – a soliloquy is a dramatic convention which allows the playwright to afford the audience a privileged glimpse into what the character on stage is thinking

stichomythia – a type of dialogue in which characters speak the verse by alternating lines

stream of consciousness – a type of narration in which the speaker or narrator speaks the thoughts as they come to him or her. The thoughts are unedited, and so the reader has access to the speaker's thinking as it happens

subversive text – a text which deliberately tries to undermine expectations or values

suspense – a literary technique which deliberately hints at something but withholds full information so that it sets the reader up to wonder what is going to happen

symbol/symbolism – something that represents something else in a work of literature, eg, in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, the conch (a shell) is a symbol for democracy

tragedy – a work of literature in which the main character fails to achieve his or her goal. Often the main character – and other characters – come to a bad end. A very traditional definition of 'tragedy' comes from Aristotle who said that a tragedy arose from a character having a fatal flaw which inevitably leads to his or her downfall

transcendentalism – an artistic movement from the mid-19th century based on the belief that the divine was embedded in all nature and humanity

trochee/trochaic – a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable

utilitarianism – an ethical theory which says that whether an action is ethical or not depends on whether it results in the greatest good for the greatest number of people possible

Notes on the activities

■ Chapter 1.1

Activity 2

Culture, identity and community:

This extract suggests that Alice Munro's short story could be used in an exploration of the relationship between appearance and identity. The narrator discusses Queenie's looks in some detail – noting how they have changed over time, and commenting that Queenie looks like she fits into the world in which she works. She also points out the change in the looks of Queenie's husband. Unlike Queenie's looks, which seem to make her a part of her environment, Mr Vorguilla's looks, because they suggest anger and aggression, seem to suggest that he has not fitted naturally or comfortably into his environment. In the whole story, the narrator provides many instances of description of how things look and what the appearances suggest about identity. You would have to read the entire story to see if this initial impression bears out and what point Munro makes in the story as a whole about identity and appearance, and you would have to pair this with a work in translation that also dealt with the relationship between how one looks and one's identity.

Politics, power, and justice:

In this short extract, it is difficult to see whether the story as a whole has much to say about politics or justice, but we can see hints of an idea about power. The narrator contrasts herself with Queenie, who appears to have a powerful presence in the community – 'a woman who doesn't take a backseat to anybody' – while the narrator feels powerless. She doesn't want to sit alone in public where people might think about her as someone with nothing to do and nowhere to go. Again, you would have to read the whole story to see what Munro might be suggesting about one's personal power in a community, but the seeds of that idea are present here. In the whole story, the idea of power is extended from the power of the individual in a community to the power dynamic within a marriage. The contrast makes for interesting study. You would, as always, have to pair this work with a work in translation which also dealt with the idea of how one can be seen as a powerful individual – or not – in a community.

If you would like to read the whole story, use the QR code:



Activity 8

The speaker speaks to spring as if it were a sentient being, in order to convey a feeling about springtime. This speaker sees the heart of spring as being light and 'joyous' (line 2), but also as being fragile and short-lived (line 3). The image of spring fainting under the fire of summer evokes a feeling of alarm and even sadness. The second half of the poem asserts that the earth welcomes spring, despite its short life. In calling spring a 'bold', 'blithe newcomer' (line 6), the speaker seems to admire spring as a courageous season, appearing even in the face of danger. The stanza ends with a sense of wonder and curiosity as the narrator asks spring where it goes on its seemingly endless journey before coming around again every year.

Activity 9

- 1 This piece could be classified as an essay. We know that it is an introduction to a collection of ballads, and introductions of this sort are always essays. This is an interesting one, however, because of its strongly personal flavour. It is not autobiography, but it is a passionate statement of the writer's personal opinion about the value of the poems that have been collected in this book.
- 2 Some of the literary techniques that you might have noticed are:
 - a The use of water imagery in lines 1–2 to characterize the contrast between post-war poems and these older ballads. Nichols calls the former 'watery', but the latter 'great draughts of poetry'. (A 'draught' is something that we can drink.) The suggestion is that the old poems are life-sustaining.
 - b Nichols also compares the two types of poetry to food in lines 4–6: the old poems 'keep' forever, while the new ones grow 'sour' overnight. This comparison strengthens the idea of the old poems as life-sustaining: the implication is that we can feast on them forever, but the new poems go bad and cannot sustain us.
 - c The imagery in lines 10–15 provides an idea of an ancient world, full of mystery and excitement. This imagery elevates the old ballads to something mystical and elemental.
 - d Lines 16–20 provide the contrast to the imagery of the old world, interestingly, though sadly, by decrying science as the force which has destroyed

all the mystery in the world. The modern poems are situated in this destroyed world, and so they are, in Nichols' view, not worthy of attention.

- e A final contrast is introduced in the final paragraph, in which Nichols claims that modern poetry is egotistic (focused on 'I') while the old poetry never concerns itself with 'I', but with all of us.

Contrast, then, is the main literary strategy, but there are four different contrasts which involve symbolism, imagery and grammar as their subjects.

If you missed some of these, don't worry. Keep practising. If you found others and you can justify them with text, then you are doing well!

Activity 12

- 1 The speaker of this poem seems to be highly reliable. The fact that the poem is laudatory – that it praises Germany – in a tone which is genuine and passionate suggests that the speaker is expressing the feelings of the poet. The repetition at the end of each stanza helps to support this interpretation because it always says that the German fatherland is better than what has been described in the stanza. The tone is never sarcastic; instead it is always enthusiastic and full of praise.
- 2 The poem is not representational in the sense that it describes people and places and events. Instead, it speaks in general terms about features of countries such as the 'land and people' in line 22 and the 'fame and victory' in line 28. All of those things are real things, but they are non-specific, so it is difficult to say that the poem is representational. It does, however, represent the feelings of the speaker toward his homeland and, because the speaker is highly reliable, we believe that the poem also represents the feelings of the poet toward his fatherland. The poem is about a love of Germany in particular, and a love of one's country more generally, and certainly such a feeling is a common human experience.
- 3 The poem paints a portrait of a person who identifies strongly with his country. We could say that there is potential for developing a global issue about the way that love of one's country can lead one to see all of its good qualities, both in terms of nature and in terms of the values that the people of the country represent.
- 4 Some of the literary strategies used in this poem are: the use of repetition, the creation of a tone of praise, the use of a highly structured organizational strategy consisting of six-line stanzas, and the development of

the ideas from physical features of the country to more abstract features such as the courage and values of the people of the country. There are others, so if you did not notice these but you did notice others, that is fine! The poem suggests that the ideal reader would have a good understanding of geography and some names for countries which are now out of date: in the first stanza, Prussia is mentioned, as is 'the Swabian's land'. The former was a prominent region of Germany in the southeast, on the Baltic sea. The latter was a region in the southwest of Germany. The terms are not commonly used in the present day. Several other geographic places are mentioned over the course of the poem; the poet clearly presumes that the reader of the poem will be able to call to mind a map of Germany in particular, but of the wider region of Europe in general.

The poem also suggests that the ideal reader would recognize the pattern of hypothetical questions followed by a denial at the end of each stanza. We are expected to appreciate the fact that the speaker lists a wide range of features that a country might have, and then declares that none of these is good enough for Germany – Germany is better than all the elements mentioned.

Another consideration is that the poet expects the reader to be able to appreciate and celebrate Germany along with the poet. The poem was written in 1813, long before either of the two World Wars, and long before Hitler made Germany infamous. Readers with a knowledge of modern history might find it difficult to appreciate the speaker's untarnished view of his country, so the ideal reader is one who can put the poem in its historical context and view it from the perspective of someone who does not have knowledge of the history of the country since 1813 – or someone who can set aside history enough to realize that a speaker can love his country now, without necessarily supporting the actions of people in other eras.

Other demands are made on the reader of this poem: the features that you struggled with the most are probably the most revealing about what is needed for a successful engagement with this text.

- 5 The tone of the poem may be the strongest feature of the text which is intended to appeal to the aesthetic. The speaker wants his readers to see Germany through his eyes and to appreciate the pride and joy that the speaker takes in thinking about his country. The use

of the exclamation points is one sign that the speaker wants us to have an emotional response to the text, rather than a more intellectual one. The repeated hyperbole also contributes to this aesthetic. Every stanza presents features that some countries have and then exclaims at the end that Germany is better, stronger, bolder, greater. We are not being asked to consider facts; we are being asked to respond to the emotion of the speaker and, by extension, of the poet.

■ Chapter 1.2

Activity 1

- 1 You might be surprised at Abigail Adams' obvious awareness of the political situation and her insistence in asking her husband to speak up for women and their role in any new government. There is a stereotypical understanding that women in the eighteenth century did not tend to involve themselves in public affairs, and we are aware that women did not have the right to vote. We might even tend to think that women were subservient to their husbands, and so it might appear quite surprising that this woman obviously felt herself to be her husband's equal, qualified to comment on public affairs and to suggest an important way forward for public policy.
- 2 You may have noticed that Abigail Adams is focused on the kinds of difficulties that have arisen from being in a state of war. Her house has been occupied by the army. Damage has been done to various buildings, and she has been worried that they would not be able to plant the crops when they needed to. She is also worried about smallpox. None of these concerns are things that we have to worry about in the present day.
- 3 A possible reaction to Abigail Adams' request is that even now, 250 years later, women are underrepresented in many governments around the world. Decisions about women's rights regarding health care and equal pay are often made by groups comprised entirely of men. This is true in many countries around the world – even in places where some women have reached a high level of responsibility in government. Britain has had only two female prime ministers; the United States has had no female president or vice-president. Canada has had one female prime minister, as has Australia. New Zealand has had three women serve as prime minister, including the current prime minister. We might

think that in many places around the world, women's situation – at least with regard to their functioning as contributing members of government – has not changed all that much since the days of Abigail Adams.

Activity 3

- 1 One possible observation is that at the end of the poem, the speaker tells us about a present-day person who works diligently to restore the destroyed headstones.
- 2 The little story at the end of the poem makes a connection between the values of the present day to the values of the past: those of the past made stones to remember people by; those of the present care enough about trying to remember the past to restore the stones. This tells us that over generations people share the same desire to commemorate those we have lost. It shows us a feature of our common humanity, regardless of our religion.

Amichai also reveals people's desire for connection in the lines in the middle of the poem where he describes the isolated words on broken stones as people in search of their lost pieces. We all want to belong.

Activity 9

- 1 There are many possibilities here, and different readers will pick out different lines. One example of a powerful set of lines is 11–16, where the speaker describes his memory of having to watch a soldier die from gas poisoning because there weren't enough masks for everyone. The description is powerful, and the idea that he continues to see this man in his nightmares puts us inside his head, as if we, too, were witness to the horror.
- 2 There are also many elements of craft here that you might have noticed, including the narrative perspective (the voice of a person who is speaking from direct personal experience and so carries great authoritative weight), the use of imagery which is vivid and memorable, or the implied audience which, since we don't know exactly who the speaker is addressing, could be us. One particularly effective poetic tool that Owen uses here is rhyme, which is perfect all the way through the poem, but which is so perfectly balanced that it is not intrusive. You don't notice right away that the poem is built of rhymed lines. The rhyme takes the horrible experience and raises it to something epic, in the manner of someone like Homer. It gives the poem weight that it might not otherwise have.

- 3 The social commentary is very clearly anti-war. The speaker is a soldier who has seen the worst horrors of war and so objects to anyone who tries to glamourize it.
- 4 The 'you' of line 25 is anyone who believes the facile sentiment of the Latin phrase: 'Sweet it is to die for one's country'. Only people who have not been to war can possibly make such a claim. The 'you' in the speaker's world might be someone who is out recruiting young men to be soldiers, or a politician making a speech in support of a war.

■ Chapter 1.3

Activity 4

There are a great many features of the language in this poem that you might have noticed. The list below is by no means comprehensive; if you found some other elements and can substantiate your interpretation with text, then you have done good work. If you missed all of these or if you feel that you misinterpreted some elements, don't worry. Just keep practising! Some of the important uses of language for artistic purpose you might have noticed are:

- All of the stanzas have four lines except the last two stanzas which have three. The shortened ending might reflect the limited life that the poet has been depicting.
- The metaphor of the 'white dream' for the bread. Bread is often a symbol of life – the thing which sustains life – and calling it a dream brings up that symbol. Emphasizing the white might suggest something about the cultural context in which this bread is being made.
- Contrast of white and black in the first stanza. The image suggests a black woman making bread for someone white.
- The development of the poem is shaped around the development of the bread, so the bread becomes an extended metaphor.
- The Biblical allusion to the sacrifice God demanded of Abraham suggests that the life of the baker woman is being sacrificed to this work.
- The image of sacrifice is extended by the allusion to the sacrifice of Jesus for mankind's sins and the fact that bread is given in the Christian ceremony of communion to stand for the body of Christ.

Activity 7

We noted the use of dialect earlier in the chapter. Another striking feature of the language that reveals

something about Janie's character is the strongly metaphorical nature of her speech. She talks about having been to the 'horizon and back' – a powerful image about how far she has travelled. The distance is not necessarily literal, but the idea of going all the way to the horizon conveys her feeling about how much changed she is from when she went away. She also talks about her neighbours worrying their 'guts into fiddle strings'. This is a reference to the fact that fiddles are, indeed, strung with catgut. The guts have been twisted and refined until they make long, tight strings which twang when plucked. The image conveys beautifully Janie's understanding about just how overwrought the neighbours are going to get if they can't find out Janie's secrets. The most striking metaphor Janie uses is the metaphor about love and how it is shaped to each individual in the way that the ocean is shaped by each different shoreline. The fact that Janie so naturally uses these metaphors in her everyday speech reveals that she has an intuitive mind and that she can understand the world around her in a nuanced way. We see that she has gained a great deal of wisdom on her journey through life.

Activity 10

Language which characterizes:

The most striking thing about the way that Walker depicts herself here is that the language she uses shows that she sees the dogs as creatures equally deserving of dignified treatment as people are and, further, she shows that she sees the dogs' experiences as symbolic of human experiences. In the first paragraph, she worries that the dogs are enslaved and that she is contributing to their suffering by taking their puppies away. She worries again in the final paragraph where she describes having to pay for the puppy. We also learn something about Walker from her attitude toward nature, which she calls Mother. Another piece of evidence for the idea that Walker as a thinker sees correspondence between and among different things in the world is her playing of Bob Marley's CD *Exodus* in the car. Exodus is the book in the Bible which describes the escape of the Jews into the promised land. She sees in the music a parallel to her liberating the dog from the place of its birth. The detail about the African basket contributes to the developing metaphor of escape from slavery: the black dog is leaving in an African basket.

Language which contributes to artistry:

We have already noticed the highly metaphorical and symbolic use of language in this passage. She also uses

personification to characterize the dogs as she sees them – the father looking so proud that he ought to have a cigar, for example. The digression away from the story to the musing about why purebred labs never have spots is what gives Walker the opportunity to bring in Mother and show us her reverence for the randomness and power of nature. The connection of nature to the dogs also shows Walker’s respect for them.

Language which sets tone:

The tone is thoughtful, humorous and ultimately respectful. The detailed comparison of the breeders and the dogs to slave traders and slaves ought to seem rather horrifying, but the language undercuts that by the awareness that such a comparison is too hyperbolic. The dogs are well-cared-for. She takes the situation seriously enough to present herself to the parent dogs and ask their permission for the puppy, but she makes a little fun of herself when she says ‘I tried not to have Slave Trader thoughts’. The capital letters there show the over-exaggeration that she knows she is indulging in. The reference to Babylon also ultimately makes a little fun of the comparison, because while the Jews in Biblical history were entrapped in Babylon, they could not escape in a speeding car with a CD playing Bob Marley in the background. The safety and freedom of choice provides a little humour to the passage.

■ Chapter 1.4

Activity 2

A is Kendrick Lamar.

B is EE Cummings.

C is William Shakespeare.

Activity 6

Sample 1: (all iambs):

U / U / U / U / U /

Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?

Sample 2: (one trochee and the rest iambs): The first two syllables are the reversed ones.

/U U / U / U / U /

I all alone beweeep my outcast state

Sample 3: This one is three trochees followed by one stressed syllable, so the pattern is alternating stressed syllables and unstressed syllables.

/ U / U / U /

Twinkle twinkle little star

Activity 7

- 1 Some possible observations you might make about the end of Pasternak’s poem are that the stability of the stanzas reflects the stability of the idea that the garden is a living, almost sentient, being that holds power over the human who enters it. The last stanza gives us the garden in which a pond becomes a lake and it (the garden) can hold out the entire sky. We might give this stanza a title such as ‘Garden as Master of the Sky’. We can see a development as the poem goes on. First the garden holds worlds, then it controls light and dark, and here it controls the entire sky. The human appears in the first two stanzas but disappears altogether in the final one, becoming less and less significant.
- 2 The rhyming words are ‘sigh’ and ‘sky’. The sigh is from the apple blossom, and giving it the power to sigh means that the author has personified it. ‘Sky’ is the biggest word of the poem in the sense of the portion of the universe it contains. In this stanza, then, the rhymes suggest that the garden is coming alive into something sentient and, since it can hold the sky, can even be seen as godlike.
- 3 The first two lines of the stanza have the extra stresses. In the first line, we have the ‘pond’ and a ‘secret’, and in the second line we have the ‘surf’ and the ‘sigh’. It is almost as if a transformation has taken place: the pond becomes surf and the secret becomes a sigh, with the apple blossom breathing the secret out. The stresses draw our attention to this transformation.

■ Chapter 1.5

Activity 4

You may have noticed several common symbols in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’. Maybe you picked up on the word ‘fall’ from the title which, especially combined with the mention of decayed trees in line 12, might be a reference to the fall from grace, as mentioned on the chart. The word ‘fall’ might also be a reference to the season of the year, and line 1 mentions autumn, which the chart mentions as approaching death. Windows are mentioned in line 11, and although windows might mean escape or freedom, in the context of the darkness and gloom, and given the description of them as ‘vacant eye-like’ windows, in this case, we might be more likely to consider that these windows represent something more like entrapment. Line 1 mentions clouds, which might be a sign of a storm

coming – especially as these clouds are ‘oppressive’. All in all, this passage already seems to suggest that trouble is coming, and something is coming to an end. If you picked up on a few of these elements, then you have begun to develop your ability to interpret symbols. If you missed some, don’t worry. You will begin to notice more and more as you study more and more literature.

Activity 5

Different readers will find different things challenging, but here is a list of some of the more challenging things that readers would need to understand:

- **Vocabulary:** ‘furrows’ (line 4), ‘bolls’ (line 6), ‘bale’ (line 8), ‘hulking’ (line 17), ‘ungainly contraption’ (lines 19–20), ‘cowcatcher’ (line 20), ‘dilapidated’ (line 26)
- **Historical references:** underground railroad (line 2), cotton picking (line 4), American slavery (line 5)
- **Historical allusion:** Caesar
- **Non-representational element:** the underground railroad physicalized as an actual train. This element has been the source of much debate and disagreement by many readers who have difficulty accepting the strategy as symbolic rather than literal.

Activity 6

- 1 Different readers will find different elements challenging, but here are some of the most likely elements:
 - The **phrase** ‘dog eat dog’ is from the cliché that ‘it’s a dog-eat-dog world’. If a listener does not recognize that reference, the whole point of the song is likely to be lost.
 - **Reference** to doves and hawks: in the US, a dove is someone who is peace-loving and opposed to war; a hawk is someone who supports war.
 - **Vocabulary word:** pedal.
 - **Allusion** to snakebite evangelists and racketeers; snakebite is also likely an allusion to the serpent in the Garden of Eden.
 - The **phrase** ‘big wig’.
 - Play on the word ‘crooked’ in ‘crooked legs’; this might also be an **allusion** to the devil.
 - **Vocabulary word:** sycophant.
- 2 Answers will vary from reader to reader.
- 3 Someone who is part of the financial establishment, who sees the amassing of wealth as the marker of a

good life, and someone who is pro-war would likely be offended by the lyrics to this song, because the world view it espouses is quite critical of that mindset.

Chapter 2.1

Activity 2

One of the first things you may have noticed in this extract is the characters’ strong connections to food. Indeed, Tita (the protagonist) is born in the middle of the kitchen, which later becomes her ‘domain’. We can also see the importance of food in the way that Nacha, the De la Garza family’s cook, uses it to ‘educate the innocent child’s stomach’; further, ‘though she didn’t know how to read or write, when it came to cooking [Nacha] knew everything there was to know’. Food plays a central role within Mexican culture, and the structure of the novel reinforces this notion, with each chapter framed by a recipe that serves as a symbol for the action and conflicts presented within the chapter.

You may also have noticed the reference to mourning: ‘Mama Elena accepted her offer gratefully; she had enough to do between her mourning and the enormous responsibility of running the ranch – and it was the ranch that would provide her children with the food and education they deserved ...’ There is a suggestion here that grief is a cultural practice, observed publicly and as part of the daily routine.

Activity 3

- 1 Responses will vary according to the individual reader.
- 2 Dylan wrote ‘The Times They Are a-Changin’ during a time of political and social unrest. The Vietnam War had been going on for nearly a decade and, on the American home front, the Civil Rights Movement was taking place. Dylan’s lyrics are a call to action, a rallying cry for those in power to use their position to take a stand against injustice. You can read an interesting 2018 article from National Public Radio’s series *American Anthem*, which speaks to the currency of Dylan’s lyrics.



Activity 4

- 1 You will probably have noticed that, in the aftermath of the event, Changez feels marginalized by American society. He feels paranoid, like he is suddenly an outsider in the land that he has chosen to make his

home: ‘My entrance elicited looks of concern from many of my fellow passengers. I flew to New York uncomfortable in my own face: I was aware of being under suspicion; I felt guilty; I tried therefore to be as nonchalant as possible; this naturally led to my becoming stiff and self-conscious.’

- 2 Point of view is perhaps the biggest contributing factor to the empathy that we feel as readers. While our perspective is limited to only Changez’s point of view, this technique also allows us to relate to him. The structure of the novel (as a dramatic monologue delivered to an unnamed American) makes us more directly involved in the narrative; it is as if Changez is speaking to us, involving us directly in his experience.
- 3 The events of September 11th give us a context for Changez’s feelings of marginalization. He is not just an immigrant; he is a Muslim immigrant attempting to assimilate within American society at a time of heightened paranoia and increasing Islamophobia. Without including this event, we would not be able to fully understand Changez’s internal conflicts.

■ Chapter 2.2

Activity 4

The two translations of Akhmatova’s poem demonstrate how subtle changes in word choice can affect meaning. We will look at just a few examples here:

- ‘Caged in this savage capital’ versus ‘In the wild capital – or prison’: The word ‘caged’ connotes a sense of imprisonment, but ‘prison’ itself conjures an image of a specific place. ‘Savage’ and ‘wild’ also have slightly different connotations; ‘savage’ suggests a fierceness or violence, while ‘wild’ is often used to describe something which has not been tamed.
- ‘We have forgotten forever’ versus ‘And we’ve forgotten till doomsdays’: the former phrase suggests an indeterminate finality, while the latter alludes to an apocalyptic event.
- ‘Peter’s sacred city, / Will be our unsought monument’ versus ‘Peter’s-city, to all us, / Will be the sanctified tombstone’: ‘Monument’ is a more benign word than ‘tombstone’; the latter suggests death, whereas the former could signify honour and respect for something or someone living.

In both translations, there is a clear sense of mourning for the city of Petrograd as it was; however, Kline’s version

offers a more detached, existential view, whereas Bonver’s version, perhaps because of his cultural connection to the source material, contains more emotive language.

■ Chapter 2.3

Activity 1

- 1 The images depict the following:
 - Row 1: (left) the Sami culture of northern Sweden, (right) the Hindu Holi Festival (a celebration of the end of winter and the arrival of spring)
 - Row 2: (left) Mexican food culture, specifically Oaxaca, (right) Notting Hill Carnival (a celebration of Caribbean culture)
 - Row 3: (left) Afghan folk music, (right) Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations
 - Row 4: (left) Jewish Hanukkah celebrations, (right) Native American powwow

You will have noticed in the images some of the following cultural aspects: community spirit or cultural pride, shared traditions and celebrations, religious rituals, food, music.

- 2 Answers will be personal to the individual.

Activity 2

Music plays a pivotal role in shaping Joy’s identity. According to Harjo’s account, music was such a powerful force that it called to her from the ancestral realm; she connected to her mother through music before she was born. Music is central to Native American culture; as Harjo says, it is a unifying force across cultures and can inspire people or call them to action: ‘music can help raise a people up or call them to gather for war’.

Activity 3

- 1 The values of honour and family pride are implicit within this extract. Similar to the Vicario brothers in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Gjorg is bound by tradition to continue the blood feud started by his ancestors. We can imply through Gjorg’s questioning of his role within the funeral ritual that he feels uncomfortable; he clashes with his father over this, who insists that he must be present to honour the dead man’s soul. Gjorg’s internal conflict is evident within his internal monologue: ‘Why must I be here?’ He feels insecure, almost guilty for causing the anguish of the mourners around him, with whom he must participate in the ritual.

- 2 The funeral itself is a dramatic event. The mourners, dictated by custom, appear to have certain roles to enact. We can gather, through the exaggerated descriptions of them scratching themselves and tearing their hair out, that grief is a public emotion within this culture similar to what we saw in the extract from *Like Water for Chocolate* in Chapter 2.1.

Activity 4

The dialogue in the extract from *Woman at Point Zero* highlights several gender stereotypes. For one, the prince speaking to Firdaus cannot believe that Firdaus is capable of killing a man because she looks so gentle, a characteristic associated with women. (In the part of the extract that has been edited out – for space considerations – Firdaus proves him wrong by violently slapping him.) Later in the extract, Firdaus tells the police that women cannot be criminals, only men, furthering the stereotype that men are aggressors and women are victims.

Activity 5

Satrapi uses humour to draw attention to the shifting cultural values under the Islamic fundamentalist regime. The images presented in the first two panels are almost caricatures and suggest that there are only two types of women and men which are acceptable in society. Marji's mother's comment in the second row of images suggests a slight mockery of 'Madame'; the comedic tone is perhaps an attempt to distract (and perhaps understate) the impact of the cultural changes on individuals. Marji's and her mother's exaggerations regarding prayer in the final two panels is another example of how Satrapi uses humour to emphasize the importance of religion within society; in the last panel, Marji almost turns it into a competition with her peer.

■ Chapter 2.4

Activity 1

- 1 The function of time in this poem is in its passing; it is about burial and rebirth (and reincarnation). The poem includes 'grass' and 'a flower', both of which are ephemeral and can be compared to the human persona. We see the effects of mortality but also the way mortals can be a timeless part of the world. In contrast, the poem assumes that nationhood lasts a long time, maybe forever.
- 2 You might find a variety of information about individuals living in Palestine in 2003 and what their

daily lives were like. Additionally, some important events in the news were that three youths in Palestine were killed in the ongoing conflict with Israel (United Nations) in 2003 and the Arab League supported an independent Palestinian State 'road map' (CNN: 'Palestinian territories – timeline'). You can read more about what that means in the article mentioned here or through your own further inquiry.

- 3 Rather than focus on a reader-response view, where your personal situation changes your reading, you should look at the way current events and political climates (especially in Palestine) would add meaning to this personal connection to land and nationhood. Connect the poem to current discourse about Palestine through an article you find from a reputable source; for example, more recent fighting in Gaza or Trump's plan for the 'deal of a century' that links this land to the US. The poem can then be a political piece to give a voice to people who feel their identity, even in death, is connected to their land.
- 4 Rather than make the poem explicitly political, it is more about a sense of belonging that everyone wants. Like the Kafka passage we looked at, an unnamed space can therefore be relatable to more people and perhaps timeless if we consider different places that might reach this situation in the future. Additionally, the persona feels ownership of her/his country through the article 'my'; therefore, they link a part of their identity with the country – this is a universal idea. The persona could have political ideas about land rights; we see this in conflicts between Israel and Palestine, but it could relate to other times and places. Alternatively, the poem may be more about the persona's connection to the earth than a nation; it could be more universally about 'country' as a space of land.
- 5 There are several ways of articulating universal ideas in this poem that can be formed from the answers to the previous questions. You might articulate them as:
- Part of our identities come from the land we inhabit or the nation we are a part of.
 - Though we are mortal, our bodies can become a part of the cycle of nature.
 - People have a right to be buried in their homeland.

Activity 4

- 1 Your answers to these questions will vary depending on the inquiry you conduct; you can therefore make

these responses more specific to your research topic. The ‘mass of men’ are the common people, workers and citizens of a country who are controlled by the government (and possibly the rich). In a movement of civil disobedience, these are the common people protesting government decisions.

- 2 Thoreau’s use of man as a ‘machine’ refers to the way they are part of the system; when men protest the system, the whole machine must stop, which is why civil disobedience is powerful. In the present day, you might also consider to what extent men are replaceable with machines to do their jobs. If men are less required by the government, then the government has more power.
- 3 This response will be your opinion based on your research. However, consider what ‘bad’ means here. It might be about creating a larger rich–poor gap, inciting violence, etc.
- 4 The resisters will be the people in your inquiry who are using civil disobedience – marching, writing, or however they are responding.
- 5 You might see Thoreau as more or less relevant today after the current issue you have researched. You will have to consider whether you think it is a model that people unsatisfied with their government should follow or not.

Activity 5

- 1 Danforth doesn’t allow for any dialogue in between, creating an ‘us versus them’ mentality. Further, he connects the court with God, which doesn’t allow room for argument: ‘Now, by God’s grace, the shining sun is up, and them that fear not light will surely praise it’. A leader with an agenda might not allow negotiation by creating a connotation of evil with the opposite of their beliefs. They might use religion to sway people unfairly.
- 2 Proctor has the control in the situation in that he is given a choice. You might agree or disagree with his choice not to sign his name. However, in this way, he has gained some power over Danforth who wants the confession. Proctor chooses to protect his reputation, and that of his friends, rather than save his life.
- 3 We like to believe that courts are fair and end in a resolution that is justified. However, courtrooms can also be biased and even political. If you consider the appointment of Supreme Court Justices in the US, you will see how presidents try to find justices whose

ideas of justice are linked to their own values or those of their political party.

Courts can also be duped by ‘mob mentality’ or public opinion, such as that which is seen on television or social media.

Activity 7

- 1 **Chronological:** reference to ‘Hong Kong’s defeat’, ‘countless thousands of people dead’, etc.
Timeless: generally defeats and victories, personal place in history, legends, etc.
- 2 Philosophical questions about fate, winners and losers, history, etc., connects the personal to the historical narrative. If we just look at the question (‘Did a great city fall so she could be vindicated?’), Zhang asks us to also consider the bigger idea of fate and karma, the ways of the world. Do small events around the world affect each other or do people make a narrative to try to make sense of the world in this way? Zhang questions whether some people were born to be a part of history or whether these people decide to be important in the way the world progresses.
- 3 The legends are more about the philosophical ideas than the individuals, thus a story becomes a lesson that is timeless. Legends are able to move beyond facts to create a story that suits our understanding of an idea or a nation’s identity, for example.
- 4 In the ‘unreasonable world’, you might find examples of individuals in big events such as 9/11 or another terrorist event, tsunamis in Japan or Indonesia or other environmental disasters. Perhaps in the destruction, they still had a victory.
- 5 In the film clip, you will see a personal and political story juxtaposed, which shows the timeless and the historical together.

You might notice the ironic music that does not seem to fit the violence of some of the scenes; this can tell you there were different layers of society at the time and that some still found joy in the violence.

The impact can change over time, because Hong Kong cinema is something that has helped to establish a Hong Kong identity that was greatly undefined. Maybe you see elements of the setting or through the use of Cantonese that start to create this sense of identity. A mainland filmmaker might film in Mandarin, for example, and this would change the text.

Chapter 2.5

Activity 2

- 1 The *katsudon* is more like the simple, everyday food of the women's dinner in Woolf's essay, but described as deliciously as the men's luncheon. If you know more of Woolf's essay, you might understand that the setting is also more like the women's dinner, less ornate and more 'everyday', like the type of cultural practice de Certeau writes about.
- 2 It is something you would see all over Japan and something everyone can enjoy. While some may only eat the *katsudon*, others would be experienced with the practice of cooking it. All would have some relationship with places that serve it and the way they might enjoy it casually with friends. The word is kept in the original Japanese because it has no translation; therefore it is essentially Japanese.
- 3 Examples of hyperbole in the text include: 'outrageously good', 'exceptionally delicious', 'flawless' and 'The best *katsudon* I've ever had in my life'. Mikage notes she may find it so delicious because she is 'starving'. Perhaps Yuichi exaggerates his reaction as well either out of joy for being with Mikage or in contrast to the sad state he has been feeling. Having a friend or loved one bring you food is a common way of showing love and cheering people up. In any case, authors use hyperbole for effect to create emotion and meaning in the exaggeration.
- 4 Yuichi and Mikage joke that showing strength would make him seem more powerful or 'manly'; Yuichi acknowledges he was silly to be 'cold' and emotionless in this way. In this way, they mock a stereotypical masculine feature and reject it. The book plays with gender norms also through Yuichi's father, who is transgender, and allows us to see that stereotypical gender behaviours can be masks to hide behind. In contrast, the food is warm and brings out emotions both here and throughout the book.
- 5 The familiarity of the *katsudon*, a Japanese comfort food, is like their relationship; it goes way back and gives them comfort. It may demonstrate Mikage is not trying to run away from her comfort zone (Yuichi) through the metaphor of new types of food.
- 6 In the end we see that Mikage is both interested in Japanese culture and others through the types of food she cooks. The passage shows she is open-minded and uses food to be creative and independent; the creation of meals is her artistic practice. Still her delivery to Yuichi

is of Japanese foods, including 'wasabi', suggesting this is always her base or her core. She is interested in other things, but her identity as Japanese and her roots that include her love for him are central to her.

- 7 Responses will be personal to the individual.

Activity 3

- 1 Although yoga looks like something physical, it is about an awareness beyond the physical through breath and meditation. Huxley's use of materialism here helps us understand he is talking about the mind-body connection, an idea you may have come across as you learn about mindfulness at your school.
- 2 The answer to this question is really at the heart of mindfulness practice, where one is aware of their present actions and thoughts, and the mind and body are connected peacefully. You might consider these ideas, but perhaps you have thoughts of your own (the answer is beyond the text itself):
 - You can do everyday tasks mindfully, making them a kind of yoga.
 - It takes both the body and mind/spirit to engage in everyday activities.
 - Everyday activities are more than chores or repetition; they are part of being alive and being aware of oneself and one's cultural practices.
- 3 This idea of yoga teaches us how we can face mortality in life. The people acknowledge that life is wild and that nature rules their beings. In their culture, beauty and horror are natural parts of the circle of life and nature.
- 4 Direct address makes the passage personal; you think about your own response to it rather than just the characters of the novel, and the fears of mortality are more real. We can consider how people would be directly swayed or converted to a type of thinking about the world when they were addressed directly. The passage is more connected to representing than reflecting because the reader uses their imagination (as 'you') to become a part of the scene.
- 5 They respect what he says has truth, maybe through his positional authority and title as 'Dr'. Further, their 'worshipping wonder' shows the way people can be taken in by different kinds of religion, and perhaps through a foreignness (in tongue, looks) of any kind. Will 'notes' in separate individuals the way they are all drawn in by the doctor. He watches them more than the performance itself.

- 6 There are a few ways to interpret this response:
- It allows something violent done to them to be natural or beautiful.
 - It suggests that one can find god (ecstasy) even through something horrific or terrible.
 - It shows that you can use deconstruction theory to understand ideas in the text associated with beauty and horror within the same scary unknown.
- 7 This is another interpretive question. You might consider how the repetitive nature of yoga can become something people do without thinking, just like the new practices or beliefs they would take on without thinking further about them (yoga of everyday life). A group practice of yoga could be used to control people's thoughts; people are drawn in to the practitioner in the same way they are drawn in to the doctor's speech here.

Yoga can further be beautiful and difficult or painful at the same time; while a difficult, twisty position may look very painful, it can be ecstatic if understood and mastered over time.

In the modern world, we see people of different religions drawn to yoga for different reasons; in the same way, yoga here can be a unifier. Huxley must imagine the narrative rather than just show what people do in the practice of yoga; he represents a way it can be used in society and also uses it as a metaphor.

Activity 4

- 1 Fashions are like trends ('we follow fashions ... in and in'), so people in Hong Kong may follow different cultural trends from around the world. He also shows how fashion looks back on the 'past' more generally, showing the way our identities come from our pasts.
- 2 Hong Kong brings together many cultures to make its own, which you might see reflected in the 'jungle of possibilities'. The kaleidoscope breaks an image into many colours and patterns, showing that it is made of many elements. This idea can be both beautiful and overwhelming, reflected in the stanza's use of diction with positive and negative connotations. It is a hard culture to pinpoint or navigate, for the reason that it is made up of many cultures (the 'maze'). Others may try to define or even use Hong Kong culture without understanding it ('trapped in the gaze of others'). Although Yesi suggests an entrapment, there is also a feeling of freedom in the way the woman views fashion and her identity.

- 3 In the 1997 handover, Hong Kong does not start completely afresh, but uses the old colonial politics as its old 'fabric' from which to make something new. The political system of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) was and is largely experimental and undefined. This can also allow a space for culture to grow organically. The socioeconomics of Hong Kong rely heavily on capitalism, but are now under rule of a communist nation. Also, the rich–poor gap in Hong Kong is huge and public housing makes up nearly half of homes. Immigrants may be poor domestic workers or rich bankers. All of these juxtapositions allow a freedom of cultural practice, where many forms of culture are in close contact in one of the densest cities in the world.

4

Break in old and new in the poem	What it says about Hong Kong culture
'I've no means to tailor for you / garments of worlds to come'	Everyday people do not want to welcome the political change to Chinese rule or communism.
'A body wants a change / but hardly knows what it needs to want'	Holding onto British colonial rule is not the answer, but maybe the handover to China isn't either; there is confusion about what would best serve the SAR.
'unfinished feelings'	People still have a relationship with the British that is not over; this can also be witnessed through cultural practice, such as fashion, but also things like British pubs, driving on the left side of the road, and using English as an official language in addition to Chinese.

Chapter 2.6

Activity 1

- 1 Braques uses his imagination to create a broken-up image of a female nude from a male perspective. He focuses on things like the 'belly nipple arse' (from Duffy's poem) but takes the natural colour out from the body. He is more interested in how shapes come together ('volume, space') rather than a real representation. This minimalist representation might show a limiting view of females. The male gaze shows the demure, weak female but, reading her narrative, we hear she is strong even though she is 'thin'. She doesn't really care what people think of her. In this way, you might see her as an empowering figure. Perhaps most shockingly, she is not given eyes – which are often

viewed as the window to the soul. Without eyes, she is dehumanized and made into an object.

- 2 He paints the model to ‘hang in great museums’ and be called ‘Art’ – which might give him fame, reputation, and money. It is not something he does to honour the woman.

He claims that even the ‘Queen of England’ will come to look at the final painting, briefly. Because she moves on quickly, we understand that the model understands that either the Queen does not truly think this is a ‘magnificent’ rendering of a woman, or that her viewing and accolades are just an act as part of a patriarchal system that values art like this.

- 3 She earns ‘a few francs’ just for sitting a few hours in order to pay for ‘the next meal’ – her thinness shows she does not have much money for food. She also sells her body for money in other ways; although we could see her as a victim, she uses the system to also get what she wants. The idea of being hung in a painting and seen by the Queen ‘makes [her] laugh’.

The unusual painting seems silly to her and she thinks he ‘take[s himself] too seriously’. Through Duffy’s poem, we get to see a perspective of many narratives of female nudes (mostly in paintings) that are often left silent.

- 4 This moment represents an exchange of service for money and therefore places both painter and model in the economic system. However, even though the model (also a ‘river-whore’) does not have as much money or fame as the painter, she feels more powerful than him in the room. She ‘confuses him’ with her smile; showing she knows more about him than he about her; you can think about the way knowledge is power in your TOK class. She asks ‘Why do you do this?’ and he claims he ‘has to’, suggesting she is more free than him to choose the way she earns money. She lives carefree, drinking ‘wine’ at night while he worries about his art being bought. It gives us a different perspective on a profession we may have prejudices against. She also asks for twice as much money as originally agreed. Lastly, she decides ‘It does not look like me’ at the end, which suggests she is still in control of her body and her image. What he is selling is something she sees as a silly imagination.
- 5 You can develop the ideas in the response above to focus on the following linguistic elements that add to our understanding of power in the text:

- Direct statements and active verbs opposite passive language for the man – he is ‘little’ and insecure though others think he is a ‘genius’
- By contrast, others think she is a ‘river-whore’ (which is a label imposed on her) but she is free and keeps her image, her identity, for herself.

Activity 2

1 Possible thesis:

- People play with language to investigate different parts of their identities. (Consider the connections between language and race, but also the way those of the same racial family background use different language. With Zora and Levi, for example, their dialogue is different and the way they talk about race is different.)
- Appropriation of dialects disrespects people who naturally speak in them. (This is Zora’s perspective but not Levi’s. By looking at other parts of the novel, you might conclude that Smith argues one way or the other.)

2 Possible thesis:

- Academia represents an esoteric and exclusionary culture through its use of highbrow language. (In this way, Carl doesn’t have a voice. Others might argue that anyone could access this language.)
- People who speak dialects need to learn standard English to be successful. (From Claire and Zora’s perspective, they help Carl find a voice by having access to this kind of language.)

3 Possible thesis:

- Knowledge of language and vocabulary gives one power. (In general, the power of a voice is important through the novel. Here we understand how Carl can code-switch in order to powerfully express his opinions to different people.)
- The use of correct standard English makes one’s ideas better. (Of course, this and any thesis statement should be debatable. When Carl uses the word ‘motif’ he is able to better express his ideas.)

- 4 Academic English is about ‘accurate’ spelling and grammar as well as sophisticated language – one can be specific about one wants to say. But sometimes street language is just as, if not more, specific and can be just as complex. Slang, for example, is created for gaps in language, delivering a particular nuance and tone of

an idea. For example, Carl's street language ends up producing the 'better' poetry. However, when Levi tries to use it, he comes up short. This demonstrates that authenticity might also be important. Both types of language have the power to explain ideas clearly to a certain audience, but they both also have the power to exclude others from their discourse.

Activity 3

- 1 Liza speaks in cockney dialect or slang and speaks directly, while the others speak in 'proper' English and speak in a more roundabout way. Some examples include:
 - Liza's grammar is 'wrong' for standard English ('Bucknam Palace', 'don't want no gold').
 - She uses more crude language ('wallop', 'bully').
 - Higgins addresses others about Liza in front of her, showing a rudeness; Liza addresses people directly.
- 2 Liza's language use implies the following:
 - connects to a low-income (at the time of the play)
 - cockney links her to London's East End
 - she is confident and self-assured in her choices, but she may also be covering up a vulnerability as a 'tough guy'.
- 3 Although language use is not dependent on financial circumstances, sometimes we see either real correlations or stereotypes and prejudices of connections between language and class. In this passage, examples include:
 - Class is linked with language use in general (taking taxis).
 - Money is used to pay for language lessons.
 - Marrying a certain class is linked with language use.
- 4 Higgins' 'proper' speaking is of perfect standard grammar and pronunciation. In contrast, Mrs Pearce thinks that people should speak to be understood; it is not fair to trick people into experiments. She will use whatever language it takes to make sure that Liza understands the relationship she is entering in to with Higgins. It suggests that there is also a connection as women and perhaps a language between women to make sure Liza is not being used by a man and his ambitions. Mrs Pearce assumes she can speak more dexterously and, free of class or gender constraints, ensure that Liza fully understands.
- 5 Liza links her value as a worker to her language use, but is clear that it is not her 'self' that is being sold or

valued with money. Her entry into a different class via language now limits her from being a part of her old world. This means she may have trouble returning to her place in the economic system and perhaps in interacting with her friends from the world she inhabited. However, the play assumes Liza is not able to code-switch and work between different languages for effect when, in fact, that may be the case. Further, the author may be trying to emphasize that 'higher' registers of language are not always better, rather than show the limitations of Liza's intellect.

- 6 Although Liza worries about going back to her old ways of selling flowers, she has gained rather than lost knowledge. The two languages, or dialects, can allow her to play between identities. It can include her in different types of situations, with different groups of people. It also metaphorically demonstrates her choices and her growth as a character, rather than being controlled and changed permanently by a rich, educated man.

Chapter 3.1

Activity 1

If you were making a list of some of the conventions of a film trailer, for instance, you might include things like:

- It lasts about two minutes.
- It introduces the stars of the film.
- It gives an overview of the plot of the film.
- It uses music for dramatic effect.
- It employs a voice-over to give key bits of information.
- It gives information about setting.

Activity 2

As you are working on your 'translation', you might find the following Modern English prose version helpful.

However, if you can write yours in verse, and even possibly in alliterative verse, then so much the better.

When the desperately needed rains come in April, they make sure that the dry spell of March is completely ended, and even the plants' roots get the water they need in order to give them the power to produce flowers. When the sweet breath of a soft gentle breeze has reached the young and tender shoots and leaves in every part of the

countryside; and when the young Sun has run his half-course in the sign of the Ram, and the small birds have sung, which sleep all night with one eye open because nature pricks their courage; then – at this point – people long to go on a pilgrimage and to seek out strange coasts and distant shrines which are famous in faraway countries. And, in particular, they go to Canterbury from every part of England, to seek out the holy, blessed martyr who helped them when they were sick.

Activity 3

These sample answers might give you an idea about how you could respond to these questions.

- 1 While the first sentence (which portrays the parson as ‘quite a reasonable man’) seems to embody Myal’s point of view, the second clearly sets out her husband’s opinion that she should keep that parson ‘at a distance’. The effect of the simile in the third sentence (where Myal is rolling ‘her husband’s insides around in the palms of her hands like Cook making dumplings’) is to suggest Myal’s capacity to manipulate her husband’s opinions, and massage them to her own viewpoint. By showing us the workings of Myal’s mind in overcoming the difficulties she faces, the narrative clearly seems to be wanting us to empathize with her.
- 2 Irony is when the intended meaning of a phrase is the opposite of what is actually said. Therefore, the

description ‘very rational man’ is ironized by ‘usually’ as it suggests that, because he is sometimes not rational at all, the initial phrase is not true. Indeed, the passage might be suggesting the tension between a public image and the reality of private behaviour.

- 3 In a passage which has already established various levels of irony, the phrases ‘public and private’ and ‘fully and frankly’ seem to be deliberately alliterative and therefore almost artificially playful, almost as if their construction is like putting on face which appears publically to be frank but might actually privately be rather superficial. This sense that the language used is a bit glib and ‘to order’ (in that people are saying what they think others might want or expect them to say) could be further underlined with the cliché ‘a different kettle of fish’. Public language is a veneer, a gloss, a stereotypical glib coating, which we need to remove to discover the emotional and social realities of the relationships and power structures being described.
- 4 The final sentence uses polyptoton or the repetition of cognates (‘bother’ and ‘bothered’ are different forms of the same word). This playful construction suggests that, although Myal really is ‘continually’ troubled and worried, she is nevertheless creative and original in the way she thinks, and we are afforded a glimpse of the exuberance and lively nature of her thought processes and the way she sees the world.
- 5 Answers will vary between readers.

Chapter 3.2

Activity 1

- 1 You might find it useful to answer this question using a table to compare the two poems. The following are examples of the sorts of things you could point out.

William Carlos Williams	Tom Leonard	Audience, place and time
‘plums’	‘speshlz’	While ‘plums’ might be considered by many as a ‘middle-class’ foodstuff, ‘speshlz’ (special brew larger) might – also stereotypically – be considered by many to be ‘working-class’.
‘icebox’	‘frij’	These two terms define place: ‘icebox’ is an American term whereas the term ‘fridge’ is more usually British, and its phonetic realization as ‘frij’ places the item in Scotland, perhaps specifically in Glasgow, because of the accent.
‘breakfast’	‘pahrti’	A breakfast with plums might suggest a calm, personal experience, whereas a party with ‘speshlz’ might suggest a much more public, more raucous experience.

William Carlos Williams	Tom Leonard	Audience, place and time
'Forgive me'	'awright'	'Forgive me' is intoned in an almost religious manner (which might be ironic, because it might not be sincere), whereas 'awright' is an acknowledgement of taking the beers but not an admission of guilt or even responsibility.
'Delicious'; 'sweet'	'great'; 'stroang'	While William Carlos Williams' adjectives are delicate, Leonard's are robust, suggesting very different aesthetic experiences of tasting the various 'stolen' items.

- 2 While there might not be an 'intended audience' for these two poems, the poets, consciously or not, locate their poems in quite specific cultural spaces. Recognizing those social, class and cultural differences is to call attention to assumptions we might make; indeed, that experience might be alienating for some readers. The poems seem to deviate from conventions in rejecting standardized expectations about punctuation and spelling, for instance. In doing this they might be reflecting the ways in which their subjects are not 'conventional': perhaps not in a moral or social sense, or how their experience of the world doesn't match with the ones that they might see 'conventionally' articulated in literature.

Activity 2

- 1 In answering this question, you may find it useful to describe exactly how you would envisage the staging of this play; indeed, if you find it helpful, why not sketch a stage design? Your answers to the questions will inevitably be deeply personal; however, in analysing the play you might want to think about, amongst other things, the significance of:
- the presence of rubbish on stage and how this might reflect things that are left over and which people no longer have a need for
 - the effect on the audience of a 'brief cry' which could be shocking, disorientating, surprising
 - the changing lighting effects which could be designed to focus our attention on different things at various times.
- You might find it useful to know that 'vagitus' is the crying of a newborn baby and think about the emotive nature of hearing a baby's distress. You might, finally, want to consider the focus on breath, and on its centrality to life.
- 2 Answers will vary between readers.

Activity 4

- 1 'Once upon a time' is an interesting construction which simultaneously places a story both as unique ('once') but outside of specific historical time. The effect of this is to suggest its narrative 'truth' – it is 'for all time' – while highlighting its inevitable fictionality. Paz is playing with the idea of myths and using the constructions that human beings use to tell stories which try to make sense of their place in the world and what their role is.
- 2 The word 're-creation' seems to suggest the text's intertextual acknowledgement of its place in literary and cultural history. In other words, it recognizes that our acts of creation are always acts of 're-creation' as we respond to and build upon the stories that have come before.
- 3 Stories and literary texts are very often characterized by their playful qualities: they enjoy having fun with language. This, in itself, might be considered a celebration. However, the public performance of literature gives the text an enhanced social function as it celebrates a shared set of cultural values. The act of telling stories is a celebration of human creativity, resilience and sociability.

Chapter 3.3

Activity 1

In responding to this passage, there are many elements you could focus on. The following suggestions offer you a starting point which you will be able to take much further:

- Roy's use of very short sentences ('Doubledeckered. Deft.') stops the narrative momentarily and has the effect of focusing in on the delicate patterning of the nature she is describing. It is almost like a narrative injunction to pay attention and to look closer. This is further developed later in the passage with the use of similarly short (one-word) paragraphs.

- The narrative's diversions and tangents express the wonder of the natural world. We are presented with a glimpse into the mental world of the 'admiring policeman' who 'wondered briefly' before he 'clicked to attention' which suggests that even these brutal enforcers are spell-bound by the beauty and exuberance of the natural world.
- Roy uses similes, for example, when she describes the anthills as 'Slumped like drugged sentries asleep at the gates of Paradise'. The effect of this, firstly, to highlight the way in which the anthills appear to be lifeless and inanimate, but are actually the result of the furious actions of the natural world and, secondly, to suggest that the journey really is a magical one that potentially allows access to the unguarded 'gates of Paradise'.
- Simile is also employed to describe the passage of the butterflies through the air as being 'like happy messages'. This suggests a sense of levity and an exuberant enjoyment and appreciation of the natural world.
- The alliteration of the 'thin trunks of tilting trees' creates an almost visual, typographical representation of the criss-crossed patterning of the natural world and its punctilious and beautiful construction.

■ Chapter 3.4

Activity 2

The responses shown might help you to start thinking in more detail about some of the questions here. These questions might also serve as the prompt for an interesting discussion, perhaps in class.

- 1 When Eliot is talking about 'comprehensiveness', he's expecting a classic to express, in his own words, the 'whole range of feeling'; that is, possibly, to be able to offer an empathetic account of several characters, to show the plurality of the world and to recognize its diversity. In this sense it should also, therefore, appeal to the widest possible audience.
- 2 We have seen how some people would question this idea, and we need to understand books within the context of their place and time. However, Eliot believes that 'classics' transcend that place and time and are able to appeal beyond that to many different people. This is possible, although some readers will require a lot of context in order to make some of those connections.

- 3 This is a very interesting question in linguistics: whether the particular language or languages we speak help to condition the way in which we think. Many people do believe that individual languages help structure thought and that, therefore, speakers of the same language often think in similar ways, even when they don't hold the same opinions or values.
- 4 There is often, in many fields, a perceived gap between something that is classic and something that is popular and, sometimes related but not the same thing, between elites and masses. Eliot's assertion might certainly be read as ironic, as some of his poetry is notoriously 'difficult', and when he published his famous modernist poem, 'The Waste Land', he even thought it necessary to publish notes alongside the poem to help readers to understand it.
- 5 The word 'all' is potentially a problem here. At the very least people need to be literate, to be able to read, in order to access most literature and, even in Eliot's time, that excluded a significant number of people, not to mention the problems with access to books and to education. Perhaps this sounds, in retrospect, like a rather ambitious idea. It is certainly an interesting starting point for a debate.

Activity 3

- 1 When constructing your list, you might want to start thinking about aspects such as those below, although it will, of course, contain your own personal views:
 - the widest popular appeal
 - surviving the 'test of time'
 - approval by 'critics' and 'professionals'
 - the number of different languages into which the work has been translated
 - the number of different subsequent versions of the work (for example, films)
 - whether the work is taught in schools and universities
 - the 'richness' of the language used
 - the work's refusal to embody just one meaning.
- 2 Once you've made your own personal list then you will be able to use it to answer the subsidiary questions.

Activity 4

- 1 Like many 'classic' works of literature, this novel confronts the inevitability and universality of death: indeed, at the very beginning of this passage the reader finds out that 'Baby Suggs died', and attitudes towards death and coping with it are a theme throughout the passage and the novel. Another aspect that many 'classic' works of literature portray is extremes of emotion; in this passage, for instance, we can see this in the rhetorical question, 'Who would have thought that a little old baby could harbor so much rage?'
- 2 The dialogue in this passage is formally and conventionally punctuated and presented. However, it does reflect the particular speech patterns of its characters, which are sometimes represented in non-standard language, such as 'You forgetting how little it is' and 'Maybe she don't want to understand'. The rhythms of speech are also captured in the variation of sentence length and structure. For instance, we can hear the pauses and rhythms of the language in the line, 'Maybe. But if she'd only come, I could make it clear to her'.
- 3 Features that might be identified as 'classically literary' could include elements of 'magic realism' in the personification of 'The sideboard took a step forward but nothing else did'. The passage also includes language which might be conventionally described as being written in a literary register; for example, the description of the 'dawn-colored stone studded with star chips'. Here, the compound adjective

('dawn-colored') also resonates metaphorically as the reader is called upon to imagine the colours that might be suggested by the concept of 'dawn'.

- 4 There are several interesting literary features in this passage. One example is a simile: at the end of the passage, for instance, the writer describes 'the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil'. The comparison invites the reader to consider the stickiness of the blood, its difficulty to remove and, perhaps, its messiness. It also suggests the strangeness and awfulness of the experience by calling up a more common event to make the terrible nature of the soaking even more vivid in comparison.
- 5 Answers will vary from reader to reader.

Chapter 3.5

Activity 2

This question involves you making a highly personal choice which will be different for every reader. When you are considering different readings of the poem, you might want to consider social, cultural, or political events that you have had personal experiences of, and think about whether the poem's symbolism works in any of those contexts as well.

Activity 4

You might find it useful to answer this question using a table to compare the two extracts. The following are examples of the sorts of things you could point out.

Event	<i>Jane Eyre</i>	<i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i>
Grace Poole falls asleep after drinking too much.	The narrative describes quite literally how, 'Mrs Poole was fast asleep after the gin and water'.	The narrative perspective is much more personal as Bertha describes her view of Grace Poole: 'I lie watching the woman asleep with her head on her arms'.
'Bertha' takes the keys and lets herself out.	<i>Jane Eyre</i> presents 'Bertha' as insane, employing a simile to convey her volition and cunning: 'the mad lady, who was as cunning as a witch, would take the keys out of her pocket, let herself out of her chamber'.	<i>Wide Sargasso Sea</i> presents this in a much more matter-of-fact manner: 'I got up, took the keys and let myself out with a candle in my hand'.
'Bertha' appears on the roof during the fire.	The narrative describes how 'she was on the roof, where she was standing, waving her arms, above the battlements' continuing, with the use of 'waving' to suggest the madness of 'Bertha'.	The narrative describes how 'When I was out on the battlements it was cool'. The word 'cool' gives both a sense of a personal experience but also suggests a lack of hysteria (as presented in <i>Jane Eyre</i>).
Mr Rochester calls out to 'Bertha'.	The narrative describes how 'we heard him call "Bertha!" We saw him approach her'. Other than apparent concern, no other powerful emotion is suggested.	The personal narrative describes how 'the man who hated me was calling too'. It reminds the reader of the suffering of the narrator and the vindictiveness and cruelty of Mr Rochester.

Activity 5

- 1 You might find it useful to answer this question using a table to compare the two poems. The following are examples of the sorts of things you could point out. You will then be able to explain how you think the differences are interesting and which ‘version’ you prefer and why.

WH Auden	William Carlos Williams
Auden chooses the name of the art gallery (the ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’) as the title of his poem.	Williams chooses the title of the painting (‘Landscape with the Fall of Icarus’) as the title of his poem.
Auden starts with a meditation on suffering and the way it has been accurately presented by great painters in the past: ‘About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters’.	Williams starts by reframing the narrative of the particular painting: ‘According to Brueghel’.
Auden’s free verse includes, for example, this wordy, long line: ‘While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along’.	Williams’ language is always concise and precise. Throughout he uses very short lines and no punctuation: ‘the edge of the sea / concerned / with itself’.
Auden describes the fall of Icarus as ‘not an important failure’.	Williams uses the adverb ‘unsignificantly’ to describe the fall.

- 2 In responding to this poem, there are many elements you could focus on. The following ideas offer you a starting point which you will be able to take much further. You could comment, for instance, on:

- the ordinariness of the lines ‘a farmer was ploughing / his field’ and the contrast with the literary register of ‘the whole pageantry’
- the use of personification in the lines ‘the year was / awake tingling’
- the alliteration in the line ‘sweating in the sun’
- the one-word line ‘unsignificantly’
- the very plain and completely unadorned final two lines, ‘this was / Icarus drowning’.

Activity 6

In responding to this passage, there are many elements you could focus on. The following ideas offer you a starting point which you will be able to take much further:

- The opening line of the poem immediately references the painting and situates itself within the consciousness of the dragon, who tells the reader that the painting represents: ‘Not my best side, I’m afraid’. The reference is to the common practice in photography of using a model’s ‘best side’. The use of dragon’s perspective and the ironic throwaway (‘I’m afraid’) draws the reader’s attention to the Uccello painting’s choice about perspective and representation.
- The poem employs a comedic voice – for instance, in the rhetorical question in parenthesis, ‘(What, after all, are two feet / To a monster?)’ – which invites the reader to look again at the painting. In reobserving the representation of the dragon, our experience of the painting is transformed.
- The poem gives the maiden a stereotypical voice. Her language is simple, colloquial, unadorned and repetitive. She says, for instance: ‘I mean, I quite / Took to the dragon. It’s nice to be / Liked, if you know what I mean’. The modern nature of the voice again transforms our appreciation of the painting as we are encouraged to revisit the narrative through the prism of a twentieth or twenty-first century set of expectations.
- In the final section, relating the perspective of St George, the poem uses an ironically twentieth-century register. We find ourselves, for instance, being confronted with the rhetorical question: ‘Don’t / You want to carry out the roles / That sociology and myth have designed for you?’ Here, once again, our experience of the painting is transformed as we return to it with a recalibrated consciousness of our own culturally attuned reading of the narrative.

Chapter 3.6

Activity 1

This is a particularly personal activity, and hopefully you will have chosen your own, specific examples. However, an example of the kind of choice that you might make and the notes you might make in response could be:

'Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead'

I really like the way in which the poem registers the presence of the aeroplanes and notices them in the sky, but then makes them participants in the mourning described

in the poem. I think this is particularly powerfully achieved through the verb 'moaning'. It is an accurate way to describe the noise of an aeroplane (they often make a kind of low droning sound) but the specific choice of 'moaning' gives that sound a negative connotation, thus suggesting that the planes are aligned in grief with the mourners.

Activity 2

You should be able to identify at least four similes. The table below shows two examples of how you might organize your thoughts.

Simile	What is being described?	What is it being compared to?	The effects of the simile
'the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings'	The month of May and the first green leaves of spring are being described.	They are being compared to a butterfly flapping its wings.	This could suggest that May is delicate and beautiful, that it is full of life, but also perhaps that – just like the butterfly will have transformed from a caterpillar – this is a season of new growth, of change, of metamorphosis.
'Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk'	The butterfly's wings from the previous simile are being described.	They are being compared to threads of silk that have just been 'spun' or created.	This reinforces the sense of the beauty of the wings (silk is something used to make beautiful garments). It also highlights their softness and smoothness, but also their – perhaps surprising – strength: silk is a very strong material and the butterfly's wings, although delicate, facilitate flight and allow the butterfly to fly away.

Activity 3

You might find it useful to answer this question using a table to compare the two extracts. The following are examples of the sorts of things you could point out.

EM Forster	Zadie Smith	Narrative changes
'Beethoven chose to make all right in the end. He built the ramparts up.'	'According to the film, Mozart died before he finished the thing, right?'	The structural device used in both texts is remarkably similar. While, in Forster, the context is a concert hall and a performance of Beethoven's 'Fifth Symphony', in Smith, it's an outdoor performance of Mozart's 'Requiem'.
""Excuse me," said Margaret's young man, who had for some time been preparing a sentence, "but that lady has, quite inadvertently, taken my umbrella.""	""She's got my Discman, this girl, this lady – just up there – sorry, 'scuse me, man – yeah, can I just get by here – Hey! Hey sister!""	Smith 'updates' the narrative in the sense that the object that is mistakenly taken is not an 'umbrella', as in the Forster extract, but a 'Discman': a personal portable music player. We can also note the very different registers of speech when the loss of the object is expressed.
""It isn't of any consequence," said the young man, in truth a little uneasy about his umbrella.'	'He pulled the baseball cap down his forehead and checked in his pocket for his cell.'	The uneasiness of the male character in each text is presented. In Forster, the narrative presents his slight awkwardness and describes him as 'uneasy'. In Smith, the 'baseball cap' serves as a way of shielding his face.
'For this fool of a young man thought that she and Helen and Tibby had been playing the confidence trick on him, and that if he gave his address they would break into his rooms some midnight or other and steal his walking stick too.'	'The white people nearby looked about themselves anxiously. Was there going to be trouble?'	In the Forster narrative, we see the suspicions and uncertainties resulting from class difference. In the Smith narrative, class is still a concern, but she also explores a similar set of tensions and suspicions around racial difference.

Activity 4

You might want to research and look at some works of art which employ the motifs listed or tell the stories of the narratives referred to. For some of these examples, we've suggested a painting title which you could search for online, and you may be interested in pursuing further research yourself:

- nativities: *The Nativity with the Infant Saint John*
- martyrdoms: *Martyrdom of St. Ursula*
- mystic marriages: *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria*
- rival armies close in a deadlock of striped lances: *Battle of San Romano*
- an ascetic greybeard: *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness*
- riddled with crossbow bolts: *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*.

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