

Standards

& *Style*

Writing for English Studies

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About This Handbook

The English Department at SUNY New Paltz requires written work to comply with the guidelines established by The Modern Language Association (MLA), a professional association of language and literature teachers. These guidelines are set out in that organization's *MLA Handbook* (7th edition, 2009). As a basic principle, you should assume that your teachers expect you to follow all MLA guidelines, though some may have certain preferences that differ from MLA style.

Our handbook refers to the *MLA Handbook* at many points, but it also provides additional examples, discussion, and insights. We strongly suggest that you use the two handbooks together, perhaps beginning with material in *Standards & Style* and referring to the *MLA Handbook* for additional explanations, detailed examples, and special cases. We on the faculty of the English Department realize that the MLA system can be daunting when one first begins to use it; *Standards & Style* should help you get acquainted with the basic principles and forms of the MLA system. Also, if you own a copy of the 7th edition of the *MLA Handbook*, be sure to use the activation code on the book's back cover to access the variety of helpful examples of MLA format provided at www.mlahandbook.org.

But this handbook is also a good deal more: it contains advice and guidance gathered from the faculty of the English Department, ideas which are designed to help you think through the expectations and techniques of writing college-level literary analysis. Ultimately, we want you to become a stronger, more self-conscious writer. We recommend that you read this entire document, take careful notes, think hard about what you are reading, and keep it with you during your career as a student of the English Department.

notes

1.

Writing for English Studies: An Overview of “Academic Discourse”

Most people believe that good writing is pretty easy to recognize, especially when contrasted with bad writing. However, good writing is actually surprisingly difficult to define: a news story in a daily paper must do things that an interview in a weekly business magazine does not; a free verse poem is hardly the same as a legal contract; a personal letter to your best friend is not the same thing as a cover letter to a prospective employer, and so on. And yet most of us realize that each of these might well be a shining example of excellent written expression. Indeed, if we are to talk about good writing, we need to be attentive to the basic fact that not all writing is intended to do the same thing: *all writing is not the same*. Instead, in order to judge the quality or success of a particular example of writing, we need to know whether a writer is trying to argue a controversial point, summarize historical events, entertain a mass audience, amuse a few friends, defend a decision, or analyze a work of literature.

Good writing is expression that succeeds for a particular **audience**, within a particular set of **circumstances, purposes, expectations, and conventions**.

Audience, circumstances, purposes, expectations, and conventions: it might be obvious that the “rules” of a course in English literature differ in all these areas from those that govern, say, the writing of lab reports, news stories, legal briefs, or humorous short stories. But even understanding these crucial points may not guarantee that we can easily define what actually makes good writing *good* within the discipline of English studies. However, with experience comes increased understanding of and skill in the nuances of good writing. This section is designed to give you some basic insights into the distinctive features of writing for the discipline of English studies.

In recent years, writers and editors within our discipline of English studies have significantly broadened the boundaries that used to govern the field. Word choices and formulas that used to be essentially forbidden are now widely practiced, and the field has seen a

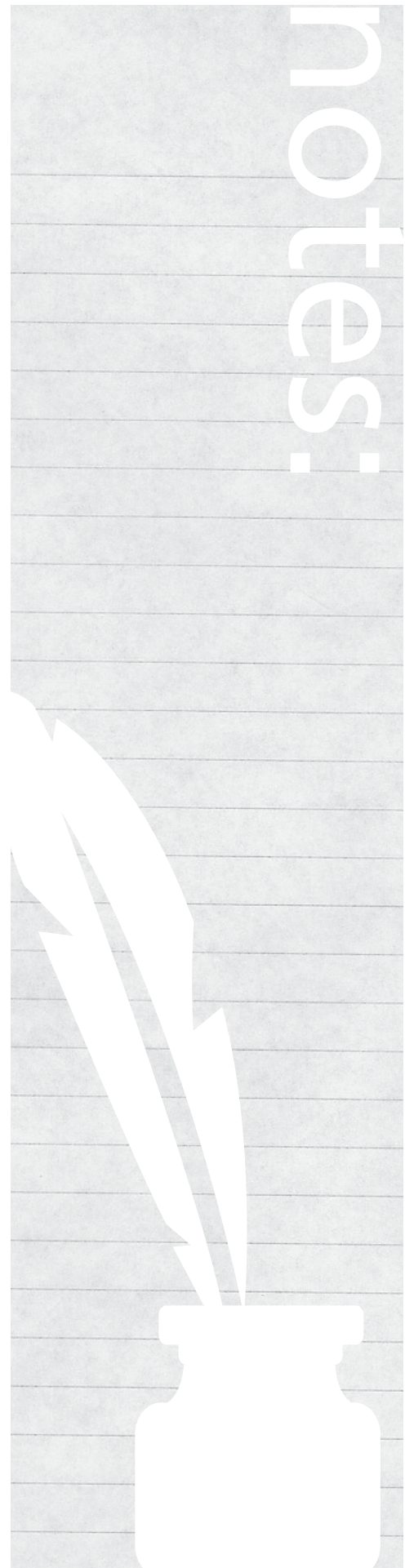
general process of self-reflection concerning its own discursive practices, habits, and conventions. Despite these changes, some expectations remain generally constant across the field.

What is Literary Analysis?

Literary analysis is fundamentally argumentative writing. In its best forms, it makes a claim—often called a thesis—about a text or texts that is not so obvious as to be ordinary or uninteresting, nor so vague as to be impossible to argue in a convincing way. In order to support such a claim, you must do two major things: assert a well-reasoned opinion or observation that will excite interest or debate, and gather and present evidence that substantiates what you are arguing. Though literary analysis is like many other forms of writing, it tends to have one particular emphasis that you should always consider: your professors expect you to engage with the language and stylistics of the material you discuss. What choices does the author make at the level of words, sentences, or structures? What makes this particular work different from other kinds of writing (journalism, political discourse, a sermon, a piece of advertising, etc.)? Sometimes you will be asked to place a work in an intellectual or historical tradition; sometimes you will be asked to focus more narrowly upon the play of images or sounds. But whatever the particulars of any given assignment, close attention to language will always be welcome: word choices in a poem, the slang that a character in a novel or play uses, the way an essayist uses opposing images, and so on.

What is a Good Thesis?

A vague thesis is very often the root of all essay-writing evils, as it were. Everything in an essay rises or falls, succeeds or fails, according to the quality of the thesis. As simple as this basic rule is, a lot of essays that really have little or nothing to say nonetheless get handed in. So what is the rule? Offer a thesis that is sufficiently controversial as to need proof and argument, and be clear and concrete when you announce your purpose. A good thesis statement is something that goes beyond a statement based upon class discussion, and well beyond



a statement based upon plot details alone. The best thesis statements take risks, stir up some controversy, and go beyond the obvious.



Here are some examples of bad thesis statements:

Jane Austen's tone is a very complex question.

King Lear is a great play and a great work of art.

The protagonists Sir Gawain and Lanval can be compared and contrasted.



And here are some ways that each example could be improved:

How should we interpret Jane Austen's tone? This is a very complex question, but we can understand a great deal about her intentions by looking closely at her ironic presentation of young, unmarried women.

Though literary critics usually agree that *King Lear* is a great play and a great work of art, it is also a great statement of moral philosophy.

The protagonists Sir Gawain and Lanval can be compared and contrasted because of the quests they undertake and the temptations they face; however, in the final analysis, Gawain emerges as the more human and life-like character because the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* invites readers to experience Gawain's humiliation along with him.

Of particular importance to new college students is that staple of high school instruction: the five-paragraph essay, a form that may have its usefulness at some early stage of learning to write, but which usually makes for absolutely predictable, dull essays at the college level. In the five-paragraph essay everything gets jammed

into three main body paragraphs or sections, with typically dull, formulaic introductions and conclusions at either end. Mature writers avoid these formulas and figure out other ways to structure their thinking, but you should also be aware that “five-paragraph essay thinking” can lead to rather mindless thesis statements. Avoid theses such as these that deal in broad, generic categories that could apply to almost any literary question, or that mechanically repeat three categories:

The protagonists Sir Gawain and Lanval can be compared and contrasted in terms of character, mood, and theme.

The protagonists Sir Gawain and Lanval can be compared and contrasted because the authors of these works use mood, tone, and character very effectively.

The Importance of Evidence

Your professors also want to see that you can present and discuss evidence as part of your argument in an essay. Though sometimes you will consult outside (or “secondary”) sources, most of the time your papers will involve only the presentation and careful discussion of the literary work or works you are writing about. As a very basic principle, therefore, be sure that your analysis adequately accounts for the particular features of the work or works you are analyzing. The best way to “stick to the text” is to make sure that your essay refers concretely and specifically to the work or works under discussion. Sometimes you will focus your attention on nuances as minute as the sound of syllables or the absence of a word a reader might expect, but even very minute details should show a relation to the thesis of the paper and to the larger thematic meanings of the work or works you are discussing. Quote amply but with purpose, and be sure to spend enough time discussing the passage so that your reader sees what is important, relevant, significant, or distinctive about the words you quote. Try to anticipate what your readers will need to know to carry them from point to point toward a conclusion, and provide evidence and discussion accordingly. See Section 4 for specific advice on how to integrate your quotations into your own analysis.





Plot Summary is Not the Same as Analysis!

Many essays, even at the college level, go wrong because their authors devote far too much space to the retelling of plot events that contribute little to the thesis of the paper. Instructors frown upon plot summary for its own sake because it suggests that a writer is laboring under a vague—and possibly even absent—thesis, and because merely retelling the events of a narrative is not as intellectually challenging as making meaning out of those events. Writers who have a clear thesis usually can discern what constitutes relevant evidence that is useful in advancing a particular argument and what is merely incidental. In other words, if you have a clear thesis, it will be easier for you to decide what evidence needs to be in your essay and how you need to discuss it. Often a very brief introductory statement early in the paper that includes such details as the author's name, the title, and a very short synopsis of the work in question proves helpful to your reader, but once you are into your argument, keep plot summary to the bare minimum needed to support your analysis.

How Do I Organize My Ideas?

Often, your unfolding argument will demand an organizational scheme that does not rely on the order of plot events in the work you are discussing. Follow your instincts and good sense and try to avoid creating a running commentary on or paraphrase of major plot events. Can you instead structure an argument based on key facets of your thesis rather than key events in the plot of the work you are discussing? As you plan your writing, think carefully about what helps you make your case (it is usually the same points in the text that made you want to make the argument in the first place), and present that evidence as a logical and persuasive unfolding of your thesis. And as we have said above, be sure to give enough space to a careful discussion of what your evidence means to your argument: linger over key images, word choices, juxtapositions, and the like. Make your evidence **mean** something.

Conclusion or Summary?

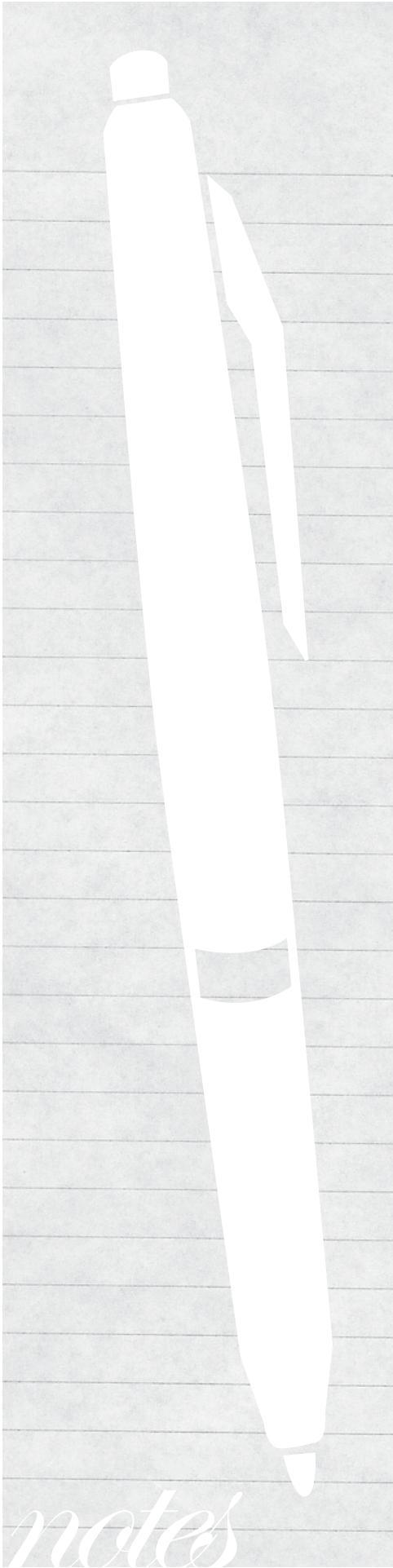
Just as analysis and plot summary are different critical undertakings, a conclusion and a summary are different undertakings. A summary is a recapitulation of points made earlier in a discussion, while a conclusion offers closure—a move toward finality and a decision on your part. While some discursive traditions (lab reports, field research findings, etc.) do favor summaries over conclusions, essays written within English studies should do more than merely repeat what has already been stated. The best conclusions compress the argument into a concentrated form, state clearly what the essay has proven, and may even suggest implications that grow out of the argument you have just made. If you find yourself writing a conclusion that is essentially what you wrote in your introduction, think harder about where your argument has carried you and what it means in terms of the larger questions your topic provokes. Don't write a mirror-image of your introduction. Such re-statements often leave a reader feeling that the paper really did not go anywhere except back to its starting point.

Here are a few general suggestions for writing good conclusions. First, be sure that the conclusion is a version of the thesis, but ideally a version that goes beyond the mere statement or restatement of what you said early in the paper. The ending of the paper, your answer, should be in dialogue with the question you asked in the beginning, but it should have the last word, as it were. Second, whenever possible, try to offer your reader something other than a summary of points, some statement or statements that take us beyond what has been argued and encourage us to see or wonder about new dimensions of your discussion. We should feel, paradoxically, both satisfied and intrigued: a conclusion, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot, needs to end with a bang and not a whimper.

Stylistic Considerations in English Studies

There are many nuances to good style within the discipline of English Studies, and many stylistic points have changed—or have been challenged by writers—in recent years. It is well worth your time to become familiar with the following topics.





The use of first- and second-person forms (*I, me, my and you, your, yours*) and the use of contractions (*would've, it's, what's*) were once considered unacceptable by the conventions of English studies. These expectations have changed so radically in recent years that you should discuss first- and second-person forms with your instructor to see whether he or she has expectations, insights, or suggestions concerning their use. While there may be fewer "rules" governing this topic, writers still face important questions about the effects and implications of their word choices.

By the conventions of our discipline, use the present verb tense to discuss the events that occur in a literary work: "Jay Gatsby **yearns** for the past" or "The Wife of Bath then **goes on to speak** of her fifth husband." Reserve past tenses for reference to historical events ("Chaucer **was** a notable court poet" or "The War of 1812 **proved** to be a turning point in American letters") and for making distinctions in time within the chronology of a work of literature ("Though the Wife of Bath **had** five husbands, she now **claims** to have loved only her last one").

In general, try to avoid over-using passive verbs and passive constructions. The passive voice refers to a legitimate grammatical construction in which the subject is acted upon by a named or unnamed agent, instead of doing the action. The verb is constructed with the aid of the auxiliary *to be* (*is, are, was, were*), and the agent doing the acting is either left unnamed or indicated by a phrase beginning with *by*. For example:

Macbeth is tempted.

Macbeth is tempted by the Weird Sisters.

The passive voice tends to rob sentences of energy and specificity. In the examples above, we probably would benefit from knowing more about who does what to whom. So how about this for a revision? By adding only ten words, suddenly the sentence says something important:

The Weird Sisters tempt Macbeth, driving him to the moral dilemma that will eventually seal his fate.

Some writers also hide behind vague passive constructions or excessive use of forms of the verb *to be*:

It could be argued that Macbeth is tempted by the Weird Sisters.

Temptation is a serious problem for Macbeth.

The excessive use of passive forms almost always weakens a paper. Often a reader gets the impression that the writer wants to disappear behind the protective barrier of ambiguous language. Stock phrases such as “it can be said” or “it is often thought” rob you, as the writer of the paper, of the opportunity to do what you are supposed to do in an essay: assert yourself and advance an argument that you believe to be true. In some cases, of course, a passive verb or construction may be the best way to convey your ideas. Ultimately, your job as a writer is to be self-conscious about the verb forms you choose and know why you are making the choices you make.

Good writing for English studies tends to be fluid, rather than curt and formulaic. Avoid repeating the same sentence structures, and especially short, declarative sentences. Most professors consider short, choppy, awkwardly linked sentences to be a sign of simple thought processes. One way to spot trouble is to read your work aloud: does it sound fluid? Do your ideas lead gracefully into one another? Do your word choices and sentence structures convey the relationships between ideas that drive your paper from the introduction to the conclusion? If not, think about ways to link ideas using subordinate structures (phrases and clauses that “depend” upon others for their meaning: “*x happens because of y*” or “*x reveals, however indirectly, that y really means z*”) or employing punctuation that suggests continuity or levels of meaning (the colon, the semicolon, the emphatic dash, the parenthetical aside). Consider these two examples:

Huck Finn then realizes that he is a bad person. He contemplates what his disobedience means. He also seems to question the moral worth of racist laws. These laws are only human constructs, but they are powerful forces to the young boy.



Notes



As Huck Finn contemplates his act of disobedience, weighing the powerful force of racist laws in relation to his transgression, he realizes that he is bad person. However, for us as readers this young boy's realization only points out how inferior the human construct of law is to Huck's (and our) innate sense of morality.

How Do I Tie My Analysis Together?

Just as writers in our discipline avoid short, disconnected sentences, they also avoid short, disconnected paragraphs. If you find yourself writing several short paragraphs in a row, try to discover the relationships that might tie the ideas in these paragraphs together, and adjust your paragraphing accordingly. Just as you try to help your reader by strategically grouping related ideas within a single paragraph, so too you should clearly indicate where one major idea leads into a new one by starting a new paragraph. Help the reader by including transitional words or phrases that bridge from idea to idea (for example, "*Just as x, so too y ...*" or "*In the same way that x, y also ...*"). Pay particular attention to the signals you give your reader that your argument is changing directions or moving to a new point.

Here are some examples of paragraph transitions that should be helpful to readers. Note that here the writers are trying to help readers by introducing a new paragraph in terms of the ideas of the previous one (words in boldface are specifically intended to put ideas in relationship to each other):

Just as Melville imagined evil on the high seas, his literary mentor Nathaniel Hawthorne saw evil in the hearts of everyday New England Puritans.

Honor is the highest good for Hotspur, **but** Falstaff presents us with a **different**, more subversive ethical code.

Even though Dickens's **novels** profess love of the common people, the **author himself** did not always love them in his heart of hearts.

And What About “Audience”?

The points mentioned above bring us to one of the more complex questions within the larger question of writing for English studies: how is my analytical voice supposed to “sound”? How formal or informal am I supposed to be? For whom am I actually writing? (Or, put another, less formal way, *who am I actually writing for?*) What is my relationship to my reader or readers? These are all questions that you need to ponder seriously as you progress through your college education. Each assignment presents a different set of circumstances, a new audience, and a fresh purpose, and you need ultimately to develop flexibility in discerning what is called for as you approach a new challenge. Your instructors can help a great deal: make a point to ask for their advice and speak with them about their expectations. For most assignments, you will probably be told that the voice in the paper should be a reasonably formal, careful version of your own natural voice, not a stilted or artificial attempt at someone else’s. Finding your voice is both one of the most difficult and most rewarding aspects of learning to write for the discipline of English studies.

Titles

A title can and should say a lot about the essay that is to follow. Ask yourself whether your title would make *you* want to read on (you may be surprised at what you see in your own past papers). The worst title is no title at all; the second worst is a dull repetition of the assignment or of the general topic that the paper addresses. Try to do two things in a title: give some appropriate indication of or glimpse into what is to follow in the paper, and pique the reader’s interest.

Some examples of dull titles:

Paper 1

Essay on Chaucer

Shakespeare and Tragedy





Some examples of provocative titles:

The Realm of Utopia: Thomas More's
Imperfect Perfect Place

Thomas More's Utopia and the Search for
Social Justice

"Myn Entente": The Wife of Bath's Feminine
Wiles

The Terrible Truth of Hamlet's Philosophy
of Life

Which papers would *you* want to read?

Do not put your title in a box or use exotic fonts, italics, or underlining; do not add pictures, images, etc. If, however, you include in your title the title of the work you are writing about, or if you include a quotation from that work, then punctuate accordingly.

Speaking of titles: improperly punctuated titles send a terrible first signal to a reader. Not knowing what should be italicized and what put in quotation marks can make a good writer appear careless. The basic MLA rule states that long works such as novels, epic poems, full-length plays and the like are italicized when they are referenced in an essay, including in the title of an essay; short works such as short stories, lyric poems, one-act plays and the like are placed within quotation marks. So, it's *Beowulf*, *King Lear*, *The Awakening*, and *The Canterbury Tales*, but "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "The Pardoner's Tale," and "A Clean Well-Lighted Place." (See the *MLA Handbook* Section 3.6 for more details.)

Formatting and Presenting Your Paper

As stated above, as a basic principle, the English Department at SUNY New Paltz requires written work to comply with the guidelines established by The Modern Language Association (MLA) in the *MLA Handbook* (7th edition, 2009). Your instructors expect you to follow the formatting guidelines of the MLA, but may have individual preferences on minor details.

The basic layout of an English paper is explained in Chapter 4 and conveniently illustrated in the Appendix of *Standards & Style*. If you own a copy of the 7th edition of the *MLA Handbook*, you can also check out sample papers on www.mlahandbook.org.

Note in particular these details:

- Use just one standard 12-point font and avoid exotic, decorative fonts or purely decorative borders, pictures, or images.
- Use black ink only.
- Follow MLA margins and page numbering rules.
- Be sure that you provide the necessary identifying information (name, professor, class, date), per MLA guidelines.
- Double-space the entire text, including inset quotations.
- Staple or paper clip your paper.
- Do not combine Works Cited and Works Consulted pages (see *MLA Handbook* Section 5.3).
- Do not use covers or folders.

Take pride in the appearance and the substance of your written work:

- Start thinking and drafting well before the paper is due, taking time to consider the best organization of your ideas and the best body of evidence to support your ideas.
- Pay especially close attention to the three classic trouble areas: the introduction, the thesis, and the conclusion.

2.



- Be sure that your paper is correctly formatted and neatly presented—especially in the details of margins, quotation forms, titles, identifying information, and the like.
- Proofread and spell-check carefully. Remember that spell-checking does not find errors in grammar, punctuation, and usage.

3.

Sources, Fair Use, and Plagiarism

“Sources” (sometimes called “secondary materials” or “secondary sources”) are reference works (such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and the like), biographies, reviews, critical essays, and books related to the study of literature. Such materials are often a very valuable resource to students of English studies, but they may not be appropriate at every level: in some courses, your professors might prefer that you avoid such sources, while in others, secondary materials may be required. Your instructor will make it clear what the expectations for a particular assignment are. If you are not sure, ask for clarification or consult the *MLA Handbook* Chapter 2. In addition, The Sojourner Truth Library maintains an excellent web page devoted to questions of plagiarism, fair use, and reliability of sources:

Web

<http://library.newpaltz.edu/assistance/plag.html>

If you do make use of sources, you **must** acknowledge your use correctly and honestly. Fortunately, you as a student can make use of sources freely, whether they appear in print form, in databases available through the campus library, or on the Internet. The *MLA Handbook* gives you a good system for doing so. All you need to do is acknowledge what you have used, where it appears in your own thinking, and where it comes from—and to do so in the prescribed forms.

Plagiarism is what happens when you do not. It is a form of cheating and theft: the unacknowledged use of others’ ideas, words, or expressions which are presented as one’s own—whether done intentionally or inadvertently. The recent proliferation of secondary materials,

especially those available online, has made the problem of plagiarism more acute than ever, and so it is important that you understand the difference between proper and improper uses of sources. The College's policy concerning plagiarism, quoted from the *Advising Handbook*, is as follows:

Plagiarism is the representation, intentional or unintentional, of someone else's words or ideas as one's own. Since words in print are the property of an author or publisher, plagiarizing is a form of larceny punishable by fine. When using another person's words in a paper, students must place them within quotation marks or clearly set them off in the text and give them appropriate footnoting. When students use only the ideas and change the words, they must clearly identify the source of the ideas. Plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, therefore, is a violation of the property of the author plagiarized and of the implied assurance by the students when they hand in work that the work is their own. If students have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, it is their responsibility to clarify the matter by conferring with the instructor. Faculty members must report in writing cases of cheating, plagiarism or forgery to their department chair and their academic dean.

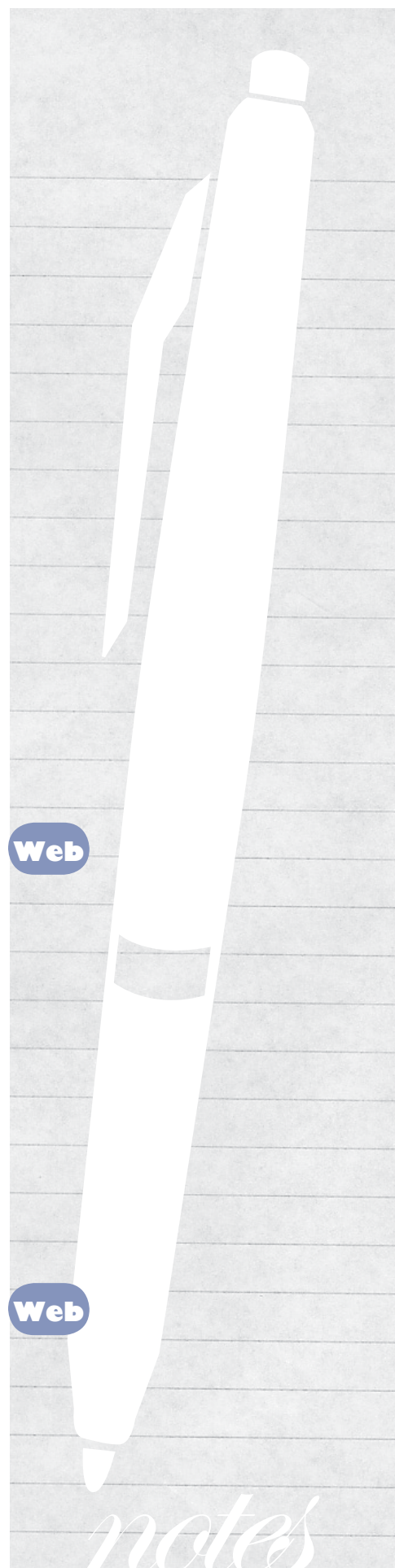
www.newpaltz.edu/advising/policies_integrity.html

In order to avoid plagiarism, keep these tips in mind:

- Keep scrupulous notes while conducting your research, making sure that you credit your sources as you read and gather information.
- When in doubt, credit the source.
- Be discriminating in your choice of sources, but especially of materials on the Internet at large, being sure to consider the authority of what you find.

Again, see the resources online at The Sojourner Truth Library:

<http://library.newpaltz.edu/assistance/plag.html>



4.

Quoting Successfully

As discussed in Section 1, your presentation of evidence forms an essential part of literary argument, whether in the form of specific reference to the work(s) under analysis, through paraphrase, or by direct quotation. Although each form has its value, direct quotation is undoubtedly the most concrete and convincing form of evidence that you as a writer can offer to your readers. It is also, however, the technique that requires the most patience and practice to get right. As a writer of literary analysis, you should endeavor to understand the logic and techniques of successful quoting and to master the correct forms in your analytic writing.

Four basic rules of thumb should guide your thinking about quoting:

- 1) Quote with **purpose**: think carefully about why, where, and when you quote.
- 2) Quote with **moderation**: an essay is not a collection of quoted passages, but an argument that uses quoted evidence. Quote only what you discuss.
- 3) **Integrate** your quotations: make them fit into your own argument and your own writing.
- 4) **Discuss** your quotations fully: make them part of your argument, linger over them, explain them in terms of your larger argument. Remember that they do not explain themselves!

As you prepare your quoted evidence, begin by asking how many lines you intend to quote:

Use the integrated form for

- Up to three lines of verse or verse drama
- Up to four lines of prose

Use the inset (block) form for

- Four or more lines of verse or verse drama
- Five or more lines of prose

Follow your quotations with **page number or numbers** for prose, **line numbers** for verse, and **act, scene, and line number or numbers** for verse drama whenever possible. These references must correspond to works that you cite in your Works Cited page (see below).

The Basic Integrated Quotation

The basic integrated quotation functions as a part of your own sentence, with only the words of the quoted passage between quotation marks, reproduced exactly as they appear in the original. The quotation and your own words should read smoothly as a complete, logical sentence (you can test yourself: does it read correctly if you ignore the quotation marks?). Consider these examples:

Gilman describes the breakfast as “not profuse, but sufficient in amount and excellent in quality” (24).

Gilman describes the men’s meal: “The breakfast was not profuse, but sufficient in amount and excellent in quality” (24).

Gilman describes the breakfast as “not profuse” even though it is “sufficient in amount and excellent in quality” (24).

You may use this technique for prose passages that equal **no more than four lines** in your paper. Longer quotations must be inset (see below).

Students just learning to quote successfully sometimes get tangled in awkward syntax or inadvertently write fragments or run-on sentences because they do not integrate their own words and the words of the quotation smoothly. Or they simply insert the quotation, as in this unsuccessful example:

At this point Gilman offers the reader some symbolism. “The breakfast was not profuse, but sufficient in amount and excellent in quality” (24). The men are growing used to the plenty and the moderation of this society.

As you can see, this quotation seems quite disconnected from the analytical points the writer is making here because there is no clear connection or linking between the breakfast and the symbolic value that the writer wishes to argue is present in the scene. The writer is not working with the quotation in a way that suggests he or she really has understood the original very well, or at least has not worked to make the quotation’s meaning clear to the reader. The passage is simply “dropped” or “dumped” into the discussion. It just seems to “float.”

You can avoid such problems by adjusting your own wording so as to frame or introduce the quotation:

Gilman emphasizes that the men’s breakfast is “not profuse.” Their food becomes, in this example, a symbol of this society’s moderate habits. At the same time, however, the meal draws our attention to this world’s natural plenty because their breakfast is also “sufficient in amount and excellent in quality” (24).

The Basic Inset (or Block) Quotation

Use the inset quotation format for **prose passages of five or more lines** in your paper and for **verse and verse drama of four lines or more**. After introducing your quotation, either with your own carefully phrased syntax or with a colon, indent (or tab) one inch (or ten spaces) from the left margin and run your lines out to the right margin, just as you would with a line of your own text. Note that in inset quotations the final punctuation comes just **before** the page number(s) and that quotation marks are **not** used unless you are quoting dialogue:

In Chapter 3, Charlotte Perkins Gilman seems to suggest that the men's meal is not only a new experience but also a symbolic form of consciousness-raising:

The breakfast was not profuse, but sufficient in amount and excellent in quality. We were all too good travelers to object to novelty, and this repast with its new but delicious fruit, its dish of large rich-flavored nuts, and its highly satisfactory little cakes was most agreeable. There was some water to drink, and a hot beverage of a most pleasing quality, some preparation like cocoa. (24)

See the *MLA Handbook* Section 3.7 for more details on inset-style quoting.

Additions, Deletions, and Changes

If you need to change or add something (usually a pronoun or other word needed for clarity), use square brackets [] to indicate your change, as in these changes from *me* in the original to *him* in the quotation:

Milton then describes a "celestial patroness" who comes to him in his sleep "And dictates to [him] slumb'ring, or inspires / Easy [his] unpremeditated verse" (9.21, 23-24).

If you take out something—a word, phrase, or even a sentence or more—indicate the omission by using ellipses:

Joyce then describes Gabriel waiting "outside the drawing-room door . . . listening to the skirts that swept against it and to the shuffling of feet" (24).

If the omitted section comes at the end of a sentence, add the final punctuation to the the very end of the sentence or to the three periods:

Joyce then describes Gabriel waiting "outside the drawing-room door . . . listening to the skirts . . ." (24).

On page 24, the author then describes Gabriel waiting “outside the drawing-room door . . . listening to the skirts that swept against it. . . .”

See the *MLA Handbook* Sections 3.7.5-7 for more details on how to alter sources correctly.

Special Rules for Quoting Poetry

Poetry is treated in much the same way as prose, but all **line breaks must be preserved** in your quotations. Forgetting this important rule can make you seem insensitive to the patterned language of poetry.

Thus, in a basic integrated-style quotation you must reproduce the format of the original by signaling to your reader where the lines break:

In the opening lines of the devotional poem “Easter,” George Herbert instructs his heart to acknowledge God and “Sing his praise / Without delays” (1-2).

According to MLA rules, you may quote **one, two, or three lines** of verse in this way, being sure to place a slash mark (/) between lines. Longer quotations must be inset:

The opening of Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 87” introduces an important legal metaphor that continues for the first twelve lines of the poem:

Farewell—thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know’st thy estimate.
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
My bonds in thee are all determinate. (1-4)

Special Rules for Quoting Drama

Drama presents some special challenges, especially when you are dealing with verse drama (see the *MLA Handbook* Section 3.7.3. and 3.7.4 for more details). Here are three different quotations from Shakespeare:

Integrated Quotations

Hamlet is sure that “The time is out of joint” and he laments the “cursed spite / That ever [he] was born to set it right” because at this point in the play he still has no concrete motive to avenge his father’s suspicious death (1.5.215-16).

Note here that line breaks are indicated, that the pronoun change is enclosed within square brackets, and that the act, scene, and line numbers follow the quotation. A period comes at the end of the sentence, not the end of the quotation.

Dialogue

When your quotation contains two or more characters speaking, you must follow this format so that your reader can understand who is speaking to whom. Dialogue must always be **inset** and the characters' names are given in ALL CAPS. Indent the first line of a character's speech one inch from the left margin and subsequent lines of that character's speech an additional quarter inch. Also, make sure that you adequately introduce the quotation:

The powers and the duties of a monarch are always central to this play. For example, King Henry V is eloquent but also rather sly concerning a king's responsibility to his people:

WILLIAMS. But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in a battle shall join together at the latter day and cry all, 'We died at such a place'—some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind them, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. . . .

KING. So, if a son that is by his father sent about merchandise do sinfully miscarry upon the sea, the imputation of his wickedness, by your rule, should be imposed upon his father, that sent him. . . . But this is not so. The King is not bound to answer the particular endings of his soldiers, the father of his son, nor the master of his servant. . . .

(4.1.128-47)

These principles apply to quoted dialogue in both prose and verse drama.

Inset Quotations

When quoting four or more lines from verse drama, you must use the inset style. Make sure that your introductory sentence or sentences make it clear who is speaking and what the quotation means:

Perhaps ironically, perhaps in seriousness, the "tamed" Kate proclaims before the assembled guests that

A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty,
And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty
Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it.

(5.2.146-49)

When quoting from drama, be sure to indicate the speaker(s), either within the quotation or within your own introductory phrase or sentence. If the speakers' names are included in a block quotation, put them in ALL CAPS. If you identify a single speaker in your own words, do not repeat the name in the quotation itself. (See more in the *MLA Handbook* Section 3.7.4.)

Tips For Successful Quoting:

- ✓ Note where the punctuation goes relative to quotation marks and parentheses. Commas and periods go **inside quotation marks**; semicolons and colons go **outside quotation marks**.
- ✓ Final punctuation is placed **after parentheses** in integrated quotations. In inset quotations it is placed **before parentheses**. See the different examples.
- ✓ Be sure that everything you quote from is included in your Works Cited page, and that your reader will know how to locate the work from which you quote.
- ✓ If you have line numbers for verse and verse drama, always use them instead of page numbers. Be sure to respect all line breaks in verse and verse drama (see the *MLA Handbook* Section 6.4.8).
- ✓ Do not use quotation marks for inset-style quotations. Do use them for integrated-style quotations.
- ✓ Do not change anything, including the smallest details of punctuation or spelling without indicating your intervention (for example, *moved* in the example from *The Taming of the Shrew* should not be transformed into *mov'd*). The one exception to this rule is that you should eliminate all punctuation in the original text at the end of a quotation, except for the question mark and the exclamation mark (see the *MLA Handbook* Section 3.7.7).
- ✓ Don't "stick in" evidence as decoration or an afterthought. Evidence should be integral to your argument, because ideally what you want to say came from the text. There is a certain logic to the proposition that "if it's not in the text, you should not be arguing it." Build your arguments, from the brainstorming and outlining stages, upon textual evidence.
- ✓ Refer to the text or quote from it frequently, but don't quote more than your argument needs: excessively long quotations look like padding, and they usually are! If it's better to paraphrase or merely refer to a section, do that instead. Quote selectively and purposefully: what does the reader really need from you?
- ✓ Using the integrated style of quotation tends to suggest to readers that you have a firm command of writing technique. It's not always easy to integrate your words with another author's, but those who can do it usually appear sophisticated in their thinking. Be careful, however, not to quote so often that you lose track of or minimize your own analysis.

- ✓ Always introduce inset quotations with either a colon or with words that adequately introduce the quotation in relation to your argument. Always introduce your integrated quotations into the sentence in which they appear. If you feel a disjunction between your writing and your quotation, fix one or the other. It's usually easier to fix your syntax than to make deep changes to the passage you are quoting (i.e., inserting lots of square brackets and ellipses). Remember, **flow** is important.
- ✓ Be careful of quotations at the end of a paragraph or at the end of a paper. While these can sometimes work well, you also run the risk of "dropping" or "dumping" a quotation that you never explain. Unless you are sure that a quotation says what you mean better than you yourself can, or that it will deliver an unmistakable "punch" to finish off an idea, it's better to quote and then discuss the passage in your own language. Don't expect quotations to do the work of analysis by themselves.
- ✓ Use the *MLA Handbook*. This digest is a very reduced summary of a very detailed system. See Sections 3.7, 5, and 6 in particular.

Notes:

The MLA-Style Works Cited Page

Your essay should end with a Works Cited page containing bibliographic information for all texts you have referred to, paraphrased, or quoted from. Arrange the entries alphabetically by the author's last name (or by title if the author is unknown). Every parenthetical citation in the body of the essay should correspond with a text listed on the Works Cited page. It may be that you will have no more than one entry—namely, the literary work itself—if you have not drawn upon any secondary sources, but it is important to let your audience know what edition of the literary work you have used. The Works Cited page should list only those texts you have actually cited in your essay and not all the materials you may have read in the process of researching the essay (though some instructors will require a separate Works Consulted page for the latter group of texts).

There are three main categories of bibliographic information:

- 1) **the author of the work,**
- 2) **the title of the work, and**
- 3) **publication information, including medium (usually "Print" or "Web").**

There are various kinds of publication information, depending upon the nature of the work (e.g., book, article, interview, electronic document, video recording), but in general the publication information includes the publisher, the place of publication, the date of publication, and page numbers for the work cited, if it is part of a larger work. Note that when page numbers appear in a Works Cited entry, they should be **inclusive**; that is, they should indicate all the pages in the work and not just the pages you have cited in your essay.

In our discipline, we organize and format bibliographic information according to the guidelines laid out in Chapter 5 of the *MLA Handbook*. There you will find discussion of every possible form you might need. Samples of the most common cases are given here, and if you own the 7th edition of the *MLA Handbook*, you can use the included activation code to access a variety of helpful examples of papers and citations employing this format at www.mlahandbook.org.

5.

Print Sources

The basic entry for a book by a single author:

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980. Print.

(For further discussion and additional examples, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.5.2.)

Two or more works by the same author:

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Learning to Curse*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.

---. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980. Print.

The basic entry for an anthology or collection with one or more editors:

Finch, Robert and John Elder, eds. *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. New York: Norton, 1990. Print.

(Here "eds" means "editors." For further discussion and additional examples, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.5.3.)

The basic entry for a translation:

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953. Print.

(For further discussion and additional examples, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.5.11.)

The basic entry for an edition:

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry D. Benson et al. 3rd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987. Print.

(Here "Ed" means "edited by" and "ed" means "edition." The Latin phrase "et al" means "and others." For further discussion and additional examples, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.5.10 and 5.5.13.)

The basic entry for a work in an anthology or collection:

Lanyer, Aemilia. "The Description of Cooke-ham." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. M. H. Abrams, et al. 7th ed. Vol. 1. New York: Norton, 2000. 1287-92. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. M. H. Abrams, et al. 7th ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 2000. 2153-2214. Print.

(In the first example, the words in the quotation marks are the title of the short anthologized work, while the words in italics are the title of the anthology. But in the second example, the anthologized work itself, *A Room of One's Own*, is a long work requiring italics. Note that it is important to give inclusive page numbers for works quoted from anthologies, as you see in these examples ("1287-92" and "2153-2214"). For further discussion and additional examples, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.5.6 and 5.5.14.)

You may also have occasion to refer to the editorial apparatus (e.g., introductions) in an anthology. The proper format for such an entry is as follows:

Maus, Katharine Eisaman. Introduction. *The Tragedy of King Richard II*. By William Shakespeare. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997. 943-50. Print.

"Edmund Spenser." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. M. H. Abrams, et al. 7th ed. Vol. 1. New York: Norton, 2000. 614-16. Print.

(Here "Edmund Spenser" is not the author but the title of the anonymous introduction to the selection of Edmund Spenser's works. Authored introductions combine the logic of the *MLA Handbook* sections 5.5.6 and 5.5.8.)

The basic entry for an article in a scholarly journal:

Piper, Andrew. "Rethinking the Print Object: Goethe and the Book of Everything." *PMLA* 121.1 (2006): 124-38. Print.

(Here "121" is the volume number of the journal and "1" is the issue number; "124-38" are the page numbers for the article. For further discussion and additional examples, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.4.2.)

The entry for an article from a Norton Critical Edition would have the following format:

Bezanson, Walter E. "Moby-Dick: Work of Art." *Moby-Dick*. By Herman Melville. Ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker. New York: Norton, 1992. 651-71. Print.

Web Sources

The Web can be a convenient way to find valid academic sources that also exist in print. It can also provide useful information that does not exist in print, through scholarly journals published only on the Web or on websites. But it also contains vast amounts of unverifiable, biased, or inaccurate information. Often, then, the Web is not your best source for academic information. When you do use the Web, remember that it is especially important to evaluate an online source for validity and reliability. For guidelines on evaluating sources, see www.newpaltz.libguides.com/websiteevaluation.

Publication in an online database of a periodical that previously existed in print:

Chan, Evans. "Postmodernism and Hong Kong Cinema." *Postmodern Culture* 10.3 (2000): n. pag. *Project Muse*. Web. 5 June 2008.

(Here, the publication information for the print periodical is followed by the title of the database, medium of publication consulted ("Web"), and date of access (day, month, year); "n. pag." indicates that the periodical does not indicate page numbers in this online format. For further discussion and additional examples, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.6.4.)

Scholarly journal published only on the web:

Landauer, Michelle. "Images of Virtue: Reading, Reformation and the Visualization of Culture in Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloïse*." *Romanticism on the Net* 46 (2007): n. pag. Web. 8 Nov. 2007.

For further discussion and additional examples, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.6.3.)

Website:

Green, Joshua. "The Rove Presidency." *The Atlantic.com*.
Atlantic Monthly Group, Sept. 2007. Web. 15 May 2008.

(Here, after the author and title of the work, "*The Atlantic.com*" is the title of the overall website, "Atlantic Monthly Group" is the publisher, "Sept. 2007" is the original publication date, and "15 May 2008" is the date of access. For additional examples, see the *MLA Handbook*, 5.6.2.)

Other Common Sources

Film or video recording:

When citing a **film**, give italicized title, director, distributor, year of release, and medium consulted. You may choose to include other information, such as performers or screenplay writers.

It's a Wonderful Life. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart,
Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, and Thomas Mitchell. RKO,
1946. Film.

If you are consulting a **DVD or videocassette of the recording** rather than the actual film, however, you must list the re-release date after the original release date, along with the type of medium consulted, as below, where "1946" is the original release date and "2001" is the release date of the DVD. For further information consult the *MLA Handbook* 5.7.3.

It's a Wonderful Life. Dir. Frank Capra. Perf. James Stewart,
Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, and Thomas Mitchell. 1946.
Republic, 2001. DVD.

Performance:

Heartbreak House. By George Bernard Shaw. Dir. Robin Lefevre.
Perf. Philip Bosco and Swoosie Kurtz. Roundabout Theatre
Company. Amer. Airlines Theatre, New York. 1 Oct. 2006.
Performance.

After title, author, director, and performers of the play, list site of the performance (usually theater and city, as here, "Amer. Airlines Theatre, New York"), date of performance ("1 Oct. 2006"), and indication that you are citing a performance. For further information consult the *MLA Handbook* 5.7.4.

Interview:

Lansbury, Angela. Interview. *Off-Camera: Conversations with the Makers of Prime-Time Television*. By Richard Levinson and William Link. New York: Plume-NAL, 1986. 72-86. Print.

Begin with the name of the person interviewed, and list the interviewer(s) after the title of the larger publication if that information is relevant to your research. If the interview does not carry its own title, call it "Interview." For further information consult the *MLA Handbook* 5.7.7.

6.

Before You Hand in Your Paper: A Brief Checklist

On the opposite page is an example of a checklist you can use to make sure that the final product you are handing in to your instructor is your best work. Remember, too, that you should add your own personal categories at the bottom of this list (e.g., paragraph transitions, extraneous commas, sentence variety, or other areas for which you personally might need extra attention).

- Have I titled my essay? Have I tried to make the title say something important about the paper and invite the reader into the discussion? Is my title more than just blandly descriptive? Do not underline, italicize, or quote your own title.
- Have I included my name, the class, the professor, and the date (along with any other information relevant to the particular assignment)?
- Do I have a clear, provocative thesis?
- Does my introduction introduce the main ideas of the essay and lead smoothly into the thesis statement?
- Do my supporting paragraphs support my main argument? Have I chosen appropriate textual evidence and discussed it adequately?
- Do my supporting paragraphs form a logical and integrated sequence of points?
- Does my conclusion actually close, rather than merely summarize, the paper?
- Have I followed MLA standards for font, page formatting, numbering, and quotations?
- Do I have a Works Cited page, formatted according to MLA standards? Have I included all works cited in the paper?
- Have I acknowledged and properly cited all sources, both print and electronic?
- Have I spell-checked and proofread the paper?
- _____
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Appendix: Sample Essays

This section contains five sample essays. Each one is a real paper written by a student for an actual course in the Department of English here at SUNY New Paltz.

We enclose these papers for several reasons:

- All five are correctly formatted according to MLA standards: they are titled, they contain the necessary identifying information (author, course, professor, date), they have page numbers, and they conclude with a Works Cited list.
- All five authors are attentive to language. Not only do these essays provide careful examinations of the play of language in the works they discuss, but the essays themselves are well written: they show care in word choice and phrasing, in paragraphing and organization, and in the smooth, logical integration of evidence.
- All these papers demonstrate some of the approaches and techniques that we have emphasized in the pages of *Standards and Style*. You should take time to look carefully at how these student authors focus on a central argument, how they cite and discuss evidence, and how they conclude their discussions.
- Finally, we hope that these essays can become topics of discussion in classrooms. There are many nuances (such as transitions, sentence rhythms, choice of titles, and so forth) that could be discussed in detail.

The paper by **Danielle Douglas** is a comparison-contrast discussion submitted for a 200-level course. Her essay is a thoughtful and imaginative analysis of two modern prose works.

The essays by **Karen Blovat** and **Jeanmarie Evelly** were written, respectively, for a 400-level and a 300-level course. Both are very successful examples of “response papers” to a single work of literature; they are essays submitted before class discussion of the works in question. Both are close readings of narrative verse.

The essay by **Jason Hinkley** was a response to a mid-term test. It is a medium-length discussion of three different heroes from the English literary tradition, using a theoretical observation by Northrop Frye concerning the nature of heroism. His essay cites works in verse.

The paper by **David Alfieri** was a response to a take-home final examination in a 400-level course. It is a thematic discussion of eighteenth-century fiction and non-fiction prose that covers a great deal of ground without resorting to over-generalization.

Danielle Douglas

Professor N. E. Persone

41200-04: Analysis and Interpretation of Literature

Fiction Essay

October 7, 2004

Shedding Light on Perspective

With the vast cultural diversity found in the United States and the ever-growing process of globalization throughout the world, the ability to consider various perspectives has become a necessary and often overlooked skill. In literature, however, this often underappreciated skill is ineluctably important.

Point of view, the perspective from which the details of a piece of writing are expounded, is a fundamental writing skill. The person telling a story is a crucial element in affecting a reader's opinion of characters and that character's purpose and reliability. Both Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the author of "The Yellow Wallpaper," and Cynthia Ozick, the author of "The Shawl," use point of view to effect responses that have a particular importance to each story. These points of view cast various shades of enlightenment on the plot and characters and allow the author to focus this light onto certain facets of the story.

"It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer" (Gilman 604). In this opening line from "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman successfully imbeds her narrator into the story. The story continues into a personal narrative told through the first-person point of view. In the first person, the narrator uses "I" or "we" to help the reader

connect with the narrator. Empathy is much easier when readers can put themselves in the place of another person. By expounding a story using "I" or "we" this substitution becomes much easier. Thus, the narrator in Gilman's story is a sympathetic character. When she says "John does not know how much I really suffer," it is even more poignant because the narrator has divulged to the reader the extent of this suffering (606). Besides invoking a sense of empathy, Gilman's use of perspective in the story allows her to express the narrator's opinions which, as they diverge from the socially accepted ideals of the time, would very likely not be expressed were the story told from another character's view point. For example, the narrative is shared through a secret journal. She shares things through this journal that "[she] would not say . . . to a living soul" (604). A few phrases later, she even states outright that "personally, I disagree with their ideas" (605).

While both empathizing with the narrator and listening in on her secret thoughts allow a reader to connect to the story on a deep level, in the case of "The Yellow Wallpaper" the first-person point of view also creates a specific problem. Is the narrator, who by the end of the story has gone completely insane, a reliable source of information? As the story progresses, the narrator's credibility slowly begins to dissolve. We are left wondering how much of what she says is true and how much is simply psychotic musings. The narrator starts to notice a smell which she says "creeps all over the house": "I find it hovering in the diningroom, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs" (613). Furthermore, the narrator swears that she sees the woman in the wallpaper "on that long road under the trees, creeping along" (614). Is this scene simply in her imagination? At the end of the story, the narrator's

insanity certainly casts a shadow of doubt over her story.

Conversely, Cynthia Ozick uses a very different point of view in her story. "The Shawl" is told from the perspective of an uninvolved observer: "But Magda lived to walk. She lived that long, but she did not walk very well, partly because she was only fifteen months old, and partly because the spindles of her legs could not hold up her fat belly" (954). The narrator withholds judgment and relates the tale in a matter-of-fact tone. Because the narrator expresses no attachment to any of the characters, there is no reason to question motive. Were the narrator a character in the story, we would have to consider, as in Gilman's tale, whether or not the narrator shows any particular bias. One of the more interesting aspects of Ozick's choice of perspective is the narrator's omniscience. The narrator is able to relate the thoughts and feelings of all the characters rather than just one. The narrator tells us that "Stella wanted to be wrapped in a shawl, hidden away, asleep, rocked by the march, a baby, a round infant in arms" (953). By being able to see into Stella's mind, the narrator gives an insight into the motivation of Stella's actions. Similarly, when Magda wanders out into plain sight, the narrator opens a window into Rosa's mind: "A tide of commands hammered in Rosa's nipples: Fetch, get bring! But she did not know which to go offer first, Magda or the shawl" (955). By seeing the hesitation in Rosa's mind, the reader can better understand the desperation which victimizes her. The narrator's omniscience presents the characters as individual beings and invokes a sense of empathy. It is the impact of the Holocaust on these individual lives that makes this story powerful, and the narrator's omniscience acts as a prism, separating the story into its various characters and bringing them all to light.

Point of view is a major literary device in both Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Ozick's "The Shawl." In these stories, the point of view of the nar-

rator acts as a flashlight, illuminating a certain path or highlighting a specific event or thought. Both authors make excellent use of this technique, allowing certain characteristics of the story to shine. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" Gilman's use of the first-person point of view helps the reader to understand the illogical reasoning of a madwoman whom we might have otherwise dismissed. In "The Shawl" Cynthia Ozick uses the third-person omniscient point of view to emphasize not only the reality of horrors of the Holocaust, but how these horrors affected individual lives. Like the sunshine and moonlight in "The Yellow Wallpaper," literature changes drastically depending on which light a narrator shines upon it. Both "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Shawl" would be drastically different if the story were told through another point of view. The plot might remain the same, but the characters, tone, and themes would all vary greatly if highlighted differently. While perspective is a part of everyday life, both Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Cynthia Ozick give us examples of how a well-employed point of view can shed light on an aspect of a story that, if overshadowed, as Gilman's narrator says, "takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard" (613).

Works Cited

- Ozick, Cynthia. "The Shawl." *Responding to Literature: Stories, Poems, Plays and Essays*. Ed. Judith A. Stanford. New York: McGraw Hill, 2003. 952-56. Print.
- Perkins Gilman, Charlotte. "The Yellow Wallpaper." *Responding to Literature: Stories, Poems, Plays and Essays*. Ed. Judith A. Stanford. New York: McGraw Hill, 2003. 604-16. Print.

Blovat 1

Karen Blovat

Professor Niemann

Shakespeare II (41407)

1 March 2003

The Defeat of Love

When trying to decide whether Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* concerns love or lust, it is helpful to ask first from whose perspective we are looking. On the surface there seems to be very little doubt that this is a tale of sexual conquest, and certainly Adonis would say that the intense display of affection by Venus towards him is merely dressed-up lust. In addition, one would probably be hard-pressed to find an audience who would disagree with Adonis's point of view. However, it we look at this elaborate wooing from the perspective of Venus, goddess of love, perhaps we can better see with romantic eyes the intense love she feels for this young, beautiful mortal.

Adonis is so beautiful that Venus wants only to possess that beauty, to love it. Unfortunately for her, Adonis is a youth who would much rather be hunting than submit to the amorous embraces of Venus. From the outset, Venus wants Adonis and will have him, by force if necessary: "Being so enraged, desire doth lend her force / Courageously to pluck him from his horse" (29-30). She has little regard for

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what he wants. To attain his love, Venus resorts to various tactics: pointing out to him how beautiful she is, admonishing him not to be like Narcissus and love only himself, telling him that as " "Torches are made to light, jewels to wear . . ." (163), he is made to reproduce—i.e., for sex. The wooing of Adonis, for Venus, is serious business, and her frustration at not getting what she wants leads her to try other tactics. She tries tears, "And now she weeps, and now she fain would speak" (221), and when this does not work she invokes the sexual imagery of him as a deer to her park (229-40), all in vain, for "At this Adonis smiles as in disdain" (241). It does not matter what Venus does to try to win Adonis; she will fail, for he considers himself too young and inexperienced to be initiated into love.

Adonis's youth is not the only reason he has for spurning Venus. He, perhaps rightly, believes that he is merely a conquest for her. When he says "I hate not love, but your device in love, / That lends embraces unto every stranger. / You do it for increase" (789-91), he is accusing Venus of pursuing him merely to win the game, not because she truly loves him and no other. Adonis does not see the actions of Venus as love, but as lust, characterized by her intense desire not only for his body, but for his beauty, too: the goddess of love loves beauty, and Adonis, for Venus, personifies beauty.

Venus, worshipped by men, wants to worship Adonis, as if he were a god. She tells him of a time when she was wooed by the god of war, saying, "Yet hath he been my captive and my slave, / And begged for that which thou unasked shalt have" (101-2). The love that Venus displays causes her to want to give over her role

Blovat 3

as a goddess to him if only he will reciprocate her love; she will do anything to gain his affection. We are told, "Look how he can, she cannot choose but love" (79), a line which helps us appreciate that Venus, who is also the goddess of beauty, worships Adonis for his beauty. Finally, we are told of the intense grief of Venus when she finds Adonis's body: "Over one shoulder doth she hang her head. / Dumbly she passions, frantically she doteth" (1058-59). She is devastated at her lover's death.

Venus is so affected by the death of Adonis that she proclaims that "Sorrow on love hereafter shall attend" (1136), which is, ironically, one of the things that Adonis tells us he was afraid of, should he get involved with Venus. He says, "For I have heard it is a life in death, / That laughs, and weeps, and but with a breath" (413-14). She is so affected by Adonis's death that she decrees that all those in love shall feel the sorrow she feels. While certainly Venus's actions towards Adonis can only be looked at as lustful, one has to wonder whether Venus would agree. It is easier to have sympathy for her when we are told that "She's Love; she loves; and yet she is not loved" (610), and it is a melancholy thought that Venus, goddess of love and beauty, is thwarted at her own game.

Blovat 4

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. *Venus and Adonis*. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. New York: Norton, 1997. 601-34. Print.

Jeanmarie Evelly

Professor Nessuno

English Literature 1

November 8, 2004

Response Paper #2: Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*

In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the Wife of Bath's tale is very much an extension of the autobiographical prologue that she offers up before it. She emphasizes the power of women, and how they may use this power to get what they desire from men. As the prologue starts out, the Wife of Bath reveals the details of her five marriages, the ways in which she would use her sexual power to get her way with her husbands. The story that she tells following the prologue very much echoes these same ideals, and from her tale we gain even more insight into her mindset.

The tale of the lusty Knight in King Arthur's court is interesting for several reasons. It relates back to the prologue in that it can very definitely be read in a feminist light. To begin with, we can look at the significance of what the Knight discovers. He is sent out on a quest to find out the one thing that women desire most, and he soon learns that: "Wommen desire to have sovereynetece / As wel over hir housbonde as hir love, / And for to been in maistrye him above" (1044-46). Here, the Wife of Bath explicitly points out that what women want above all else is power over the men in their lives. This point can clearly be related back to her own personal experiences as revealed

in the prologue. The Wife of Bath explains throughout the prologue the ways in which she gained control and power over her many husbands—she would make false accusations, play upon their guilt, or even use sex as a means of getting her way: "For winning wolde I al his lust endure" (422). She boasts about her excellent skill at manipulating these men, even advising other women to do the same:

Ye wise wives, that comen understonde,

Thus sholde ye speke and bere him wrong on honde—

For half so boldely can ther no man

Swere and lie as a woman can. (231-34)

The Wife of Bath desires the same thing as the women in her tale, which is to be the master of her husbands.

This idea is echoed many times with the characters in the tale. The women throughout the tale are the ones with the power, and the Knight finds himself entirely at their mercy. For example, at the start of the story, as the Knight is about to be condemned to death for rape, it is the advice of his wife, the Queen, that makes King

Arthur reconsider:

...But that the Queene and othere ladies mo

So longe prayceden the king of grace,

Til he his lif him graunted in the place,

And yaf him to the Queene, al at hir wille,

To chese whether she wolde him save or spill. (900-04)

Here, King Arthur is turning his power over to his wife. This relinquishing of power

happens again in the story. When the Knight is given the choice of either remaining married to the old hag, who will be good and loving, or having her be young and beautiful but unfaithful, he leaves the choice in the hands of his wife: "Cheseth yourself which may be most plesaunce" (1238). For letting his wife rule his fate, the Knight is rewarded, for she then becomes beautiful while she still remains good and loyal. What the Wife of Bath is trying to emphasize is her belief that a marriage will be happiest if the husband hands all power over to his wife, for he will be rewarded with love and faithfulness. This conclusion can once again be tied back to the tale's prologue. In her fifth, turbulent marriage, the Wife of Bath tells of how she and Janekin were able to experience marital bliss only after he turned over all his estates to her, and told her to do whatever she pleased:

And whan that I hadde geten unto me

By maistrye al the sovereynete,

And that he saide, "Myn owene trewe wif,

Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lif..."

After that day we hadde nevere debat. (823-28)

Words used here in the prologue, such as *sovereynete* and *maistrye*, are the very same as those used in the Wife's tale. Like the young knight, once Janekin let his wife be in control, the two never fought agin and lived happily.

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Hinkley 1

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English Literature I

Midterm Essay Question 1

10 October 2004

The Evolving Role of the Hero in Early English Epic and Romance

In the literary tradition of England the position of the hero in the epic poem moves from the high mimetic order into the low mimetic order as Christianity's influence grew stronger on the collective mind of the nation. According to Northrop Frye, the high mimetic order is "a mode of literature in which, as in most epics and tragedies, the central characters are above our own level of power and authority, though within the order of nature and subject to social criticism," and the low mimetic order is "A mode of literature in which the characters exhibit a power of action which is roughly our own level, as in most comedy and realistic fiction" (366). The move of from the high mimetic order to the low mimetic order shows the changes of values that occurred as Christian values such as humility and subservience started to replace traditional pagan values of personal glory and prowess. Likewise, the hero's role in the epic evolved as he went from being the master of man and his environment to being subject to the rules of Christian ethics and to the will of God.

The Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* is a good example of a poem whose hero

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is of the high mimetic order. Dated between the eighth and the tenth centuries, it was written when Christianity was still in its infancy among the Germanic peoples that inhabited England. In its early stages Christianity existed alongside traditional Germanic values, a combination that allowed for the hero, *Beowulf*, to be sculpted in the traditional pagan image. *Beowulf* is a hero that is confident in his actions, building his reputation by glory in battle against men and beasts. When his reputation is questioned by the drunken thane Unferth, he responds by citing past glories, as he says, "all knew my awesome strength. / They had seen me bolstered in the blood of enemies / when I battled and bound five beasts" (418-20). When *Beowulf* prepares to battle Grendel, he once again acts in a way that elevates him above the rest of the men and puts him on the same level of strength and ferocity as the beast, stating, "When it comes to fighting, I count myself / as dangerous any day as Grendel. / So it won't be a cutting edge I'll wield" (677-79). *Beowulf*'s decision to face a monster in unarmed combat shows to what extent a man's physical power and exploits make him a hero.

The Arthurian romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* illustrates the ever-increasing influence of Christianity on the English collective mind. This shift is depicted in a hero whose life is dictated by a chivalric code that is based on an ethic of humility and service. *Sir Gawain* is a hero, unlike *Beowulf*, whose faults make up the meat of this story. This quality makes *Sir Gawain* a low mimetic hero whose heroism consists of his recognizing and accepting a lesson in humility at the hands of the Green Knight. *Sir Gawain* begins his adventure by accepting a challenge from

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the Green Knight out of duty to his king, Arthur. He steps in for Arthur only after some hesitation and for a lack of any other volunteers:

Though you may be tempted thereto, to take it on yourself ...

I am the weakest, well I know, and of the feeblest of wit;

And the loss of my life would be least of any. (350-55)

This is a great contrast to Beowulf, who crosses an ocean to challenge a monster and then forsakes weapons out of sport. Sir Gawain concludes his adventure by being soundly outwitted by the Green Knight, who plays on Sir Gawain's human faults. When Gawain emerges from his adventure, it is clear that he was meant to carry his blunders with him in two ways. He carries them literally on his neck:

The faults and frailty of flesh perverse,

How its tenderness entices the foul taint of sin;

And so when praise and high prowess have pleased my heart,

A look at this love-lace will lower my pride. (2435-38)

And he carries them symbolically on his sash:

This is the blazon of blemish that I bear on neck;...

For cowardice and coveting that I came there,

This badge of false faith. (2506-10)

These artifacts serve as a reminder to Gawain of his cowering in the face of death and the dishonesty he employed to save his life. By reminding readers of their human faults, they serve as a deterrent to pride and a cultivator of humility.

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The problem of writing an epic out of the Christian tradition is that Christianity, in its obedience and reverence to God, discourages heroes that seek or find greatness and glory of their own making. In John Milton's *Paradise Lost* we find a return to the high mimetic in the unlikely heroic figure of Satan; by turning his attention to the villain of the story, Milton can create a character who can challenge God's greatness. Satan's quest for revenge leads him on an epic journey to earth, but this quest after suffering defeat in a war with God seems to echo the world of Beowulf, who said of revenge, "Wise sir, do not grieve. It is always better / to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning" (*Beowulf* 1384-85). Milton's explanation of Satan's journey from hell to Eden is full of obstacles that require a character with the strength, endurance, and wit of a hero. Before embarking on his journey Satan accepts his mission, which his second in command, Beelzebub, offers to the consul of demons:

...But first whom shall we send

In search of this new world? Whom shall we find

Sufficient? Who shall tempt with wand'ring feet

The dark unbuttoned infinite abyss. (II.402-05)

Satan accepts his epic challenge with pride and gusto:

With splendor, armed with power, if aught proposed

And judged of public moment, in the shape

These royalties, and not refuse to reign,

Refusing to accept as great of share

of hazard as of honor (II.447-53)

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After Satan leaves heaven he encounters Sin, Death, and a gate that is "thrice threefold"; threefold were brass, / three iron, three of adamantine rock / Impenetrable, impaled with circling fire" (645-47). He passes by these obstacles and continues his journey through night and chaos. In setting Satan upon such an epic quest, Milton creates a character of heroic stature from immortal material.

The changing values in English society resulting from the spread of Christian ideals and the corresponding change in the natural role of the hero in the English epic demonstrate how the values of a society affect the art a society will produce.

How a particular society defines a hero expresses its values and aspirations. The similarities between Milton's Satan and the Anglo-Saxon hero Beowulf reveal how similar character traits can be portrayed and interpreted in many different variations by authors and critics alike.

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The Persistence of Puritanism in Eighteenth-Century American Literature

The Enlightenment brought about a tremendous and irrevocable paradigm shift to the Western world, empowering the individual with a sense of worth and the faculty to reason for himself, and discounting to a large extent the authority previously bestowed upon religion. But for America, a nation founded upon Puritan thought, this new freedom of the mind, however powerful, was not able completely to dissolve the chains that kept the society fettered to its religious heritage. It was through Puritanism that the nation derived its sense of moral responsibility, which was of central concern to the literature of the day; thus to abolish the existing religious precepts entirely would be to leave the people without guidance in the social sphere, an issue that had become increasingly pressing as the country drastically changed. Puritanism, to be sure, was to persist throughout this period; but before it was to become modified and comfortably assimilated into the changing culture, as can be seen in the early American novel, it was first to be utterly rejected in its raw form, as occurred during the Great Awakening.

Jonathan Edwards was the primary figure of a number of conservative pastors who championed the Great Awakening, reintroducing the traditional Puritan practice into American

culture. While his sermons and his *Personal Narrative* are perhaps richer and more abundant in examples of the doctrines which were revisited during the Great Awakening, his "Letter to Rev. Dr. Benjamin Colman" presents, if only a taste of Puritanism itself, a fine illustration of the social reactions and repercussions of the movement at large.

In the letter, Edwards assures Reverend Colman, in order to disabuse him of whatever suspicions he may have harbored regarding the apparent fanaticism in North Hampton, that "no new doctrines [have been] embraced" and that the practice of Puritanism has remained consistently orthodox (496). The reader can deduce from this statement that it is primarily the reception of these old doctrines that has changed. In this way, Edwards, unwittingly, has been affected by the Enlightenment ideals of the day, following the advice of the philosopher John Locke that mere comprehension of religion is insufficient, that it must be understood "experientially," that the practitioners must be "moved" by the ideas; that is, that the religion must touch the individual's emotions (465). So not only must one comprehend intellectually the terrifying and angry Yahweh, but His "divine wrath" must also be felt in the heart. This approach greatly intensified and precipitated the belief in the Puritan tenets of original sin, reliance on faith, and confession. People suddenly developed a great "concern" for their souls, realizing, thanks to Edwards, their own "exceeding misery in natural condition, and their exceeding wickedness and guiltiness in the sight of God"; what is more, this outlook brought the people to think themselves to be "impotent creatures [and] utterly insufficient" (493-94). Thanks to Locke, this self-loathing was no longer limited to mere contrition, but extended itself to painful bodily sensation, the glory of God now inciting violent seizures and hallucinations under "great terrors of conscience" (496). People died fearing God, warning

and counseling others with their last breaths. Ignorant of the irony of his own words, Edwards writes, in complete earnestness and a bit puzzled by the fact that the people “commonly seem to be much more sensible of their own wickedness after the conversion than before,” as if it were not his own sententious preaching that instilled such guilt.

This sense of lowliness and reliance is antithetical to the personally liberating ideals of the Enlightenment. In order to preserve Puritanism, the people were subordinated, once again, to an angry God—but now not only mentally. Under Cotton Mather’s Puritanism, people were able to carry on their lives and work, self-reflection being a constant, but not a central, concern. Edwards’s sheep neglected their “worldly business,” as they would “mind nothing but religion” (493). The children were tricked into forsaking their “frolicking” for the solemn contemplation of God, their minds stifled; many were willing to die in order to meet Him. But, luckily, none went so far, and in thirty years these children were to be the fathers of a new nation, the inhabitants of a new world of individual importance, of freedom of the mind, despite their earlier and desperate reliance on God. Something redeemable must have come out of the Great Awakening.

Indeed, amidst all this ugliness, one crucial and lasting idea did develop as a result of Edwards’s movement: the *uttersatz* covenant of Grace, the redeeming power of Jesus. That is, in contrast with earlier colonial Puritanism, Jesus then having died only for the sake of Yahweh’s select few, to Edwards, Jesus was now willing to save any and all sinners who were themselves willing to be saved (493). For a country that was about

to commit most serious treason, to stage an unprecedented revolution, this idea of universal redemption was immensely important. This development is an example of the necessary mollification of Puritan doctrine, a modification of a moral precept, by which it is then conducive to the needs of a changing people. As the Enlightenment ideals began to soak even down to the roots of American society during the second half of the eighteenth century, it was only the modifications of Puritanism, such as those mentioned above, that persisted undisguised. The fundamental, traditional concepts became sublimated so that they might maintain relevance in a society whose attention was on the interaction of its individuals rather than on the word of God for moral guidance (425).

The Bible having lost its ultimate authority, and thus the developing society needing more than ever to be protected from itself, authors in the late eighteenth century took up their pens to write didactic works in hopes of guiding the public towards virtue. The stories themselves were mimetic, portraying ordinary individuals in an everyday light. The reader was meant to identify with the characters and their situations, developing sympathy, which would, according to Locke, ameliorate the reader’s social and, by extension, spiritual life (427). This postulate that the logical progression of a better social life was a better spiritual life allowed traditional Puritan ideas to be projected onto the family unit, where they could be understood, for once, truly experientially. Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte: A Tale of Truth* is exemplary in showing such projection.

This novel, like many others of its time, was directed towards young ladies, who were then, mysterious as it now seems to us, understood to be the moral backbone

of the developing nation. This perception stemmed, perhaps, from the ongoing symbolism of England as the mother, America the daughter, “a nation [...] founded on an act of filial disobedience” (Rowson 880). But it was now to be shown to these young ladies that disobedience could no longer be acceptable if the country were to stay intact. Albeit distasteful to the new nation, the Puritan model of morality was too heavily engrained in the minds of its people to be forgotten, even as the Bible was becoming increasingly invalid, as science developed more and more reliable ways of proving knowledge empirically; but these young ladies needed somehow to be instructed. So, whether consciously or not, the characters, themes, and motifs were lifted from the Puritan interpretation of the Bible and sublimated into those of the emerging novels of the time in order to retain whatever morality was extant.

Reminiscent of *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Charlotte* begins by personifying the human characteristics of *benevolence* and *fortune* in the author's preface. The reader makes an immediate connection to John Bunyan's characters, such as Faithful and Hopeful; and, with this personification compounded by the author's explicitly didactic and moral ends, the reader understands Rowson to be continuing the Puritan tradition.

In *Charlotte*, the words *God*, *Jesus*, *Devil*, *Eden* and the like do not exist; *Heaven* occurs in great frequency but is used primarily as an interjection or exclamation, as in “Gracious heaven!” (893). Instead, the home is Eden and Charlotte, herself, is Eve; tears become the sacraments; La Rue the seducer, the Devil. The role of God is taken over by the father, as seen in both Mr. Eldridge and Mr. Temple, who are of central importance and seem to bookend the story nicely in their characterization of God. In the beginning Miss Eldridge takes her father's hand, cries out “Oh, my father!” and speaks of heaven; in the end Charlotte,

on her deathbed, offers the only true prayer to heaven that exists in the novel, begging the help of God (implied by the capitalized pronouns), to which her father responds. Then, her father at the foot of the bed, a “beam of joy”—like the light from god—touches her, and she is saved (884, 943). In one instance, Mrs. Temple is characterized as God, referred to as the “maker” (908). It is she who continues the universal covenant of grace proposed by Edwards, acting as the redeemer in commenting rhetorically to her husband on her daughter's situation: “is it not our duty to raise the poor penitent, and whisper peace and comfort to her desponding soul?” (909).

Charlotte is able to be saved because of her confessions, both in public, to La Rue and Mrs. Beuchamp, and in private—and most importantly—to her parents. This redemption from confession, the idea that “penitence is allied to virtue,” is certainly an extension of Puritanism, and is a main theme in the novel, revisited in almost every chapter (928). Every letter written is a confession, a realization of personal humility and the necessity of faith—here, faith in being received back into the family, the Eden-like “paternal roof” from which “fallen” Charlotte was “cast out” for her disobedience (913, 923). Mercy is granted to all characters in this novel, despite the gravity of their various transgressions, as is according to the covenant of grace. Even La Rue is saved.

In the end, Edwards's introduction of emotion into religion greatly eased Puritan principles into early American literature. With the interpretation of a heavy-handed Yahweh of the Old Testament dismissed for its rigidity and harshness along with, ultimately, Edwards himself, which marked the close of the Great Awakening, the softer, forgiving God of the New Testament was left—that is, Jesus, God incarnate. Human sympathy here exemplifies only

the teachings of Jesus and does not inspire fear or dread in the hearts of the people, for no longer is there any divine wrath. Thus the model of Puritan morals is able to be retained by a new literature and a new people, the individualism and personal freedoms of the Enlightenment no longer in conflict with the religious views.

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